

# KENYAN WOMAN



Advocating for the rights of women



## In a state of stagnation

### Wrangles have derailed the constitution implementation process

...By Musa Radoli

Six months after the new Constitution was promulgated, very little headway has been achieved in the implementation process as bitter political wrangles take centre stage threatening to torpedo the process.

Civil Society Organisations have expressed concerns that very few legislations needed have been crafted yet they are critical to ensure the speedy and smooth implementation of the new Constitution.

Of specific concern are the bitter wrangles in which the two principal political parties — Party of the National Unity (PNU) and the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) — have publicly engaged on critical matters concerning the constitution implementation processes.

The Civil Society Organisations are concerned six months down the road of the constitutional implementation process, the political divide of the grand coalition government are still deliberately engaged in bitter acrimonious and highly personalised engagements that smack of deliberate schemes to torpedo the process.

During a recent joint civil society forum in Nairobi, it emerged that out of nearly 700 legislations that are supposed to be crafted by the Attorney General's office and tabled before Parliament to be enacted, less than five pieces have been crafted and passed.

#### Political wrangles

The Commission for the Implementation of the new Constitution (CIC) says that the pace at which the process was being taken was slow due to the political wrangles that have taken centre stage with the country's legislators both in and outside Parliament.

The CIC chairman, Mr Charles Nyachae says: "Despite the sluggish pace at which the new constitutional implementation process has taken since its promulgation on August 27, 2010, we at the CIC are determined to ensure that the whole process will be carried out to the letter within its stipulated five year transitional phase."

He added: "We are also determined to make a total departure from commissions of any kind on any national issue to engage all stakeholders at all levels throughout the process — but above all ensure that Kenyans enjoy a free, fair, highly transparent and accountable process ever witnessed in the history of this country."

Nyachae says despite the political wrangles and acrimonious engagements among the political divide of the coalition government, it was



Kenyans celebrating promulgation of the new constitution. According to chairman of the Constitution Implementation Commission, Mr Charles Nyachae (inset), political differences have been an impediment to the process. Picture: Kenyan Woman Correspondent.

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— Mr Charles Nyachae,

The CIC chairman

the determination of the CIC commissioners to ensure that the implementation process of the Constitution was not manipulated or compromised by any of the warring parties as it would jeopardise national interests.

#### Implementation

The concerns over the sluggish speed at which the implementation of the new Constitution was taking place were expressed by stakeholders during a conference deliberately convened to take stock of the progress made since promulgation of the new Constitution.

The conference held under the theme "Taking Stock: Six Months of Katiba" was an initiative of Bridge Africa, Medeva Africa and Oxfam among other civil society organisations that aim at building onto the efforts of non state actors in

monitoring the implementation of katiba (the constitution).

The objective of the initiative is to undertake a six-month audit of the progress in meeting the demands of the Constitution implementation schedule, identifying new progress markers and examining alternative mechanisms to foster pace and commitment to the implementation process.

In February 2011, Kenya marked exactly six months of the new Katiba. The realisation of the new constitutional order heralded for the nation a rebirth and a new beginning. The new Constitution sufficiently provides the important foundation upon which the country can make significant strides in the pursuit and promotion of human rights, gender equity and democracy; citizen empowerment and devolution of re-

Continued on page 4

## EDITORIAL

### Women must not shy away from plum jobs

In January, women's organisations took the President to task over judicial nominations of key appointments. In the case that was taken to the High Court, the women argued that the President had been gender insensitive in picking the Chief Justice, Attorney General, Director of Public Prosecutions and comptroller of Budget.

However, two months later, and after the President advertised the top judicial jobs, there is a big yawning gap. Twenty four candidates have applied for the positions of Chief Justice

and Deputy.

It is indeed worrying that women did not apply for this position of public prosecutions. Hopefully there must be women among those seeking to replace the immediate former chief justice Evan Gicheru and the newly created position of deputy chief justice.

In the new constitutional dispensation, very many jobs will be created in the current Constitutional dispensation. Women must be pro-active not be left out. The new Constitution has also embraced affirmative action in

the public service, which means that recruitment of staff from the lowest to the top cadres will not only be competitive, but a third of the posts must be reserved for the other gender.

However, for the plum civil service jobs, women must be armed with their credentials, in order to be appointed on merit. Further women should improve their ability to network within professional circles.

So far, the principles of affirmative action and meritocracy has been applied openly and fairly in the recruitment and hiring of commissioners.

The time for women with political ambitions to step forward and be counted like former Justice Minister Martha Karua is now. They must not sit back waiting until the last minute and blame men for frustrating their efforts to represent their people.

It is disheartening that so far, very few women have come out in public to express interest in any of the 47 Governors' posts that will be up for grabs come the next General Elections.

The same also applies to the over 300 Parliamentary seats that are expected to be declared vacant in a

year's time for men and women with political ambitions to fight for.

Time for shying away from taking leadership positions is over, the time now is for women who have been blaming men for their poor representation in the legislature and in Government to emulate their sisters in Rwanda, who have the highest number of women MPs in the world.

Kenya women must borrow a leaf from the United States President, Barack Obama's clarion call and soldier on saying: "Yes we can, and yes we must!"



# Women urged to take up leadership positions

...By Karani Kelvin

**W**omen must ensure the implementation of the constitution works to safeguard their rights.

Speaking Dr Lucy Kiyapi, who was the chief guest at the function, said that women need to be aware of their rights as enshrined in the new Constitution.

Kiyapi who is a lecturer in the School of Public Health, Department of Health Management, Moi University, urged women to also take up leadership positions which is given within the new Constitution. On gender assembly balance and diversity, Article 197 (1) says: "Not more than one thirds of members of any county assembly or county executive committee shall be of the same gender."

The same point is reiterated on the chapter on representation of the people and electoral systems. It says on Article 81 (b): "... Not more than two thirds of members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender."

The Constitution therefore gives women space within the law to take up leadership positions where they can go for at least one third of all roles.

During the International Women's Day celebrations held in Eldoret, women also reiterated the call for children to have education. They said education is the best inheritance to both male and female children.

This was the message coming out among 300 men and women gathered at the Teachers Advisory Centre in Eldoret to observe the International Women's Day.

Kiyapi reiterated the theme of day which was "Equal Access to Education, Training, Science and Technology: Pathway to Decent Work for Women."

She particularly encouraged the people present to take girl-child education seriously because it will benefit the society in the long run. "When you educate a woman, you educate the whole community," said she.

Speaking during the same event, Mrs Grace Kiptui, a lawyer and host of a legal awareness programme at KASS FM, reminded women that having their rights enshrined in the

Constitution is not enough.

"The Constitution must be implemented to safeguard our rights," she said.

However Kiptui warned against the over insistence on the girl child and her rights and said that it would be a matter of time before people started crying about the boy child.

"We must ensure that equal rights are accorded to every child irrespective of their sex," she said.

The Deputy Director of the Alliance Francaise, Ms Solenne Huteau, said that they had partnered with Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL) to host the function because they believed it is an important one.

The Rural Women Peace Link team leader, Mrs Celine Korir, said that the organisation which was started in the early 1990s was formed to fight for the rights of women and children.

She said there was need to continue recognizing the strength of



Dr Lucy Kiyapi shows Prof Margaret Kamar's recognition shield to a group of women from the Rural Women Peace Link who are holding certificates they have been awarded for their efforts. Picture: Karani Kelvin

women since they contribute a lot to society.

"Women are the pillars of all societies," said Korir.

The function culminated in the awarding of certificates of recognition to women leaders. The Eldoret East Member of Parliament Prof Margaret Kamar was recognised in absentia for her efforts in the fighting for women's rights.

Earlier, the women marched through Eldoret Town before going to the Teachers Advisory Centre for the ceremony.

## Inmates lament holding of children in prison

...By Frank Ouma

**W**omen who are bringing up children within prison facilities have complained of the challenges they are facing.

Speaking during celebrations to mark the International Women's Day, the women acknowledged that it was a challenge bringing up their children while serving their sentences. In a poem 'serikali imuone mama huruma', the inmates asked the Government to give women leaner sentences.

One of the inmates, Ms Mary Onguku says she was forced to leave her children with her elderly mother after she was sentenced to serve a one and a half year sentence. The mother of six whose husband died a few years ago is in jail for trying to stop her in laws from evicting her from her husband's land. In trying to save it, she ended up fighting and landing in jail.

"I do not know where I will move to after serving my jail term. My land has already been sold by my brothers-in-law," she said.

Mr Alfred Musila, the officer in charge of Kapsabet GK Prison said some inmates have to serve their sentences with children as some are young and cannot be left in the care of relatives.

"We are taking care of five children below the age of four but the number increases with time," explained Musila.

He appealed to the extended family and society at large to help in bringing up the inmates' children and not leave them within the correctional centres.

He made the remarks when he joined the inmates in marking the centenary celebrations of International Women's Day. Dance and songs rent the air at the facility with messages urging the Government to put in place mechanism that will ensure that the rights of women are protected.

The inmates were given free medical treatment courtesy of Baraton University and that also benefited male inmates.

Ms Regina Odhiambo said marking the International Women Day in prison clearly showed that the Government recognises importance of women in society.

"We are worried that some of the inmates' children have had to move to streets," Odhiambo said.

"The outside society should care for the children left by women prisoners so that they do not idle in streets," she added.

The inmates had the opportunity of interacting with their family members.

## Gender discrimination comes to the fore in women's day celebrations

...By Karani Kelvin

**S**ong, dance and theatre were used to illustrate the tribulations women go through as over 300 men and women gathered at the Teachers Advisory Centre in Eldoret to mark the International Women's Day.

Messages poured through the entertainment provided by various groups of dancers. Out of the six groups that performed, there were four traditional women dancers from several counties. The Eldoret Muslim Women Dancers and the North Rift Cultural Young Talents

also performed.

The Loripili Lomunyak Dancers from Baringo opened the stage with songs of peace. It was, however, the song "Beatrice" that captured the audience who demanded that it be performed a second time.

"Beatrice" is a song about a family that has marital problems. Instead of the man beating the wife for being "wrong", he sends her back to her family. The song asks men to stop being violent towards women and find other ways of solving problems that they face. It also points out that women are very important in society.

"Jambo ninalo waeleza wazee ni kwamba waache kunyanyasa akina mama kwani bila hao hatuwezi kueda mbele, (I am asking men to stop exploiting women because without them we cannot progress)," were the lyrics of the song.

A play by the North Rift Cultural Young Talents also went down well with the crowd. They play explored issues of gender based violence, early marriages, girl child education and women empowerment.

### Empowerment

In the play, there is a family with two daughters. The eldest daughter who was to be forced into marriage is lucky and escapes but her sister is not so lucky as she is forcefully married off to an old man.

The eldest daughter comes back home after several years. She is educated and rich and at first, the

parents and the little sister fail to recognize her. She has plans to get into politics and is keen to run as the senator of their area.

The Sabao Traditional Dancers from Mt Elgon sang in praise of the Rural Women Peace Link which they said had helped them a lot and even rescued some youths who had joined militias.

There were also performances by the Nandi Women Dancers and the Cheptumut Dancers from Pokot.

The afternoon was marked by watching of two documentaries which were 'The Woman Question and The Burden of Truth'.

The first documentary explores the challenges facing the African woman as a result of retrogressive cultural practices while the second recounts of the horrific experiences of women during the infamous post-election violence.

## Employers ask to embrace affirmative action

...By Odhiambo Odhiambo

**E**mployers in the public sector have been told to respect affirmative action of making women to take up 30 per cent of employment positions.

Gender and Social development Minister, Ms Naomi Shabaan noted that most employers did not respect the constitutional provision that required women to form a crucial segment of the workforce.

She said that Kenyan women "had woken up, determined never to turn back, forge ahead and occupy their space in the national development arena."

Shabaan said this in a speech read on her behalf by her assistant minister Manyala Keya at St Gema Girls'

Secondary School, Macalder, Nyatike District during the International Women's Day celebrations.

Keya was accompanied by the Nyatike MP Edick Anyanga and Secretary for Gender and Social Development Prof Collette Suda among other senior Government officials.

Shabaan said the Government and development partners had developed policies and programmes that sought to economically empower women by addressing gender inequality and impediments on education for the girl-child.

"We have established Women Enterprise Fund to facilitate women's access to credit and empower them economically beside the social protection fund which seeks to support vulnerable and poor women," explained Shabaan.

She noted that several commissions had been formed in the country to strengthen the promotion of gender equity and women's empowerment.

The minister mentioned new land policies and dual citizenship as areas where women's interests have been addressed.

"In an endeavour to reduce incidences of gender based violence, the Government is in the process of enacting Family Protection Bill that seeks to deal with domestic violence and its adverse effects in the family units, and particularly the victims who are mainly women and children," said Shabaan. She added: "I urge MPs to pass the Bill when it comes to the floor of the House in an effort to protect our women."

The Minister asked Kenyans to

discard outdated cultural practices such as early marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which retarded the education of the girl-child.

Shabaan said the Government was in the process of launching the Africa Women Decade Secretariat that would be hosted in Kenya for the next ten years.

"The secretariat has ten thematic areas to be addressed by the member states under the African Union umbrella," she said.

These include fighting poverty and promoting economic empowerment of women and entrepreneurship, agriculture and food security beside health, maternal mortality and HIV and Aids among others.



# Linah Jebii Kilimo

## A fighter who wears the FGM eradication belt

...By Evelyne Ogutu

She has seen it all; the good, the bad and the ugly. From abject poverty, male chauvinism, destructive cultural practices to dirty politics.

All these, however, have not deterred her from achieving her childhood dream, to become famous and successful.

Growing up in Kokwo Miso, Kartur Village in Marakwet East District was both a burden and a curse for a girl child. Her day would start at 6am with fetching salt for the animals in the Kerio Valley escarpment, a five kilometre up the hill journey.

The daily sweat, on an empty stomach with the danger coming across wildlife did not deter Linah Jebii Kilimo from ascending to top political seat in a male dominated community. Besides the tough chores that Jebii and her age mates faced, she was also at a risk of being married off at the innocent age of nine.

"In my culture, girls are circumcised as early as nine years. This is followed with a forced marriage where the young men will elope with the girl. I did not want to go through this burden. I would cry a lot whenever I thought of what was in store for me," she says.

For close to ten years, she was on the run. Running away from the monster called Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which was a mandatory practice for any Marakwet girl during her time. But one day, a male teacher who had just joined their school gave Jebii the nudge that she had been missing all her life.

"My desire to be an achiever coincidentally started when I was nine years and was ready to be circumcised. All this started with one inspirational talk from my former teacher, Ex Senior Chief Johnstone Labore, when I was in Standard Four," she recalls.

"Labore had been posted to our school and he held a one hour talk with pupils from my class and urged girls to shun FGM so that they can drive big cars like the Luo ladies who were not circumcised and were very educated," recall Jebii, who is now an Assistant Minister for Cooperatives and Marketing.

### In retrospect

Looking back 37 years later, the 46 year old mother of five — three girls and two boys — says were it not for the teacher who challenged her young mind, she would have been circumcised and married off at age nine. Her escape from the knife came with a heavy price. She had to sacrifice her communal pride and risk being branded an outcast by her father.

"I was to be circumcised in December 1975. Every preparation had been done and I was part of the team lining up for the circumciser's knife. However, I cried so uncontrollably that the women elders said I should not undergo the cut since my crying signified a bad omen."

An evil cloud hangs over the rites of passage ceremony where a candidate cries. The Marakwet culture considers such tears and cries as an ominous sign and warning that all would not go well.

"My community believes one will die if she cries before she faces the knife and so I miraculously escaped the rite," she explains.

However, her tribulations were not to end there. In 1976, instead of proceeding to Standard Five like her other classmates, she was forced to go look after her niece: "I had to drop out of school for a whole year and baby sit my niece. My eldest brother who was a nurse in Kakamega had just gotten a baby and I was sent to stay with them and take care of the baby," she says.

After missing school for a whole year, her brother was transferred to Nairobi. She moved

with him but this time she was allowed to rejoin school. In 1977, she joined Madaraka Primary School and went straight to Standard Six.

"I never studied Standard Five but still when I sat for my Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), the following year, I passed with 31 points out of 36," she says.

She then proceeded to State House Girls' High School. She would walk daily from school to Madaraka where she lived with her brother.

Jebii used to save the KSh2 that her brother gave her daily for transport. After saving KSh15, she bought a packet of sweets which she would sell to her colleagues during break time.

Even as she was enjoying her secondary schooling, a cloud of fear hung over her head. Her parents had threatened to circumcise her once she was through with her O level. She kept thinking of devising a plan to escape from the knife.

### Turning point

After, she completed her O level she joined Moi Forces Academy where she sat for her A-levels in 1982. This formed a turning point in her life.

"After I completed my O level, I had to run away from home. I went to live with some missionaries in Mombasa. For close to a month, my family did not know where I was. They came to know of my whereabouts at a relative's wedding at which I served as a maid," recalls Jebii.

It was at this wedding in August 1982, where Jebii reconciled with her parents. It was an emotional and very significant moment especially in her relationship with her father who passed on one month after their reunion.

She completed her education and was employed by Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) as a clerk. Jebii worked at the bank from 1985 to 1997 when she resigned to vie for the East Marakwet parliamentary seat on a Social Democratic Party (SDP) ticket. She lost.

She recalls how her opponents rode on the fact that she uncircumcised to influence the community not to vote for her. They described her as a dirty, uncircumcised child who cannot rule the people of Marakwet.

"It was like a tag on my face", she recalls.

### Serving the people

During the 1997 General Elections, Jebii got only six votes but this did not dampen her spirits of representing the people of Marakwet.

For the five years that she was out in the "political cold" with no formal job, she volunteered for the World Vision, and acted as a translator in all their meetings. She also sold maize and sardines (Omena) in Nairobi and Kitale to make ends meet.

"I was so broke that when I was vying in 2002, my political mentors, Tabitha Seii and Zipporah Kittony would fuel my campaign cars. They also gave me a lot of moral support," she says.

"The people of Marakwet were dying and I could not just sit and watch. I sought refuge in my Bible and asked God to give me a chance to change the situation. I wanted to be the (leketio)

***"The people of Marakwet were dying and I could not just sit and watch. I sought refuge in my Bible and asked God to give me a chance to change the situation. I wanted to be the (leketio) woman's belt between the Pokot and Marakwets, I wanted to bring these two communities together and in 2002 my dream was realised. I won the election on a Narc ticket."***

— Jebii Kilimo, Marakwet MP



Jebii Kilimo, Marakwet MP is also the current chairperson of the Kenya Women Parliamentarian Association. Picture: Kenyan Woman Correspondent

woman's belt between the Pokot and Marakwets, I wanted to bring these two communities together and in 2002 my dream was realised. I won the election on a Narc ticket," she recalls.

Besides, World Vision which supported all her FGM programmes which she initiated in the constituency, she also received a lot of support from Education Centre for Women and Development (ECWD), which gave her a lot of material for her campaign against the painful FGM practice.

However, this battle is far from over. In 2007, she had to face her male opponents who believed she was not qualified to be the area MP owing to her being an uncircumcised woman.

"Most parties would shy off from nominating me to vie on their ticket and I went with KENDA Party which was not well known. There was an ODM wave which was sweeping across Rift Valley but my people did not disappoint me.

As per now, I am proud to state that I am the only KENDA MP in parliament," she says.

Jebii, who is married to Mr Philemon Kilimo, an Engineer with the Ministry of Roads.

She reiterates: "Women need to fight for their share of voice and should not allow men to pull them down."

### Representation

Currently she also serves as the Chairperson of Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) which brings together all the women parliamentarians.

She has used the Association in funding projects in the constituencies that are represented by women.

The Association that meets often has also been at the forefront in mobilising MPs to support women related bills. One of the bills that Jebii is happy will soon be brought to Parliament is the Prohibition of FGM Bill.

This Bill if passed into law will make FGM a criminal Act. She argues that the Children's Act is not powerful enough to fight the culture which is still deeply rooted various cultures.

During the Commission on the Status of women in New York late February, Jebii presented a paper on harmful cultural practices like FGM that impede girls' completion of education.

However, as Kenya walks into the devolved system of government, Jebii is holding all her plans close to her chest. Will she be the governor, senator, MP or women's representative? Only time will tell as she is not speaking yet.



# Women advised not to compromise on Constitution

...By Musa Radoli

**K**enyan women must be at the forefront in fighting for the total unconditional implementation of the new Constitution or the process could be easily hijacked and compromised by a few political elites.

The women have been asked not to sit back or relax but continue in the spirit that saw them oppose the controversial nominations by President Mwai Kibaki of constitutional offices of the Attorney General, Chief Justice, Director of Public Prosecutions and that of the Controller of Budget.

Before the President eventually bowed down to immense pressure from the Kenyan women, widespread national and international quarters, a women's coalition had already filed a case in the High Court to challenge the appointments.

## Gender forum

Speaking at the Gender Forum, former Nominated Member of Parliament, Ms Josephine Sinyo, who is Senior Counsel and Chair of United Disabled People of Kenya (UPDK) said: "We have come a long way to get to where we are today but the real battle has just begun for the women and the disadvantaged groups of this beloved country of ours. The real challenges are still ahead and we must brace ourselves and be ready to fight against them for our rights, hope and promise that the new Constitution has brought us and the entire nation?"

Sinyo, who was the chief guest at the forum, said the highly gender insensitive manner in which the controversial presidential nominations were conducted is a clear manifestation of the mischief that the political elites were up to.

"Kenyan women must be constantly vigilant, alert and conscious. They must critically monitor and evaluate each and every step of the constitutional implementation process right from now all the way through the five year transitional implementation lifespan it has to go through," reiterated Sinyo.

She declared: "Unless we stand up and ensure that each and every step of the implementation process is conducted transparently and accountably in collaboration with all the stakeholders involved at each and every step of the process, we risk going back to the dark ages that our beloved nation has gone through."

Women were asked to take the lead in championing the implementation process because the Constitution provides them with enormous gains.

Speaking at the same Forum, Chairman of the Constitution Implementation Commission (CIC), Mr Charles Nyachae said that under the new constitutional order, the lives of Kenyan women from the grassroots to the national level will be completely transformed.

"The Constitution provides for and protects women's rights right from the homes where they live through to the offices where they work, every day encounters, county offices to the national offices whereas the old Constitution denied them these rights," he said.

Some of the critical areas that govern Kenyan women's rights under the new constitutional dispensation are the rights to inherit property and land. The old Constitution denied women an opportunity to inherit family land and property forcing many to go to court to seek redress. But even then, majority were denied their rightful share.

## Fair representation

The other critical areas are fair representation in elective and public offices. The new Constitution makes provisions for direct elective positions specifically reserved for women and other disadvantaged members of the society.

This was the inaugural Gender Forum 2011 dubbed Realising the gains for gender and the marginalized under the Kenyan Constitution: A six month reflection of implementation of the Constitution.

It was held to reflect on six months progress on the implementation process and discuss the journey



Women receive copies of the new constitution at a public rally. Women are being encouraged to ensure that they are part of the process in ascertaining the implementation of the constitution.

Picture: Kenyan Woman Correspondent.



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— Ms Josephine Sinyo, former Nominated MP

toward realising the gains for gender and the marginalized.

The Forum supported by Heinrich Böll Foundation is a continuous process that seeks to collect and transfer sharing of knowledge as well as expertise and advocacy in the area of gender to influence changes.

According to the Gender Programme Coordinator at Heinrich Böll, Ms Wanjiku Wakogi, the Gender Forum will continue to facilitate discussion around 'Kenya's rebirth' and new constitutional dispensation with the discourse focusing on laying good foundations and institutions for ethics, justice, governance, democracy and human security.

The other critical areas targeted include constitutionalising attitudes, practices and deeds in the Kenyans' day-to-day engagements with each other, especially women whose numbers and influence in society can revolutionise the changes the country needs.

## Electoral process

"This year also marks the run-up to the first general elections under the new Constitution slated for the second half of 2012. The current political climate is an attestation to the fact that the clamour for positions of leadership is in high gear with preparations and campaigns for electoral positions evident in public conversation," said Wakogi.

She added: "The Kenyan woman must not be left out in these critical processes that are part of transforming into a new Constitution."

Speakers reiterated the fact that the political class is still determined to manipulate the new Constitution to suit their interests. They urged Kenyans to challenge them directly even if it means fighting it out through legal channels.

Participants at the Forum expressed concerns that there were still many personalities and institutions engaged in impunity and corruption. This is the group that is resistant to reforms and constitutional changes. They were either directly or indirectly involved with the constitutional implementation process.

These personalities and institutions should be expected to be constant barriers and threats to the constitutional implementation processes. "They must be identified, isolated and fought at all times and levels," the women were advised.

## Law realisation

from page 1

sources among other benefits.

"If we are seeing such bitter and acrimonious difficulties as exemplified by the public and behaviour of the legislators on critical matters concerning the Constitutional implementation process at the initial stages, what can we expect of them in the long run?" posed Mr Jason Oyugi, Director policy and programmes at Bridge Africa.

Oyugi said controversy over unconstitutional presidential nominations were a clear indication that something was terrible amiss.

He argued that the situation was worsened by the fact that some of the offices have to date not been filled by new occupants appointed in strict accordance with stipulations of the new Constitution which is the supreme law of the land.

"People must be held accountable for their actions or omissions irrespective of their positions in society," observed Oyugi.

The worst area to be affected under such state of affairs is the country's gender equality and the disadvantaged peoples of Kenya equations because the country's political elites are hoarding the space and concentrating on a lot of irrelevancies instead of critical national issues that need to be given priority under the new constitutional dispensation. Women remain the biggest losers in this state considering that the new law brought them a number of gains.

Participants insisted that Kenyans in collaboration with the civil society organisations among other stakeholders must take centre stage in the implementation processes of the new Constitution since politicians will only manipulate and compromise the process to suit their interests at the expense of the nation.

Professionals in collaboration with civil society stakeholders are better placed to ensure that the process is transparent, free and fair with those involved being accountable for their actions. It is only this that will see the development of a new nation that Kenyans have been struggling to get for decades.

The Association of Professional Societies of East Africa (APSEA) governance consultant, Mr Gideon Ochanda said that the new Constitution has a transitional period of five years during which a lot of legislation and policy changes have to be worked upon by some organs of the old Constitution that may sabotage the process.

It is paramount that the country's professionals and civil society stakeholders from a wide range of disciplines be actively engaged in the implementing institutions and organs. They should not only contribute their professionalism but also to monitor and evaluate the entire process to protect the interests of millions of Kenyans and the nation as a whole.

Said Ochanda: "The legislative and policy baskets, whether private or public, are first and foremost technical and in many aspects guided by professionals."

He argued that different APSEA membership organisations have in one way or another been operating under or with some form of legislation or policy and they have both positive and negative experiences that have taught them valuable lessons.

Ochanda said there are at least 700 existing legislations and more than 60 new ones that must be looked at afresh to accord them constitutional harmony.

He observed that professionals in the implementation process will have multiple roles that may cover areas such as critical membership appraisal of the current legislations and policies against the provisions of the new Constitution.

"The professionals should also look at the roles allocated to interlocutory institutions, search for membership inclusion, action and mandates in the constitution, membership and public education, advocacy, lobbying and process influencing," reiterated Ochanda.



# Illiteracy a stumbling block to land rights

...By Duncan Mboyah

Land is a critical economic and social resource. It is both a sign of wealth as well as a symbol of cultural belonging. In Kenya, issues regarding land have therefore remained sensitive and complex. Most communities and individuals regard land as a basic factor in the attainment of economic independence and poverty reduction. Land is also a cultural tool which defines a people and identifies them in the context of things.

Property rights in Kenya, especially those related to land remain a sensitive topic to deal with given the value to which people attach to land.

Worst affected are women's rights to equal ownership of property where a number of obstacles, largely customary prop up whenever it is mentioned.

Women have experienced property discrimination sanctioned by laws and practices. The Government's policy of tenure individualization and privatization in the early 1990s has resulted in weaker tenure security for women.

## Customary tenure

Under customary tenure systems, women were guaranteed a right of use through their husbands after marriage. The process of land registration left women out of adjudication, conferring title to the male household head.

Land-use decisions are made by men to the extent that women's food crop products are marginalized and cultivated on poorer soils. Women's lack of tenure security is also an issue because men continue to migrate to urban areas, leaving many women to manage lands over which they have no rights.

However, it is hoped that this will come to pass as the new law gets implemented since the Constitution has dealt with the property rights under Article 40 (1) states: Subject to Article 65, every person has the right, either individually or in association with others to acquire and own property (a) of any description or (b) in any

part of Kenya.

In addition, Article 60(1) makes elimination of gender discrimination and equitable access to land part of the new principles of land policy. In 60 (10) (f) it states: .... elimination of gender discrimination in law, custom and practices related to land and property in land."

"Despite this constitutional milestones illiteracy amongst both men and women, though not as high as it once was, remains a challenge," Mr. Peter Ocholla, the Programme Manager at the Caucus for Women's Leadership.

## Beneficiaries

He notes that women who are the major beneficiaries of the new law are unlikely to benefit much if the Government and other organisations including statutory bodies created by the Constitution do not step up civic education.

Ocholla observes that there exists a profound ignorance similar to what appeared during the referendum campaigns about how constitutional rights on land can be upheld.

"It is unfortunate that this state of affairs may scuttle the understanding of many women about how their rights are protected under the new Constitution," he explains.

This ignorance discourages many women, particularly in areas where illiteracy is high from taking a leading role in buying, selling or leasing property. Often they rely on their husbands or other male relatives and are thus rarely registered or recognised as owners (jointly or individually) of their own property.

## Civic education

Ocholla calls on the Government to ensure that civic education on land rights are stepped up. He says that at the moment there is little civic education happening on the ground yet most people have not read the article on land and even the constitution in general.

"Statements coming from politicians are still causing fear as most of the political class continue to inform their tribesmen that their land is com-



Women working on a farm. Many women do not have access to land ownership yet land is also a cultural tool which defines a people and identifies them in the context of things. Picture: Kenyan Woman Correspondent.

munal irrespective of all that the law says," observes Ocholla.

He reiterates that politicians are causing unnecessary tension yet their focus is the 2012 General Elections, signs that they have little concern for the common people.

According to the Constitution, Article 40 and article 60 jointly create the pillar on which women's rights to property are constitutionally upheld. Around this pillar are other supporting provisions. These include the requirement in Article 68 that Parliament pass laws to recognise and protect matrimonial property, particularly the matrimonial home.

The National Accord and Reconciliation Act recognises land as a source of conflict and calls on the political class to make fundamental changes in land ownership and tenure through constitutional reforms.

The National Land Policy is meant to create various important bodies to deal with land, key among them, the National Land Commission which is to carry out land administration and

management sustainably, equitably, efficiently and cost effectively across the country.

## Women's rights

The G10, a coalition of women's civil organisations seeks to put into perspective the issue of women and land. The G-10 is composed of Caucus for Women's Leadership, WILDAF, FIDA-Kenya, CREAW and AWC among other organisations. It is implementing a project on land reforms and decentralization whose main objective is to create awareness around the National Land Policy as well as the constitutional provisions on land that speak to issues around marginalised groups such as women's rights to inheritance and ownership.

The G-10, therefore, seeks to empower the women on their rights on land inheritance and ownership as spelt out in the National Land Policy and the new constitution.

It also seeks to advocate for decentralization of decisions around land matters to the district and grassroots

levels so as to enable women and the citizenry in general participate more effectively in making decisions that have direct bearing on their lives and livelihoods.

The G-10 aims for an increased public support and acceptance of women's land rights and adoption of land equality provisions in land policy and constitution.

Increased citizen engagement and participation in ongoing reform processes at all levels and demand for Agenda 4 reforms with special emphasis on the National Land Policy among all Kenyans.

It also looks to enhance effective participation of women and other marginalized communities in demanding land reform and decentralisation

The different partners have brought in a vast experience in implementing gender and governance issues at the national level as well as grassroots level and hence the competence in handling this project.

# A call for the public to take lead on reform process

...By Joyce Chimbi

With implementation of the new Constitution in top gear, the public has high expectations on how they want things to translate into better service delivery and quality leadership at County levels.

With the Government in the process of restructuring itself, the awaited reforms can only make sense if the ordinary person is able to translate them in tangible terms, this includes transformative leadership.

## Reforms

Reforms are urgently needed to improve responsiveness, transparency, effectiveness as well as accountability of governance institutions. This will help address the needs of all Kenyans.

This paradigm shift calls for public involvement in what experts call citizenry driven reform process. A good example is how the committee on devolved structures is going around the country collecting views

from Kenyans. This translates into participation of people on the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them.

The introduction of the devolved County Governments is crucial in making sure those resources and services are accessible to the ordinary people. It will also address flawed development policies.

The people who are part of a County must be empowered to choose the right leaders and play a watchdog role to ensure good governance is adhered to. Leaders holding public offices must demonstrate a people-centred approach to leadership.

It is against this background that civil society organisations are engaging with the public to develop a leadership model for good governance especially for County governments which will be critical in the realisation of the new laws.

In this regard, the work of the JADILI Partners, a coalition of civil society organisations working towards people-centred leadership and good governance in counties is worth

mentioning. Governance of the counties needs to translate into improved service delivery, inclusivity, participation of people in policy and decision-making as well as protection of human rights as contained in the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights is an integral part of Kenya's democratic state and is the framework for social, economic and cultural policies.

## Coalition

In Article 19 (2) it says: "The purpose of recognising and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms is to preserve the dignity of individuals and communities and [promote social justice and the realisation of the potential of all human beings."

Article 10 (3) (a) says: "The rights and fundamental freedoms in The Bill of Rights (a) Belong to each individual and are not granted by the State."

Generally, there should be an improved quality of life for the ordinary person. This emerged clearly during a dialogue session in Busia where JADILI conducted a civic education session on the new Constitution.

The delegates included men, women, youth and the disabled who emphatically stressed that any leadership position at both national and at County level should be in line with integrity. According to the citizens, this will reduce corruption and promote good leadership.

There is need, therefore, for the people of the County to be empowered enough to choose the right leaders to serve them. They will then play a watchdog role to ensure good governance. Second, leaders holding public offices must demonstrate a people-centred approach to leadership and make sure that they are aware of what Chapter Six of the Constitution that deals with Leadership and Integrity. Article 73 (2) of the new Constitution says: "the guiding principles of leadership and integrity include:

(a): Selection on the basis of personal integrity, competence and suitability, or election in free and fair elections;

(b): Objectivity and impartiality in decision making and in ensuring that decisions are not influenced by nepotism, favouritism, other improv-

er motives or corrupt practices;

(c): Selfless service based on the public interest demonstrated by

i. honesty in the execution of public duties and

ii. the declaration of any personal interest that may conflict with public duties;

(d): Accountability to the public on decisions and actions taken.

This is a significant step towards achieving constitutionalism and a sense of inclusivity and participation for all in nation building. This exercise is significantly geared towards bringing marginalized groups such as women, youth and the disabled within the community onto a platform where they too can influence change can be very vital in promoting good governance within the counties in Kenya.

By ensuring that from the word go, the public becomes part of the change towards the transformative leadership can enhance more accountability, transparency and participation in the County governance structure.



# Men fighting for women's rights

...By Mercy Mumo

Ever heard of men who fight for women's rights, for their recognition in politics? This is not a common practice as most men have been brought up under patriarchal rules that have seen only men in leadership positions.

Men have for the longest time reluctantly, partly or not at all been involved in the quest for women's participation in governance. Taking the back seat and giving women roles that only pertain to the home and expecting them to deliver within these same walls has in a way contributed to the slow growth of women in decision making positions.

When a woman is confined to the home only, the burden she carries is heavy enough to deter her from participating in decision making that is equally crucial to her survival.

Culture has equally played a major role in belittling the woman and ensuring that her responsibilities only rest within the home. If she makes any attempt in seeking political and leadership representation, it is frowned upon by society.

## Advocacy

Many women are, therefore, hesitant to engage in political deliberations. They loathe the saddle that comes with juggling family, work, education and culture with the leadership responsibilities. The same society that has purportedly given her the chance is the same one that will ridicule and judge her.

However, to beat this bias, women's rights advocates have changed course and are looking at better ways in which they can raise the number of their gender in leadership and decision making positions.

They are now incorporating men into their cause. One such agenda is the Gender Warriors Programme being run by the Caucus for Women's Leadership. The warriors' Programme was started in 2009 and incorporates men in the gender agenda under the gender and governance programme (GGP III).

The idea of working with men was brought forth by the Women's Regional Assembly by the Caucus in targeting the community in bringing change to the socio-economic development of women at the grassroots level. The idea was to not only empower them economically but also politically, ensuring that they are visible in their participation in decision making processes. Currently, there are 29 Women's Regional Assemblies spread across the eight provinces of Kenya.

The gender warriors were born out of the



Evans Gachie (centre) together with other participants during a poverty eradication walk at the Coast. Picture: Caucus

Women's Regional Assemblies, keenness in taking up men who are willing to champion the rights of women involved in governance. These are men between the age of 18 and 30 years who work in popularising women's participation in governance, understanding their needs and articulating gender issues. The Caucus for Women's Leadership chose young men, as opposed to older men, as the former are more open at working to advance the women's cause. The older men are bastions of tradition and thus chances of making headway with the younger men in this advocacy venture are higher.

The warriors fit well in their role of being the advocacy tool in advancing women's rights in as far as governance is concerned. So far there are 28 gender warriors in Thika, Kwale, Karachuonyo, Homa Bay, Makueni, Mombasa, Nakuru, Migori and Uasin Gishu.

The warriors use their masculinity to push for women's rights in development, politics, governance, equity and equality.

## Awareness

Caucus acts as a facilitator in helping them conduct awareness and reforms at the local authority level. Before embarking on advocacy work, the young men go through intensive training on gender analysis, lobbying and advocacy issues and anti-corruption.

They are determined to break away from the patriarchal way of doing things where men dominate social and political structures and women's access to them is deterred by certain factors key among them being culture. The warriors are more inclined on becoming advocates for gender sensitive governance.

To be a gender warrior, one must be gen-

der sensitive, a communicator, ability to articulate gender issues and accountable to the community.

According to Mr Peter Ochola, a programme manager with Caucus for Women's Leadership, gender warriors have revolutionised governance programme work.

"Young men involved in this programme are coming out strongly as champions of gender equality and changing the society's traditional way of perceiving women," explains Ochola. He adds: "The men are able to identify women who are active, passionate and interested in leadership."

"We work with women who are recognised as figures of authority in areas of leadership and governance including those that are committed and are interested in political representation," reiterates Ochola.

He reiterates: "We want to change the face of the gender agenda in women's participation and this is so far the best approach in warming the political environment come 2012."

A gender warrior from the Coastal region, Mr Evan Gachie says the gap between policy and politics needs to be bridged.

"It is rather sad that women are still being swayed by small bribes that seem harmless at the beginning but end up being the beginning of their problems in the future," explains Gachie.

It is much easier for a community to attend and participate in political meetings and rallies than civil society strategy meetings. Women constitute the majority because of the notion and assurance of getting handouts to take back home as compared to the latter

Continued on page 7

## Gender warriors at a glance

Evans Gachie:  
Coast

Gachie started as a youth leader then subsequently moved to advocating for women's rights. He admits that culture promotes men's leadership and tends to forget the women.

At the Coast, Gachie reveals that if a meeting is organised by an Islamic group, women are not allowed to participate or speak in comparison to civil society meetings. Interaction between men and women is also hindered when they are put in one group. Both men and women end up taking sides.

Due to poverty, handouts from political leaders easily sway women during rallies and campaigns.

"Most times, it becomes hard to conduct strategy meetings because we do not have that money to give out but we are willing to help our sisters in advancing politically," says Gachie.

His work as a warrior has had a positive impact on networking, training and in campaigning for young aspiring civic leaders.

"I can proudly say that I have managed to streamline gender issues to 50-50 representation and mentoring young men to become gender sensitive and champion for their rights."

Steve Kanja: Thika

Kanja has not only been involved in campaigning for women's rights at the grassroots level but also in monitoring allocation and use of government funds such as Constituency Development Funds (CDF) and Local Authorities Trust Fund (LATF).

Although he has been able to achieve a third representation of women in employment opportunities, he admits the process has not been an easy.

He is grappling with the challenge of criticism from older men who wonder why he campaigns for women's empowerment instead of his own.

"I helped 400 female employees who were to be phased off during a strike in November last year at Del-monte get back their jobs," he says.

Khamisi Mohammed: Likoni

Khamisi has been a gender warrior for one year. He is involved in the sensitisation of gender issues on equality and equity in line with the new Constitution.

Unlike other areas, men in his region see him as their lawyer and one advocating for their rights.

However he says that "Some of the women are still facing resistance from their spouses when it comes to attending the meetings and forums we organise on governance".

However, his wife supports him fully and has no problem with him working with other women.



## Women leaders more empathetic and flexible

...By Mercy Mumo

Attitudes toward leadership are changing and what women offer is essential. A feminine way of leading includes helping the world to understand and be principled about values that really matter.

According to Dr Musimbi Kanyoro, Director of the Population Program at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation (Packard Foundation): "Domination as a leadership style is becoming less and less popular. There is a new growing appreciation of those traits that women use to keep families together and to organize volunteers to unite and make change in the shared life of communities."

Kanyoro joined the Packard Foundation from her post as General Secretary of the World YWCA, a global movement of 25 million women and girls in 122 countries.

She reiterates: "These newly admired leadership qualities of shared leadership, nurturance and doing good for others are today not only sought after but also indeed needed to make a

difference in the world."

A year-long study conducted in 2005 by two organisations Caliper and Aurora in New Jersey and London respectively, revealed a number of characteristics that distinguish women leaders from men in terms of qualities of leadership.

The study identified women leaders "as more assertive and persuasive, have a stronger need to get things done and are more willing to take risks than male leaders. Women leaders were also found to be more empathetic and flexible, as well as stronger in interpersonal skills than their male counterparts, enabling them to read situations accurately and take information in from all sides. These women leaders are able to bring others around to their point of view...because they genuinely understand and care about where others are coming from...so that the people they are leading feel more understood, supported and valued."

Women must do their part towards supporting each other in order to advance themselves in all facets of life.

Men's engagement is essential in addressing

gender inequalities. According to the report by Usawa ni Haki, men could do more in the field including rallying other men to vote for women candidates, challenge negative stereotypes in the social sphere and lobby for greater equality at policy level.

The report also notes that women leaders have in the past been subjected to challenges such as physical harassment by opponents, verbal abuse, slander, destruction of property, and ridicule. These are some of the contributing factors that point the red light on poor representation of women at all levels of governance.

It, therefore, cannot be ignored that men are key in the governance process more so in the visibility of women in decision making positions. The world cannot afford to overlook the fact that getting the support women need from men should not include dictating on what should be done. This is a stereotypical way of viewing gender.

As more and more female candidates continue to express their interest in embracing posts and changing the face of leadership, the big question still remains.

### Factfile

The Caliper study findings are summarised into four specific statements about women's leadership qualities:

1. Women leaders are more persuasive than their male counterparts.
2. When feeling the sting of rejection, women leaders learn from adversity and carry on with an "I'll show you" attitude.
3. Women leaders demonstrate an inclusive, team-building leadership style of problem solving and decision making.
4. Women leaders are more likely to ignore rules and take risks.

Additional information 'The qualities that distinguish women leaders,' a Caliper report.



# Civil society organisations plead to ICC over internally displaced women

...By Odhiambo Orlale

As the debate over the fate of the Ocampo six rages on, the civil society and human rights organisations are demanding that the Government uphold the rights of the thousands of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) languishing in camps in parts of Rift Valley Province.

The organisations are concerned that the plight of the IDPs, especially the women and children, has been ignored by the Government as it focuses on defending the Ocampo Six.

In a bold move, the organisations successfully petitioned all the five members of the United Nations Security Council, to reject a request by the Kenyan Government to defer the cases filed against the Ocampo Six at the International Criminal Court, in The Hague.

The six suspects named in connection with the 2007-2008 post-election violence which left over 1,300 people killed, over 600,000 displaced and property worth billions of shillings destroyed and looted, are Deputy Prime Minister, Uhuru Kenyatta, Head of the Civil Service and Secretary to the Cabinet, Mr Francis Muthaura, former Cabinet ministers Mr William Ruto and Mr Henry Kosgei, former Police Commissioner, Mr Hussein Ali, and Kass FM radio presenter, Mr Joshua arap Sang.

## Initial hearing

Uhuru, Muthaura Ali have been scheduled by the ICC pre-trial chamber to have their initial hearing on April 8. Ruto, Kosgey and Sang will have their initial hearing on April 7.

In a statement read by Ms Anne Njogu, the Chairperson of the Centre for Rights Education Awareness (CREAW), on behalf of the organisations, at a press conference attended by several envoys said: "We humbly request that you publicly denounce efforts by indicted suspects to evade justice including interference with witnesses and the overall judicial process of the ICC.

"Every accused person is entitled to the fair process of law to determine his or her innocence or guilt. Similarly, every victim of Kenya's post-election violence deserves a fair trial of the perpetrators to achieve truth, justice and reparation."

The statement was signed by officials representing Kenya National Commission on Human Rights; Centre for Multi-Party Democracy; International Centre for Policy and Conflict; International Commission of Jurists (Kenya Chapter); Kenyans for Peace with Truth and Justice; Centre for Rights Awareness and Education (Creaw) on behalf of G10 and National Convention Executive Council and Change Associates.

The civil society and human rights organisa-

tions have sworn to discharge their mandate and undertake a solemn duty to protect the rights of the public, to guarantee justice for all, victims and perpetrators and play a critical role in ending impunity in Africa.

The 15 UN Security Council members are USA, France, Russia, China, United Kingdom, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Gabon, Lebanon, Nigeria and Columbia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa.

"We, the civil society/human rights organisations and the statutory national human rights institution in Kenya (the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights) representing the voice of the victims of the post-election violence and the of the people of Kenya wish to make an urgent appeal seeking your support on the subject matter above. Our organisations are greatly disturbed by the recent calls for deferment of the cases now before the International Criminal Court (ICC)," the organisations said.

## Judicial mechanism

They recalled that the cases before the ICC were as a result of the failure of Kenya to establish any credible and genuine national judicial mechanism to deal with the alleged perpetrators of the violence that occurred between December 2007 and February 2008 following Kenya's disputed presidential elections.

This failure, the statement maintained, stems from a clear and manifest lack of political will to secure criminal accountability in accordance with the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into the Post-Election Violence (CIPEV) which was established via the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation (KNDR) processes.

The statement read: "The People of Kenya need your support and decisive action in ensuring that those bearing the greatest responsibility for the grievous crimes committed against Kenyan citizens are held accountable for their actions in order to help deter future criminal transgressions."

The civil society noted that the work of the ICC was crucial to ending impunity and ensuring that victims of the worst crimes obtain justice. However, they lamented that some Kenyan politicians now claim that the ICC was targeting Africa by only initiating trials on this continent.

The organisations also defended ICC saying a review of the cases currently under the jurisdiction of the ICC demonstrates that it is not targeting Africa at all. Four of the five cases were referrals from the respective African States themselves, while only the situation in Darfur, Sudan was referred by the United



*Kenyans protesting bid to have the post election violence case at The Hague deferred. Civil society organisations successfully petitioned the United Nations Security Council to reject the request by the Kenyan Government. Picture: Kenyan Woman Correspondent.*

Nations Security Council, in which Africa was fully represented. The others are Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Njogu noted that although Kenya had enacted a new Constitution which proposes the overhaul of the entire Criminal Justice System in Kenya, it is not practical to imagine that these changes will be effected within a year as proposed by the aforementioned segment of the coalition government. These institutions need to be established and tested to meet the requirements of credibility, competence, independence and requisite public confidence.

## Security council

However the UN Security Council in an informal meeting rejected Kenya's bid to have the cases deferred. Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka has been leading in carrying out a shuttle diplomacy cause to have the ICC cases deferred arguing that the trials at The Hague would threaten the nation's stability. However, an appeal to the UN Security Council was rejected.

The Security Council rejected the deferral bid saying Kenya made a mistake by going to the UN instead of taking its plea directly to the ICC.

The Rome Statute, under which the ICC was established allows a deferral only if a country can show that ICC jurisdiction threatens international peace. Kenya failed to convince the council that such a threat exists.

Kenya can still ask the ICC itself to defer the cases under terms of Article 19 of the Rome Statute. The article says the court can set aside cases if a country shows credibly that it can handle the cases itself.

*"Every accused person is entitled to the fair process of law to determine his or her innocence or guilt. Similarly, every victim of Kenya's post-election violence deserves a fair trial of the perpetrators to achieve truth, justice and reparation."*

— Anne Njogu, chairperson Centre for Rights Education and Awareness

## Kenyan men fighting for gender rights

from page 6

where they feel not much commitment is required.

Such circumstances occur as a result of poverty at the household level. When a woman is hungry, the community and its inhabitants go hungry as well and eventually loyalty shifts. If previously the woman was actively participating in the activities of the community, then she is likely to be swayed where she is able to see immediate solutions to her problems.

The challenge Kenya is struggling with currently is having a breed of leaders with integrity. Leaders who can be trusted, held accountable and are selfless enough to fight for the people's rights. This is also entrenched in the new Constitution. The whole of Chapter Six of the new law is dedicated to Leadership and Integrity.

Article 73 (2) (a): "The guiding principles of leadership and integrity include selection on the basis of personal integrity, com-

petence and suitability, or election in free and fair elections";

And (d): "Accountability to the public for decisions and actions";

(e) "Discipline and commitment in service to the people."

The community at large is demanding for accountability and transparency in governance issues. "The gender warriors have come out strongly in being the perfect role models," observes Ochola.

## Misconceptions

The warriors face the challenge of misconception over gender equality that women want to take over men. "We are ridiculed for being in the driver's seat in championing for our sisters' rights in politics. The fact that we are not gunning for positions makes it even worse," says Ochola.

They hope to consolidate the work they are doing in the districts to the county level so as to address upcoming elections in 2012. Mobilising support for women in 2012 is key in their agenda. They want to carry on their activism in gender to the county governments where women's visibility is crucial in political representation.

There is urgent need for sustained presence in the community. The warriors exist for themselves so as to transform the community to accept leadership from a level playing field.

What they are looking at is leadership that is by the people, for the people and not coerced or bought. Leadership that the community can count on to represent them selflessly without any hidden agenda. The fact that they are well versed with the underlying issues of the areas they represent gives them more leverage in championing for women's rights and leadership positions.



# Has Lesotho bridged the gender gap?

...By Karen Allen

Lesotho sits like pearl in a shell, surrounded by the land mass of South Africa. But this tiny kingdom of 1.8 million people boasts another jewel, which is perhaps astonishing given its size.

Lesotho is ranked eighth in the world by the World Economic Forum when it comes to bridging the gap between the sexes. The reasons are cultural, political and economic, but one explanation keeps being repeated when you probe the gender issue, and it relates to Lesotho's recent past.

Historically, large numbers of men from Lesotho crossed the border to work in South Africa's mines, forcing women to step into their shoes and take up school places and jobs. Many of the men have now come back, having been retrenched from the mines, and they face a more female-focused world.

In politics, one in five government ministers in Lesotho is female. Dr Mphu Ramatlapeng, Lesotho's Minister for Health and Social Affairs, attributes this to the government's pro-women policies. But more than that, she emphasises Lesotho's culture of learning.

"The defining factor is education. I think a lot of women have realised early on that they have to educate their daughters," she says.

## High literacy rates

Primary education is free in Lesotho and literacy rates among women exceed those of men — with 95 percent of women able to read and write, compared with 83 percent of men. This is filtering into the job market — the chief of police is a woman, so too is the Speaker of Parliament and there are at least a dozen senior female judges presiding over the country's courts.

These women are the role models plucked from Lesotho's elite, but unemployment stands at 43 percent and, for more regular jobs, competition remains fierce. Although 40,000 women make up most of the workforce in the energetic textile sector situated in the industrial hub of the capital, Maseru, many more risk being confined to the sidelines, as men who traditionally worked in the mines across the border look for work.

What also threatens to slide women back is the act of reproducing. Lesotho has experienced a soaring maternal mortality rate in the past five years — a trend that the minister attributes in part to a rise in back-street abortions and complications in pregnancy.

With mountains often separating a woman from medical care, Ramatlapeng's mission is to persuade more women to come to hospital for help throughout their pregnancy.

"They are prepared to visit to have their health check ups," she says. "It is just convincing them to deliver their babies in hospital that is harder."

## Gender gap

Across the other side of town, Lash Mokhathi, who coaches a women's football team, smirks when she hears that Lesotho is ranked first in Africa for bridging the gender gap and eighth in the entire world.

Like many here, she finds the figures hard to believe. "We need to boost women's self-esteem," she says explaining that is what the football training is all about. The football project, which works with an HIV prevention scheme called Kick for Life, aims to divert vulnerable young women away from drugs, prostitution and street crime.

On the pitch, the roles seem strangely reversed. Young women, some in football gear that looks several sizes too big, scream with excitement every time a goal is scored, while a team of male cheerleaders stands on the sidelines singing songs of encouragement.

But life beyond the football pitch is still hard for Lesotho's women, complains Lash. "It is not just the men that are holding women back, it is also the mothers," she says.

She explains that they worry that men will be displaced by "over-ambitious" women.

"We are not here to pose a threat. I want to see more women engineers, more women construction workers, a political party run by a woman — then I will say that Lesotho has achieved equality."

Fifty per cent of Lesotho's population live in the rural areas. Until recently, customary laws applied in the countryside dictated that women



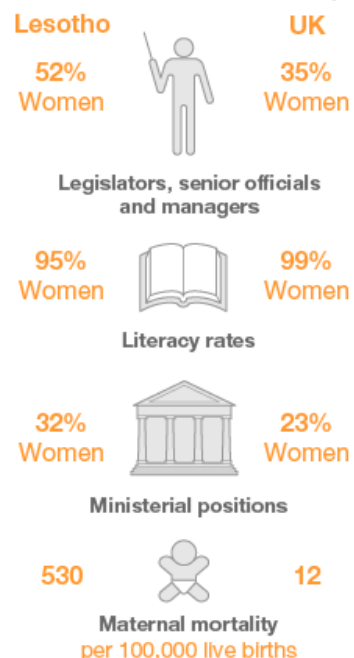
Women of Lesotho in a rural setting. The fact that majority of the men leave to work in the mines, many women have ended up taking positions of leadership. Picture: Internet



*"The government encourages pro-women policies but more than that it is Lesotho's culture of learning. The defining factor is education. I think a lot of women have realised early on that they have to educate their daughters."*

— Dr Mphu Ramatlapeng, Lesotho's Minister for Health and Social Affairs

## Women in Lesotho and UK compared



Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2010/World Bank

were virtually redundant when it came to making key decisions in the home.

Women in rural areas used to have the same legal rights as minors.

"Until the marriage act was passed, a woman had the legal status of a minor," explains Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onochie, UN resident co-ordinator in Lesotho. That meant she could not sign contracts, could not inherit property and was, in effect, treated as a child.

The rules may have changed, but 79-year-old widow Teresia Joele says that she still needs a male patron. "You need a man to look after you here. My husband died in 1962 and so I have relied on his brothers to look after my interests," she says.

## HIV/AIDS

Like thousands of other women her age, Joele is part of an army of unsung heroes — the women who raise their grandchildren because their parents have died of HIV/AIDS. Some 23 percent of Lesotho's population is infected with the disease, and it threatens to erode the gains made in female education.

"I cannot afford to send my granddaughter Dironstso to school even though I know it is the best thing I could give her," says Joele.

At 13, the child does not qualify for free education and there are also books and school uniform to pay for.

The statistics that put Lesotho at the top table in the equality game may look impressive but they risk glossing over the challenges. There may be less of a gap in health, education and political participation than in many other countries, and clearly there is greater political will to recognise the important role of women in society.

But the perceptions of many women living their daily lives in Lesotho, is that they still get a raw deal.

Courtesy of BBC Online

## Factfile from World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap 2010 Ranking

1. Iceland
2. Norway
3. Finland
4. Sweden
5. New Zealand
6. Ireland
7. Denmark
8. Lesotho
9. Philippines
10. Switzerland

## A growing gender gap in doctors' pay

...By Roni Caryn Rabin

Starting salaries for women who become physicians are significantly lower than men's, and the pay gap has grown over the past decade, a study reports.

The pay differential, which was 12.5 percent in 1999, increased to nearly 17 percent by 2008, according to the report published in Health Affairs.

The growing gap could not be explained by women's preferences, the authors said. While women on average do choose lower-paying specialties and shorter work weeks than men, those disparities were less pronounced in 2008 than in 1999. Yet the pay differential has widened.

"That was the part that surprised and puzzled us," said one author, Anthony T. Lo Sasso, a professor of health policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"As you start moving forward in time closer to the present day, your ability to explain away that difference between men's and women's salaries essentially evaporates."

The research looked at more than 8,000 new physicians in New York State. In 1999, the women earned \$151,600 on average, compared with \$173,400 for men; by 2008, the figures were \$174,000 for women and \$209,300 for men. (The study adjusted for inflation.) After accounting for differences in their practices, the study concluded, the pay gap had increased to \$16,819 in 2008, from \$3,600 in 1999.

Courtesy of New York Times



# Middle East: Women and the revolution

...By Naomi Wolf

Among the most prevalent Western stereotypes about Muslim countries are those concerning Muslim women: doe-eyed, veiled, and submissive, exotically silent, gauzy inhabitants of imagined harems, closeted behind rigid gender roles. So where were these women in Tunisia and Egypt?

In both countries, women protesters were nothing like the Western stereotype: they were front and centre, in news clips and on Facebook forums, and even in the leadership. In Egypt's Tahrir Square, women volunteers, some accompanied by children, worked steadily to support the protests — helping with security, communications and shelter. Many commentators credited the great numbers of women and children with the remarkable overall peacefulness of the protesters in the face of grave provocations.

## Citizen reporters

Other citizen reporters in Tahrir Square — and virtually anyone with a cell phone could become one — noted that the masses of women involved in the protests were demographically inclusive. Many wore headscarves and other signs of religious conservatism, while others revelled in the freedom to kiss a friend or smoke a cigarette in public.

But women were not serving only as support workers, the habitual role to which they are relegated in protest movements, from those of the 1960s to the recent student riots in the United Kingdom. Egyptian women also organised, strategised, and reported the events. Bloggers such as Leil Zahra Mortada took grave risks to keep the world informed daily of the scene in Tahrir Square and elsewhere.

The role of women in the great upheaval in the Middle East has been woefully under-analysed. Women in Egypt did not just “join” the protests — they were a leading force behind the cultural evolution that made the protests inevitable. And what is true for Egypt is true, to a greater

and lesser extent, throughout the Arab world. When women change, everything changes, and women in the Muslim world are changing radically.

The greatest shift is educational. Two generations ago, only a small minority of the daughters of the elite received a university education. Today, women account for more than half of the students at Egyptian universities.

They are being trained to use power in ways that their grandmothers could scarcely have imagined: publishing newspapers (as Sanaa el Seif did, in defiance of a government order to cease operating); campaigning for student leadership posts; fundraising for student organisations; and running meetings.

Indeed, a substantial minority of young women in Egypt and other Arab countries have now spent their formative years thinking critically in mixed-gender environments, and even publicly challenging male professors in the classroom. It is far easier to tyrannise a population when half are poorly educated and trained to be submissive.

But, as Westerners should know from their own historical experience, once you educate women, democratic agitation is likely to accompany the massive cultural shift that follows.

The nature of social media, too, has helped turn women into protest leaders. Having taught leadership skills to women for more than a decade, I know how difficult it is to get them to stand up and speak out in a hierarchical organisational structure. Likewise, women tend to avoid the figurehead status that traditional protest has in the past imposed on certain activists — almost invariably a hotheaded young man with a megaphone.

In such contexts — with a stage, a spotlight, and a spokesperson — women often shy away



In a move not seen before, Egyptian women came out in large numbers to be part of a revolution in Tahrir Square that saw the President Hosni Mubarak leave the seat of power. Picture: Internet

from leadership roles. But social media, through the very nature of the technology, have changed what leadership looks and feels like today. Facebook mimics the way many women choose to experience social reality, with connections between people just as important as individual dominance or control, if not more so.

## Democratic agitation

You can be a powerful leader on Facebook just by creating a really big “us”. Or you can stay the same size, conceptually, as everyone else on your page — you don't have to assert your dominance or authority. The structure of Facebook's interface creates what brick-and-mortar institutions, despite 30 years of feminist pressure, have failed to provide: a context in which women's ability to forge a powerful “us” and engage in a leadership of service can advance the cause of freedom and justice worldwide.

Of course, Facebook cannot reduce the risks of protest. But, however violent the immediate future in the Middle East may be, the historical record of what happens when educated women

participate in freedom movements suggests that those in the region who would like to maintain iron-fisted rule are finished.

Just when France began its rebellion in 1789, Mary Wollstonecraft, who had been caught up in witnessing it, wrote her manifesto for women's liberation. After educated women in America helped fight for the abolition of slavery, they put female suffrage on the agenda. After they were told in the 1960's that “the position of women in the movement is prone”, they generated “second wave” feminism — a movement born of women's new skills and old frustrations.

Time and again, once women have fought the other battles for freedom of their day, they have moved on to advocate for their own rights. And, since feminism is simply a logical extension of democracy, the Middle East's despots are facing a situation in which it will be almost impossible to force these awakened women to stop their fight for freedom — their own and that of their communities.

— Women Wire

# Egyptian voters approve constitutional changes

...By Neil MacFarquhar

Egyptian voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum on constitutional changes that will usher in rapid elections, with the results underscoring the strength of established political organisations, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, and the weakness of emerging liberal groups.

More than 14.1 million voters, or 77.2 percent, approved the constitutional amendments; 4 million, or 22.8 percent, voted against them. The turnout of 41 percent among the 45 million eligible voters broke all records for recent elections, according to the Egyptian government.

“This is the first real referendum in Egypt's history,” said Mohamed Ahmed Attia, chairman of the supreme judicial committee that supervised the elections, in announcing the results. “We had an unprecedented turnout because after January 25 people started to feel that their vote would matter.”

President Hosni Mubarak was forced from power last month, 18 days after demonstrations against his

three decades in power began January 25. The referendum result paved the way for early legislative elections as early as June and a presidential race possibly in August. The ruling military council had sought the rapid timetable to ensure its own speedy exit from running the country.

The military council has been somewhat vague about the next steps, but Maj. Gen. Mamdouh Shaheen told the Al Shorouk newspaper in an interview that the generals would issue a constitutional declaration to cover the changes and then set dates for the vote once the results were announced.

## Referendum

The Muslim Brotherhood and remnant elements of the National Democratic Party, which dominated Egyptian politics for decades, were the main supporters of the referendum. They argued that the election timetable would ensure a swift return to civilian rule.

Members of the liberal wing of Egyptian politics mostly opposed the measure, saying that they lacked time to form effective political organisa-

tions. They said early elections would benefit the Brotherhood and the old governing party, which they warned would seek to write a constitution that centralizes power, much like the old one.

Voters were asked to either accept or reject eight constitutional amendments as a whole — all of them designed to establish the foundations for coming elections. The amendments were announced February 25 after virtually no public discussion by an 11-member committee of experts chosen by the military.

“It is very, very disappointing,” said Hani Shukrallah, who is active in a new liberal political party and is the editor of Ahram Online, a news Web site. He and many other opponents of the referendum said religious organisations had spread false rumours, suggesting that voting against the referendum would threaten Article 2 of the Constitution, which cites Islamic law as the main basis for Egyptian law.

“I saw one sign that said, ‘If you vote no you are a follower of America and Baradei, and if you vote yes you are a follower of God,’” he said. “The

idea is that Muslims will vote yes and Copts and atheists will vote no.”

Mohamed ElBaradei, a former top United Nations nuclear official and a Nobel Prize winner planning to run for president, opposed the amendments, as did Amr Moussa, the secretary general of the Arab League, another potential presidential candidate.

In a vote remarkably free of problems, Baradei was attacked by a mob when he went to cast his ballot, fleeing a shower of rocks and bottles. His supporters said the mob was paid.

## Voting

Most “no” votes emerged from Cairo and Alexandria, Shukrallah noted, whereas support flowed in heavily from the provinces.

“The revolution was a revolution of the big cities,” he said. “The provinces are just not there. The secular values that drove the revolution have not reached them.”

Essam el-Erian, the spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood, hailed the results, saying that most Egyptians wanted to move forward toward rapid change, though he noted that

the 23 percent opposed should not go unnoticed.

“This is an historic day and the start of a new era for Egypt,” he said in an interview. “We are moving away from a bad, autocratic and dictatorial system towards a democratic system. This is the first brick in building our democracy.”

It was the first time the Muslim Brotherhood had campaigned openly since the party was banned in 1954.

In Cairo and around the country, Egyptians stood patiently in long lines on Saturday to vote, with waiting in the capital well over three hours. Many said they were voting for the first time, participating in the process alone bringing a sense of euphoria.

The main group of young political activists who helped organise the revolution that toppled Mubarak had crisscrossed the country in the weeks since the referendum was announced, trying to convince voters to hold out for a longer transitional period before elections.

Liam Stark and Amr Emam contributed reporting.

Courtesy of the New York Times



# Women's rights under the new Law

...By Claris Ogangah

Access to education continues to be a major challenge to the girl-child in Kenya. With the introduction of free primary education by the Government, there was increase in the number of girls who enrolled in primary schools. However, this was not the case in all parts of the country especially in the rural areas where cultural beliefs still dictate that girls should not go to school.

These beliefs coupled with harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation and early marriages continue hindering the girl child from accessing education.

This reveals the need for the Government to undertake public awareness initiatives especially at the grassroots level of the importance of educating the girl child.

## Policy

There are commendable steps (such as formulation of the Education policy) taken by the Government to ensure access to education by both the girl and boy child. However, statistics show that although the number of girls enrolling in primary school is on the increase, the trend decreases after completion of primary school and fewer girls enrol in secondary schools. This is due to various reasons that include poverty, early marriages and in some instances FGM.

The Government should come up with strategies of dealing with this worrying trend. It can do this by subsidising the cost of secondary education so that it is more affordable to many more parents especially the low income earners. It should also take drastic steps to ensure that harmful practices and early marriages are dispensed with.

The legislation to address this are in place (Children's Act of 2001), but much more needs to be done in terms of implementation especially in the rural areas.

## Recommendations

We urge the Government to:-

- Take measures to increase girls and women's equal access to education and training as a critical strategy for achieving social transformation.
- To address the root causes of gender disparities in school enrolment and retention of girls at different levels of the formal education systems in both rural and urban areas, especially those related to pregnancy and sexual violence.
- To address the issue of quality of education especially for marginalized communities by ensuring enough teachers are deployed to these areas.
- Implement retention strategies for girls including having re-entry policies for girls who left school due to pregnancy.

### Women in employment

The Government has made commendable efforts in ensuring the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in the field of employment. The Government enacted the Employment Act No. 11 of 2007 which is in line with the principles of the 1998 ILO Convention.

It clearly defines and provides for elimination of all forms of discrimination at the work place and promotes equality in all matters related to employment. The positive aspects of the legislation are:

- i. It prohibits discrimination against women at the work place.
- ii. It prohibits sexual harassment at the work place.
- iii. It provides for equal pay for equal work value. This eliminates the practice where women received lesser pay as compared to the men.
- iv. It provides for three months maternity leave without forfeiture of the annual leave. This provision is a clear departure from the previous legislation which provided for two months maternity leave with forfeiture of the annual leave.

All these are positive provisions but without proper implementation, they cannot be enjoyed by the women. The Government needs to establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that all employers properly incorporate the provisions of the Employment Act No. 11 of 2007 into human resources and organisational policies.

It is worth noting that even though there has been an increase in the number of women entering into the public and private sector, several obstacles still hinder more women to access these sectors.

The major obstacle is lack of proper education which it automatically blocks them from easily accessing the private and public sector of employment. It leaves the women to struggle in the informal sector which only provides minimum wages which are insufficient for the women to sustain their families.

## Recommendations

We urge the Government to:-

- address the issue of access to education by girls;
- take immediate measures to collect sex-disaggregated data to track women's share of wage employment in non-agricultural sectors;
- increase gender-responsive social protection measures to cushion women and men in vulnerable employment against economic shocks;
- take measures to regulate employment in the informal sector where a majority of women are employed.

### Women and economic and social benefit

The economic inequality of men and women is a fundamental aspect of the stratification systems of modern society.

In Kenya gender based economic inequality is intimately connected to the nature of gender relations. At least in part, because women tend to make less than men, women are more likely to stay at home to take care of children than are men, women are more likely to follow their spouses when they pursue career opportunities than the reverse and if unmarried, women are more likely than men to subsist at or below the poverty line.

These tendencies are part of a broader culture of male dominance that tends to relegate women to 'women's roles', both in the family and economic relations.

As entrepreneurs, women in Kenya like men can take up advantages of opportunities created in special



Girls from Kenya High, a national school celebrate after an exemplary performance by its students in the 2010 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examinations. Statistics show that although the number of girls enrolling in primary school is on the increase, fewer girls enrol in secondary schools. Picture: Kenyan Woman Correspondent

economic zones by setting up businesses. Women, however, face a number of obstacles which mostly condemn them to low income occupations. Women's businesses generally start small, grow slowly and end smaller than men owned enterprises.

The participation of women in Kenya is also slow in sectors that require high capital requirements (especially in manufacturing) where they were found to be earning only about 32 percent of what their male counterparts earn.

Statistics from the 2008 labour Force Report and the Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey (KIBHS) of the same year indicate that Kenya's economically active population — those aged 15-64 years constituted 12.7 million persons and 1.9 million unemployed persons, while the inactive population amounted to 5.3 million persons.

The overall participation rates were

**Kenya's economically active population — those aged 15-64 years constituted 12.7 million persons and 1.9 million unemployed persons, while the inactive population amounted to 5.3 million persons.**

Statistics from the 2008 labour

Force Report

slightly higher in urban than in rural areas. A gender analysis showed that the proportion of working females in the rural areas was higher than that of males, recording 77.1 percent and 70.3 percent respectively.

This difference could be explained by the fact that a majority of the women who reside in the rural

areas are engaged mostly in agricultural activities.

The above highlights the contribution of Kenyan women to the economy through business and investment. Their input is mainly in agriculture and the informal sector as more than 75 percent of the women in Kenya live in the rural areas. Two main reasons have been advanced for the invisibility of women in the mainstream economy. First, only one percent of all the titles over registered land in Kenya are in favour of women. A further five to six percent is held by women jointly with men. This means that most women have no access to credit due to lack of collateral as land is the security most favourable to financial institutions.

Apart from lack of control over land, it has been argued that the multi-tasking required of Kenyan women due to their dual roles in the household economy and labour market has left them 'time poor'.

An average Kenyan woman works longer hours (about 13 hours) everyday compared to men. She, however, ends up earning less because the hours dedicated to her private world are often not remunerated.

Further, most businesses in Kenya require multiple licences both from the central and local government. The requirement for licences imposes time and costs. These impact more severely on women than men as the women are more time and financially poor.

In recognition of the plight of women in business and Investment, the government of Kenya, in 2006 initiated and established the Women Enterprise and Development Fund (WEDF) as a strategy to address poverty reduction through socio economic empowerment of women. The aim of the fund is to facilitate women's access to micro finance.

The government has further addressed the challenge of women's access to credit through various institutions.

Kenya has enacted new labour laws which are intended to eliminate

all forms of discrimination at the work place. This has greatly enabled women to have equal social and economic benefits with their male counterparts. There is, however, need to properly implement these laws so that their positive effects are enjoyed by all women in Kenya. These provisions should trickle down to the grassroots level where women are predominantly engaged in the informal sector. Ensuring equality of women and men in social-economic life greatly empowers women because for a long time, they have been discriminated.

Reports indicate that there has been increased enjoyment of socio economic benefits by women in the realm of property and land holding, access to bank loans, mortgages and financial credit. This indeed is a positive milestone but the reality still remains that many women in Kenya are not economically empowered to enable them access a fore mentioned benefits. These benefits are enjoyed by a few of the population of women in Kenya.

## Recommendations

We urge the Government to:-

- Implement the labour laws so that their positive effects are enjoyed by all women in Kenya;
- Amend land laws to allow women to own land and to use them as collaterals in obtaining credit;
- Come up with proper strategies to economically and financially empower women in Kenya so that they can enjoy equal social and economic benefits as their male counterparts.

This paper was presented By FIDA-Kenya as shadow statement to the 55th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, February 2011



# FGM retrogresses advancement in education

...By Fred Okoth

Despite millions being spent in workshops on the dangers of female genital mutilation (FGM), the funds have not been converted into meaningful statistics on the ground.

And come January of every year, immediately after the December period where the region is rife with activity as girls are initiated, the drop out rates among the girls just shoots up as the parents take the opportunity to marry off young daughters to get wealth under the pretext that they were now adults. Many are withdrawn from school irrelevant of what level of education they are in.

Today, Kuria has one of the lowest primary school pupils enrolment ratio in the country. It gets even gloomier when the ratio of the boys to girls is considered.

## Education

This is a fact that Ms Denita Ghata, Chairperson of the Education Centre for the Advancement of Women, an NGO involved in the fight against the vice and the convenor of alternative rite of passage in Kuria attributes to FGM.

"If a culture is not protecting young girls and women, then it is an obligation for the government to step in and end it," said Ghata.

While most of the Kenyan communities seems to be making a definite movement away from FGM, the Kuria community seems to be digressing from all the gains made in the fight against the practice.

Unofficial figures from the provincial administration indicate that for the first time in over a decade, the number of girls circumcised might just have surpassed that of the boys.

According to the District Children's officer in Kuria West, Mr John Langat, the rise in the numbers makes it impossible for even government agencies to understand why the number of girls undergoing the rite is increasing.

"Looking at the figures being reported, sometimes I wonder what we can do to these parents," says Langat.

The two were speaking during an alternative rite of passage ceremony at Komotobo Mission in Kuria East where advocates against FGM encouraged girls and their parents to shun the vice.

Langat regretted that most of the parents in the area had declined to stop the practice despite serious efforts by the Government to discourage it.

Ghata termed the situation as worrying. She said: "We don't understand how all the gains which have been experienced in the fight against the vice seem to be getting lost."

She added that in most cases, girls are forced into FGM by their parents and without their consent.

Coordinator of anti-FGM efforts in Kuria East and West districts, Mr Mwita Samwel, admitted that efforts undertaken in the area did not seem to have the desired results.

"We have tried to have the vice eradicated here for some time but without much success," explained Mwita.

While the sight of over 400 girls singing and dancing after completing an alternative rite of passage course would fill one with hope, Mwita says this is just a camouflage and there is still a lot more that needs to be done.

## Right of passage

Reports abound of how girls who have attended the alternative rite of passage camps for over a month and 'graduated' into adulthood, go home and end up being forced to undergo the cut, immediately throwing all efforts into disarray.

Things are further complicated by the high number of Tanzanian girls who cross the border during the December holidays to take part in the rite, making even the Kenyans who had thought of avoiding the rite change their minds.

Ghata whose organisation has been involved in setting up of al-



Some of the over 400 girls who had been rescued from female genital mutilation during the passing out ceremony. Picture: Kenyan Woman Correspondant

**"We don't understand how all the gains which have been experienced in the fight against the vice seem to be getting lost but in most cases, girls are forced into female genital mutilation by their parents and without their consent."**

— Ms Dennitah Ghata, chairperson of the Education Centre for the Advancement of Women

ternative camps for alternative rite of passage in the past five years is worried.

"It has reached a point where we have to make sure that something is done about the practice," she reiterated, adding "it was such practices that made the community lag behind in all spheres of life".

She urged government agencies and other bodies involved in trying to stop the vice to step up their efforts saying more had to be done than just saying that the government had disallowed the practice.

Ghata indicated that there were legal ways to ensure the rights of the girls were not violated. She further pointed out that Kenya had already signed and ratified a number of international treaties protecting the rights of the girl child and wondered why serious efforts were not being made to have them implemented.

## Tanzanian girls risk rape to go to school

...By Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux

For Tanzanian girls trying to go to school, the stakes are unbelievably high in the dangerous temporary accommodation where the girls attending senior schools must live. They are subject to sexual harassment and sometimes rape.

Their stories are heartbreaking and often result in them abandoning the education that they have had to work so hard to access. The men who harass and assault the girls act mostly with impunity, the rapes are yet to result in a conviction.

"Even if we scream for help, people hardly come to our rescue," explained one of the girls. "By the time the police get here, well... they'll already be finished. So the men just do what they want."

In the past decade, a number of secondary schools have been opened as a response to the expansion in primary schools. But because they are far from many villages, girls resort to living in cheap rented huts in commonly known as "ghettoes", which are located near the schools. There is little security, but the girls risk the danger for an education, which many believe will help lift them out of poverty.

## Sexual assault

If girls are sexually assaulted, the consequences can be dire. Some schools have a drop-out rate of up to 20 percent because of pregnancy. Officials speculate that many of these are due to rape, which often go unreported because of stigma.

Non-government organisations' workers in the area have cited the need for increased education about this pressing issue. "It is not enough just to build a hostel to keep girls safe. It is this endemic idea that men have rights over women that needs to change," said Rosie Martin, chief director of African Initiatives. This story both illustrates the bravery of the girls who are still, in the face of these terrible risks, attempting to get an education, and highlights the need both to provide them with security and raise awareness about the horror of sexual assault and harassment.

## Campaign helps reduce dropout rate

...By Musembi Nzengu

A campaign launched last year to stop girls from dropping out of school in Mwingi East District has yielded positive results.

Area District Commissioner, Mr Martin Mwaro said before the campaign was launched in the second half of last year, primary school girls were dropping out at a shocking rate due to pregnancy and early marriage as amorous men ostensibly had a field day.

However, despite the vigorous campaign, seven expectant girls sat last year's Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) Examination.

Mwaro said in an interview with the Reject recently that the campaign to save the girl child was mooted by the District Education Board (DEB) whose members were moved by the increasing number of girls dropping out due to early marriage and pregnancy.

"Between June and July last year we started this campaign to basically retain the girl child in school. We had established that the drop-out rate particularly among the girls in primary schools

was worrying," explained Mwaro.

He said consequently a plan mooted in which head teachers shared information with chiefs and their assistants on girls who were absent from school in unexplained circumstances and a followed up made with the parents or guardians to establish whether it was due to marriage or being in the family way.

Mwaro pointed out that in most cases it was discovered that girls were absent from school after becoming pregnant or prematurely getting into a marriage relationship.

## Facing the law

He said through the mechanism, some of the men who had developed a habit of preying on the school girls have been brought to face the law with some already having cases pending in courts of law. He said others have been convicted and are serving jail terms.

The DC's sentiments were corroborated by a senior education officer from the area, John Maluki, who reiterated that the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) practice and widespread cases of rape contributed to high dropout rate among girls.

Maluki who is the Area Education Officer in charge of Mui division disclosed that since the campaign was launched his department had handled 21 cases of pregnancy and early marriage.

Speaking on behalf of the District Education officer, Maluki said that already 15 of the cases had been referred to a court of law in Mwingi while six others were under investigations that would be concluded soon.

He noted that the cases in question involved girls from 20 primary schools in Mwingi East district. He named the primary schools notorious for cases of early marriages and pregnancies as Kateiko, Kyangu, Kamulewa, Munyuni and Nzanzu.

"Through collaboration with the Children's department, and non-governmental organisations like Can Do, pregnant girls have been encouraged to remain in school until they due date and go back after weaning their children," explained Maluki.

He noted that due to drastic action taken against men who cause girls to drop out of school, majority have ceased having relationships with school girls and cases of early pregnancy and marriage have drastically reduced.



# Culture overrides need for girls' education

By Chrispinus Omar

Education for the girl-child remains a mere wish in the arid and semi-arid regions. The situation gets worse during the dry seasons when families have to move in search of water and pasture. Most parents in these areas do not value education and rarely enrol their children in the usually scattered schools.

"Asking your children to assist you put food on the table and sending them to school for a couple of years, quite unsure of what they will be after their studies. What option will you go for?" poses Mzee Tomuny Chelal, a resident of East Pokot district as he justifies his objection to children going to school.

Pressure from provincial administrators keen to enforce the government policy that education was free and compulsory in primary has seen him identify some of his children to enrol in school.

Mzee Chelal has three wives and each had to let one child to go to school. Such children are selectively identified as they must be those who are lazy and have shown little interest in herding livestock.

"Livestock is our main source of wealth. We give them out as dowry besides rearing them for meat and milk," Chelal asserts.

## Early marriages

Girls are no lucky lot as they are married off long before they mature, to men as old as their parents.

On February 16, a furious parent who was accompanied by his accomplices stormed Kakuma Girls Boarding Primary School in Turkana West District. He wanted to withdraw his daughter from school.

He wanted the daughter who had fled from home in favour of education to accept a marriage proposal from an elderly man who had already paid dowry.

According to Turkana West District Education Officer, Mr Wilson Korombori, the ugly incident caused

commotion prompting the school's head teacher to seek his help.

"We had to call the police who arrested the father and some of the rowdy people who were determined to whisk the girl away so that she can start her new role as a wife," explains Korombori.

The girl child in Turkana remains under threat because of retrogressive cultural beliefs.

"The girl has no choice over her destiny. The parents can decide when she should be married and to whom. The decision is usually informed by where more cows will come from," notes Korombori.

He suggests that there is need for a rescue centre to cater for girls fleeing from forced and early marriages as the government works at reconciling them with their parents.

## Hardship

Turkana is a hardship area. Many parents cannot afford to buy uniforms and other materials that are not catered for under the free primary and subsidised secondary education programme.

"Such children need support or they will succumb to the community's demands that contravene their rights. Most of them are usually ignored by their parents for going against the community's cultures," explains Korombori.

Enrolment in Turkana is still dismal and the completion rate for girls is low as they are affected by early and forced marriages.

"Circumcision is not practiced in this community but dropout rates start as early as when one is in Standard Three because most of them enrol quite late," Korombori explains.

***"The girl has no choice over her destiny. The parents can decide when she should be married and to whom. The decision is usually informed by where more cows will come from."***

— Mr Wilson Korombori, Turkana West District Education Officer



Ministry of education officials at Our Lady of Mercy Girls' Secondary School during the Turkana West District education day.

Inset: Students Kakuma Girls' Primary School entertain guests during day at Our Lady of Mercy Girls' Secondary School. The girl child education is threatened by retrogressive traditions like forced early marriage and female genital mutilation.

Pictures: Chrispinus Omar

There is need for leaders to be in the frontline in the war against illiteracy since they command respect of their communities.

"Local leaders have a pivotal role to play in changing the community's perception so that more children can enrol in schools and staying on to completion," he says.

Though outdated traditional and

cultural practices are a major challenge to accessing education among the pastoralist communities, distance to schools has also been a deterrent factor.

"We have no schools around here. We have to trek for many kilometres through thick bushes. On the way, we are exposed to men who can elope with us and go scot free as long as they part with the required dowry," says Margaret Longorikemer, 17, from North Pokot.

The community views a girl who has reached puberty or undergone circumcision as ripe for marriage.

"In this community, girls have no say. There is nothing like rights as our traditions are more superior to other external forces. After a girl has

been circumcised, nothing will stop me from marrying her if she is still single," says Julius Loitakori, 24.

Further, persistent dry spells have also contributed to keeping children out of school. Consequently Samburu East MP, Mr Raphael Letimalo says the Government should re-enforce education policies to ensure all children, male and female who have attained the school going age are enrolled and assisted through the feeding programmes to remain at school especially, during the dry spells of the year.

"It should be a sustainable project so that the children can be assured of staying in school for as long as it takes," reiterates Letimalo.

# Women scientists get a boost in research programmes

...By Duncan Mboyah

The African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) has announced a sponsorship for women agricultural scientists from 11 African countries.

AWARD has already sent their 2011 application calls for eligible scientists with end of March being the deadline.

"We expect to receive even more applications this year as we expand to Liberia and word about the benefits of AWARD spreads to women scientists and agricultural institutions throughout the region," said Ms Vicki Wilde, AWARD Director.

AWARD, a project of the gender and diversity programme of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) was launched following a successful three-year pilot programme in East Africa with support from the Rockefeller Foundation.

It is a professional development programme that strengthens the research and leadership skills of Afri-

can women in agricultural science, empowering them to contribute more effectively to poverty alleviation and food security in sub-Saharan Africa.

Almost 2,000 women from 10 countries have so far competed for 180 fellowships offered since the inception of the project in 2008. Out of these, there are 41 Kenyan women scientists.

Up to 70 top African women scientists who are currently conducting agricultural research in selected disciplines are to be considered under the project.

The sponsorship is reserved for African women scientists working in agricultural research and development from Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia who have completed a Bachelor's, Master's, or doctoral degrees in selected agricultural disciplines.

"Our goal is to strengthen the research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science, empowering them to contribute more effectively to poverty alleviation and food security in sub-Saharan Africa," said Wilde.



***"We are pleased and excited to offer this unique opportunity to African women agricultural scientists whose work is so critical."***

— Vicki Wilde, AWARD Director

The project is funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, United States International Aid (USAid) and CGIAR and offers two year fellowships focused on establishing mentoring partnerships, building science skills and developing leadership capacity.

Wilde observed that the organisations address many of the barriers, including lack of role models and mentors, which prevent African women from playing a more active role in agricultural research and considering a career in agricultural science.

"We are pleased and excited to offer this unique opportunity to African women agricultural scientists whose work is so critical," Wilde said.

Nearly 50 percent of AWARD's mentors are African men in senior positions who play a key role in influencing organizational culture about the important role of African women scientists.

AWARD is a \$15 million, five-year project with plans to expand to a second phase starting in 2012.

AWARD currently partners with some 75 national agricultural research institutions, raising awareness and

support for the career development of African women scientists.

Women scientists from agricultural economics, agricultural engineering, agronomy, animal and livestock sciences, aquatic resources and fisheries, biodiversity conservation, crop science, ecology, entomology, extension education, food science and nutrition, forestry and agro forestry, horticulture, molecular biology (plant/animal breeding), natural resources management, plant/animal virology, soil science, veterinary sciences and water and irrigation management are eligible beneficiaries.

Under AWARD, the scientists are working with women in rural areas in tackling poverty and hunger are given preference.

It also focuses on career development, adding value to existing academic training programs, nourishing the talent pipeline for agricultural research and development through carefully tailored fellowship packages for women with bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees and engaging with African leaders in agriculture, both men and women, to raise awareness and build networks.



# Obiageli Ezekwesili

## Holding the top turf at the world's bank

...By Kenyan Woman writer

There are very few women holding positions of decision making in international organisations. However, the few who are there have made a mark, and we honour all of them today as we mark 100 years of the struggle for women's liberation.

At the World Bank, there are women in positions of decision-making. One of them is Ms Obiageli Ezekwesili, Vice President of World Bank Africa. A Nigerian national, she joined the World Bank as Vice President of the Africa Region on May 1, 2007. Obiageli, or Oby as she is popularly known, is a Nigerian national, who joined the World Bank from her most recent position as Minister of Education within the Government of Nigeria.

Oby brought in a unique blend of first-hand experiences, especially in the more challenging and complex areas of energy sector reform and education, position her well to deal with the many challenges in Africa.

A critical factor in Oby's leadership style is her ability to achieve client "buy-in" no matter how extensive the reform strategy presented.

### Dedication

Oby's life is a testament to her dedication to Africa as is the high degree of respect in which she is held by the international community. Her passion for and commitment to Africa, her high degree of integrity and her optimism brings strengths to the region.

She has always insisted that the world must invest in women. Speaking at the Women Deliver conference in Washington in June 2010, Oby could not help drawing from her background as one versed in economics: "The world must invest in women. Investing in women is smart economic."

Oby reiterated that economic empowerment of women is a key factor of the decade. "Making a woman economically powerful reduces poverty."

She reiterated that capacity building for women was important and particularly in the area of reproductive health. "As we improve and scale up investment, the World Bank has put a lot of money in reproductive health, focusing on high fertility rates and putting out \$4.1 billion." She added: "These are devoted to reproductive health issues that address better access to family planning and

skilled health personnel."

She has a rich resume with hands-on experience and accomplishments in a unique mix of private sector, civil society and public sector positions. That is why she insists on capacity building on a universal principal to extend and expand opportunities.

"Knowledge is at the heart of capacity to make better choices."

She insists that states must place emphasis on policies that make life better for women. When women lose hope then it becomes "an incredible undoing factor".

### Career path

Oby began her career as an auditor and management consultant, where she focused on financial planning, SME financing, audit and regulatory compliance.

From 1994 to 1999, she served as one of the founding members of Transparency International where she held the position Director, Africa. In 2000, Oby went on to serve as Special Assistant to the President of Nigerian Budget Monitoring, and the Price Intelligence Unit, where she spearheaded institutional reforms through the establishment of due process mechanisms and strategies.

In this capacity, Oby achieved previously unheard of success by markedly reducing both procurement costs to the Government and turnaround time for completion of Government projects, while improving transparency.

She subsequently served as Minister of Solid Minerals Development, with emphasis on reforming Nigeria's mining sector to internationally recognised standards, especially in the area of policy transparency, with the purpose of increasing levels of global investment and investor confidence, in the sector.

She provided leadership in the drafting of the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act, establishing the Nigerian Mining Cadastre Office and opening



Ms Obiageli Ezekwesili, Vice President of World Bank Africa. Picture: Kenyan Woman Correspondent

up Nigeria's mining sector to private participation.

Oby has also served as the Chairperson for the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative since 2004 and pioneered the voluntary sign-on of Nigeria to the EITI Principles, as well as the first ever audit of the oil and gas sector.

Since June 2006, Oby has been the Minister of Education where she was tasked with leading the country's on-going comprehensive reform strategy within the education sector. She has re-

structured and refocused the ministry for the attainment of EFA targets and MDGs, introduced Public Private Partnership models for service deliver, revamped the Federal Inspectorate Service as an improved quality assurance mechanism and introduced transparency and accountability mechanisms for better governance of the budget.

The track record attesting to Oby's innovative success in this area culminated with the Nigerian stock exchange launch of "Adopt-A-Public School Initiative" earlier this year.

Oby holds a Masters in International Law and Diplomacy from University of Lagos, along with a Masters in Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard. She is also a chartered accountant.

— Extra information from the Internet

***"Emphasis must be placed on policies that make life better for women. When women lose hope then it becomes an incredible undoing factor."***

— Ms Obiageli Ezekwesili, Vice President of World Bank Africa

## Having more women good for business, but...

Declaring that gender equality in the private sector is "good for business", 167 chief executives from around the world have signed the Women's Empowerment Principles — Equality Means Business.

UN Women and UN Global Compact, champions of the initiative, released the list of executives at the Equality Means Business: Putting Principles into Practice conference. It marked the first anniversary of the launch of the principles.

Opening the two-day event, UN Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon commended CEOs who have signed the principles, but also challenged business leaders to do much more: "We would like to see this leadership community grow exponentially, forming national coalitions to advance these goals across sectors, as they are starting to do in Brazil and elsewhere."

Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile and the first Executive Director of UN Women said: "Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but as business, economic and development experts now

agree, empowering women fuels economies and social progress. The Women's Empowerment Principles offer a tool for a results-based partnership with the business community."

Executive Director of the UN Global Compact Georg Kell said: "The private sector increasingly identifies investing in women as a vital business strategy, essential to innovation, sound management and increased profits."

### Practice

He added: "By turning the principles into practice, companies create a blueprint for equality that strengthens existing efforts, focuses on implementation and helps create sustainable value."

The business case for gender diversity and equality has rapidly developed. Among Fortune 500 companies, those in the top quartile, when it comes to women's representation on their boards, outperform those in the lowest quartile by at least 53 percent on return on equity.

However, many executives acknowledge that it is difficult to change corporate cultures

to fully integrate gender equality. While 72 percent of executives surveyed in 2010 by McKinsey & Co. agreed that there is a correlation between gender diversity and business success, only 28 percent said it is a top-ten priority for senior leadership.

Since the Women's Empowerment Principles were launched just one year ago, companies report that the CEO commitment has stimulated activities to promote gender equality. One company changed its recruitment policies to seek a higher percentage of female candidates for all jobs. Another company altered procurement practices to include more women vendors. Companies have pointed out that the lack of data broken down for men and women hampers efforts to measure progress, and have called on UN Women and the UN Global Compact to work with them on a reporting framework aligned with the Women's Empowerment Principles.

— Courtesy of UN Women



Women traders selling sardines. More women in business will lead to improved economies worldwide. Picture: Kenyan Woman Correspondent



# History's most rebellious women

...From Time Magazine

## Tawakul Karman, Yemen

Tawakul Karman, a 32-year-old mother of three and chair of Women Journalists Without Chains — a Yemeni group that defends human rights and freedom of expression — was filled with renewed energy watching the people of Tunisia and Egypt fight for democracy in January 2011. But her struggle to pressure Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh — who has been in power since 1978 — to step down began long before Tunisia's revolution started a domino effect in the Arab world. Karman has been protesting in front of Sana'a University, in the nation's capital, every Tuesday since 2007. She insists upon a peaceful approach to bring about change. Still, she has been arrested several times, including in late January, when protests broke out across Yemen, where 40 percent of the 23 million citizens live on \$2 a day or less. Saleh has offered to resign once his term ends in 2013, but on March 4, he rejected a transition plan to democracy. Yemenis, including Karman, want change now. In February, Karman told TIME, "The goal is to change the regime by the slogan we learned from the Tunisian revolution: 'the people want the regime to fall.'" — *Frances Romero*



## Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma

After 15 long years under house arrest in Burma, Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi was finally granted freedom in November 2010, even as her country and the cause she has been fighting for sank deeper into political imprisonment under the military junta's repressive rule. Known as "the Lady" to millions of Burmese citizens who consider her more of a goddess than a rebel, Suu Kyi has been the foremost leader in the effort to democratize the Southeast Asian nation as well as a courageous advocate for human rights and peaceful revolution. The daughter of an assassinated independence hero, Suu Kyi seemingly fell into her role as Burma's icon. After spending much of her life overseas in India, the US, Japan and England, where she married and had two sons, Suu Kyi returned home in 1988 to care for her ailing mother. While there, protesters gathered to call for the ouster of a regime whose mismanagement had caused a sweeping economic downturn. The army fired on the assembled group of students, monks and workers, and for the first time, the Lady stepped forward to address the people. Suu Kyi founded the National League for Democracy in 1989, and the party secured a decisive victory in the 1990 elections, which would have effectively made Suu Kyi Prime Minister. Instead, the junta refused to hand over power and enacted a constitution that forbade Suu Kyi from ever serving as Burma's leader. Despite this obstacle, the Lady and the Burmese people are not ready to give up. Since her release, Suu Kyi has sought to negotiate with the junta that imprisoned her for all those years, but so far it has ignored her. "I wish I could have tea with them every Saturday, a friendly tea," the Lady told TIME after her release. And if not, "We could always try coffee." — *Erin Skarda*



## Corazon Aquino, The Philippines

A self-proclaimed "plain housewife", Corazon Aquino led the Philippines' 1986 "people power" revolution, toppling autocrat Ferdinand Marcos after 20 years of rule. Aquino's journey from Senator's wife to President of the Philippines began with the 1983 assassination of her husband Benigno Aquino Jr., who had returned from exile in the US to run against Marcos. When the autocrat called a snap election, Corazon took up her husband's cause. Though Marcos claimed electoral victory, Aquino led a peaceful revolution across the nation of impoverished islands. Emotional supporters came out in droves during a two-week standoff, and eventually, the military reversed course and supported her. Aquino became President upon Marcos' resignation. Despite coup attempts and corruption charges, she took significant strides toward democracy, including ratifying a constitution that limits the power of the presidency. Long after stepping down in 1992, Aquino continued to advocate against policies she felt threatened the country's democratic ideals. Though she died in 2009, Aquino remains a symbol of the power of peaceful popular movements. — *Zoe Fox*



## Phoolan Devi, India

Phoolan Devi, the "Bandit Queen", is remembered as both a champion of India's poor and one of the modern nation's most infamous outlaws. Following an early, non-consensual marriage and several sexual abductions, Devi began a streak of violent robberies across northern and central India, targeting upper castes. In 1981 she led her gang of bandits to massacre more than 20 men in the high-caste village where her former lover was killed. Devi negotiated her sentence with the Indian government to 11 years in jail. Within two years of her release, she was elected to Parliament. While some say she did little to improve the lower castes' plight during her two terms in office, her opposition to the caste system made Devi a symbol for the rights of the poor and the oppressed. — *Zoe Fox*



## Angela Davis, The US

By the time Angela Davis was 26, she was a scholar, a political activist and a Most Wanted Fugitive of the FBI. Her roots as a leader during the political turmoil of the 1960s stretch back to her childhood in segregated Birmingham, Ala. After spending a year at the Sorbonne, Davis returned to a racially heated America. By the late 1960s, she held membership in the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party and the American Communist Party. Her militant involvement cost her a UCLA lecturer position when the California regents learned of her affiliations in 1970. However, Davis' activism continued with her support of three Black Panther inmates at Soledad State Prison. At their trial, for a prison guard's murder, a botched kidnap and escape attempt resulted in the death of a federal judge, Harold J. Haley. Davis was accused of supplying the guns. She fled, sparking a furious manhunt and landing her a spot on the Most Wanted list. While she was on the run, a movement advocating her freedom flourished. Davis was caught in New York but was acquitted in 1972. Despite the agitation of then California Governor Ronald Reagan, she resumed her teaching career at several universities in the state and is now a professor emerita at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She has authored several books, including *Women, Culture and Politics* (1988) and *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003). — *Madison Gray*



## Golda Meir, Israel

David Ben-Gurion famously described Golda Meir as "the only man" in his Cabinet. Although best known as Israel's Prime Minister during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Meir made her mark on the revolutionary Zionist movement during the pre-state period. After several influential Zionist leaders were arrested in 1946 in Palestine, Meir became the primary negotiator between the Jews and the British Mandate. Simultaneously, she stayed in close contact with the armed Jewish resistance movements. When the Arabs rejected the UN's 1947 recommended partition of Palestine, Meir ensured that the young Jewish settlement would not be defeated in the imminent war. During a January 1948 trip to the US, she raised \$50 million from the Jewish Diaspora community. Ben-Gurion said Meir would be remembered as "the woman who got the money to make the state possible". That spring, she was one of the 25 signatories of Israel's Declaration of Independence. — *Zoe Fox*



## Vilma Lucila Espín, Cuba

Many of the leaders of the Cuban revolution were among the very Latin elites whose supremacy over the masses they set out to topple. That is they were male and from the professional class. Fidel Castro was trained as a lawyer, while Ernesto "Che" Guevara studied medicine. But the spirit of the rebellion was most vividly embodied by the "First Lady" of Cuba's communist revolution, Vilma Lucila Espín. Her father was a lawyer for the rum company Bacardi, whose business exploits in Cuba were viewed by Castro's July 26 Movement as treating the island nation like a Yankee playground. After training as a chemical engineer, including a year of study at MIT, Espín took up arms against the Batista dictatorship in the 1950s and debunked the notion of the docile Caribbean woman with her public appearances in full army fatigues. — *Daniel Fastenberg*





# History's most rebellious women

from page 14

## Jiang Qing, China

Looking back, it's almost as if Jiang Qing lived two lives: one that began in extreme poverty and led to a short career as an actress and several failed marriages, and another as a radical member of the communist regime, which brought terror and destruction to China during the Cultural Revolution. But despite the duality of her life, Jiang is remembered as one of the most brutal, unrepentant revolutionaries in modern history. After marrying Chairman Mao Zedong in 1938, Jiang used her status to satisfy her unyielding desire for power. "The Madame", as she was known, managed to climb the ladder of the Communist Party, eventually becoming the leader of the infamous Gang of Four — a group that included Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen and was thought to be responsible for much of the persecution and destruction that took place from 1966 to 1969. Exact death tolls during this time are unknown, but estimates place them at 500,000, in addition to the destruction of countless cultural entities such as ancient books, buildings and paintings. While Jiang was heavily involved in the Cultural Revolution, she was quick to assign responsibility to Mao, famously saying, "I was Mao's dog; I bit whom he said to bite." Jiang refused to apologise for the criminal charges that were eventually brought against her, instead spending a decade in prison before allegedly committing suicide in 1991. — *Erin Skarda*



suffrage movement deepened, and she formed the Women's Social and Political Union, which embraced the motto "Deeds, not words". The WSPU, led by Pankhurst and her eldest daughter Christabel, carried out public demonstrations and did not shy away from violent activism — arson, vandalism and hunger strikes were commonplace for the group. Pankhurst was routinely arrested — in 1912 alone she was arrested 12 times — but she never strayed from her pursuit of equality. She reminded the courts in 1912 that "we are here not because we are lawbreakers; we are here in our efforts to become lawmakers". While the merits of her methods are still debated today, there is no doubt over the role that Pankhurst played in the enfranchisement of British women. The right was extended to all women in 1928, the year Pankhurst died. — *Megan Gibson*

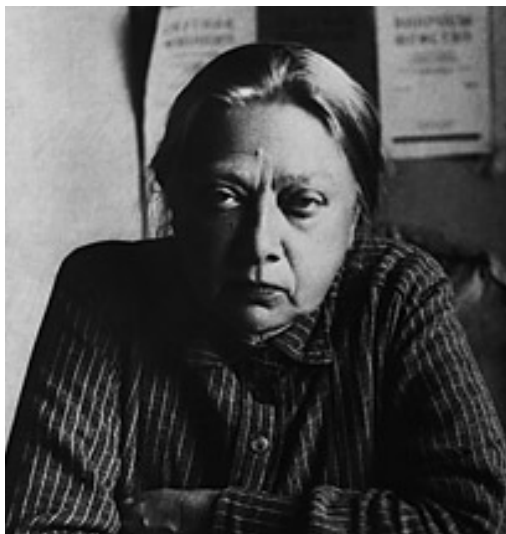
## Harriet Tubman, The US

Explaining her decision to escape from slavery, Harriet Tubman once quoted an earlier American revolutionary by saying, "There was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other". Choosing liberty, Tubman, who was born a slave in 1820, fled Maryland and followed the North Star to the free state of Pennsylvania. A year later, she returned to Maryland to help her family escape, the first of 19 missions she would make to rescue more than 300 slaves on the Underground Railroad. After an 1850 law required free states to return escaped slaves to their owners, Tubman made sure slaves could escape even farther north, to Canada. During the Civil War, she was the first woman to lead a military expedition, liberating more than 700 slaves in South Carolina. Tubman ended her life of activism fighting for women's suffrage in New York. — *Zoe Fox*



## Nadezhda Krupskaya, Russia

The spirit of protest coursed through Nadezhda Krupskaya's veins early in life. As a girl in late-19th Century St. Petersburg, she would play with children outside of the factory where her father worked and ambush the manager with snowballs. Educated at a liberal high school, Krupskaya went on to teach evening classes to industrial workers, and by 1889, she had encountered Marxism in underground circles. Along with fellow radical Vladimir Lenin, she helped set up the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class in 1895. Police arrested them both shortly afterward, and they married while exiled in Siberia. After her release in 1901, she followed Lenin to Munich, Geneva and London, all the while helping run Iskra (the Spark), an international newspaper for Marxists. After World War I, Krupskaya returned to Russia and became a key figure in the Bolshevik Party in Vyborg — a major working-class hub in Petrograd — and pressed the central committee to kick-start the October Revolution in 1917. Her ashes are interred in the Kremlin Wall adjacent to Lenin's Mausoleum in Red Square. — *William Lee Adams*



## Mary Wollstonecraft, Britain

In the male-dominated, hierarchical society of 18th Century Britain, Mary Wollstonecraft was a radical who publicly put forward the unprecedented claim that women were more than possessions. She went head to head with one of the most prominent political thinkers of the time, Edmund Burke. And in her two most famous works, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1791), she demonstrates a strong political voice, defending the rights of women as equal to those of men. In Wollstonecraft's opinion, the way in which girls were brought up, to be "empty-headed play things", contributed to a morally bankrupt society, ungoverned by reason. It was in this view of the world that Wollstonecraft showed her true colours as one of the earliest and most influential rebellious women. — *Elizabeth Tyler*



## Susan B. Anthony, The US

A male schoolteacher once told young Susan B. Anthony that she did not need to learn long division because "a girl needs to know how to read the Bible and count her egg money, nothing more". She never forgot the slight. In 1846 Anthony, then a 26-year-old school headmistress, began campaigning for equal pay for female teachers. Five years later, she met fellow women's-rights advocate Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the outspoken duo began touring the country arguing the case for women's suffrage. In 1868 Anthony first published *The Revolution*, a women's-rights newspaper, and a year later she founded the National Woman's Suffrage Association. Plenty of men tried to stop her along the way. US marshals arrested Anthony for voting illegally in the 1872 presidential election, and a judge later fined her \$100. "I shall never pay a dollar of your unjust penalty," she said at the time. Anthony died in 1906 — 14 years before the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote. — *William Lee Adams*



## Joan of Arc, France

The French peasant girl had a dream — in fact she had many dreams, visions in which Christian saints would come to her, urging her to take up the fight against the English, who occupied much of northern France. Improbably, Joan made her way to the court of the cowed French dauphin, or prince, and impressed the royals with her holy cause to the point that she was given armor and troops to command. At Orleans in 1429, Joan proved her mettle by famously leading the assault that lifted the English siege of the city. A pivotal victory, it spurred other quick successes and turned the tide against the English invaders. A few years later, though, Joan was captured by the forces of England's French allies and burned in a public square on grounds of heresy and witchcraft. The French King Charles VII, whose crown had been secured in part by Joan's heroics, did little to try to save her. But history and popular legend redeemed Joan, who was canonized in 1920 by the Vatican and remains one of France's patron saints. — *Ishaan Tharoor*



## Emmeline Pankhurst, Britain

No one embodied the expression "Well-behaved women rarely make history" quite like Emmeline Pankhurst. As the leader of Britain's women's-suffrage movement, Pankhurst was not only a pioneer of women's rights in the UK but also a staunch advocate of public revolt. Encouraged by her father, Pankhurst's interest in the suffrage movement began at a young age. At 20 she wed Richard Pankhurst, a lawyer who encouraged her endeavours with the Women's Franchise League. After her husband's death in 1898, Pankhurst's involvement with the



## Boudica, Britain

In the 1st century A.D., a native rebellion shook a backward, remote corner of the Roman Empire: Britain. At its head was an angry woman, Boudica, Queen of the Iceni, a tribe that dwelled in what is now eastern England. The Iceni had been a peaceful folk, content under the Pax Romana. But after Boudica's husband died, an avaricious Roman official annexed her lands and had Boudica publicly flogged and her daughters raped. Not long thereafter, with the Romans distracted on a campaign in Wales, Boudica rose up, leading a coalition of tribes on a revenge mission, surprising Roman garrisons, razing cities to the ground (including ancient London) and slaughtering tens of thousands of Romanized Britons. The uprising prompted some in Rome to consider a full withdrawal from the troublesome island colony, but the better-equipped and trained Roman forces eventually defeated Boudica's rebels. According to some accounts, much like Cleopatra, Boudica took her own life rather than risk capture. She is remembered as one of Britain's original nationalist heroes, a righteous, vengeful mother of the land. In the 19th century, Queen Victoria invoked the spirit of Boudica to characterize her own reign, presiding, at the time, over the world's great superpower. — *Ishaan Tharoor*



# Only one hospice in Freetown serves the needs of Sierra Leone's dying

...By Mark Doyle

On the edge of a small village just outside Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, there is a line of four or five mud-brick rooms.

Most of the 20 or so residents there — men, women and children — are in real danger of dying from untreated tuberculosis (TB). But in a hospital in Freetown, just a couple of hours drive away, women are giving birth safely in a country that has been notorious for being one of the most dangerous places in the world to have a baby.

Sierra Leone is a country that is trying hard to change its image of being a hopeless "basket case", but the challenges are still huge. It certainly has some terrible statistics. Among those I dug up before my trip here were: an average lifespan of about 40 years compared with between 70 and 80 in rich countries; one of the highest pregnant mother, and infant, death rates in the world; and extreme shortages of health facilities in rural areas.

## Health

But every health worker I met on my trip to Sierra Leone, from junior nurses to experienced doctors and managers, said matters were slowly improving.

In the village outside Freetown, a 17-year-old boy sits on a broken plastic chair. Saidu Sankoh has advanced TB. Because it was not treated properly, the wasting disease has spread from his lungs to his bones. Saidu is now virtually immobile. He is a bright, articulate boy who learnt to speak good English when he could still go to school.

"The pain is so much. It makes my bones ache. I sometimes lie here crying softly to myself," he says.

But Saidu feels another sort of pain, too. His mother is blind, yet he cannot help her. The other pain

Saidu feels is shame. "Look at me. I am 17, a big boy. I should be able to help my mother, but instead I am sick and I sleep in the same room as her. My little brother of six has to do all the chores," he says.

A few doors along in the row of village rooms, a young woman, Emma Kamara, can barely move. She has a cough which convulses her thin frame.

John Conteh, a social worker from a nearby clinic who accompanied me to the village, suspects that Emma also has TB.

Tuberculosis is an airborne disease. So Emma's baby, who sits beside her is in danger of catching it. And Emma's mother, who was also there, sitting on the rough floor, looks weak — and is already coughing.

## Isolation

If something is not done to isolate and treat these cases, the whole community is in danger of early death.

A couple of hours drive away, in the capital Freetown, there is a very different scene. In a modest hospital maternity ward, Mariama Mansaray is sitting in the sunlight that is streaming through an open window. Mariama would have died in childbirth had she not had access to medical care. She's pinning a nappy on her baby, Sarah.

"My baby was sideways inside me and would not come out," says Mariama.

"I tried the traditional healers in my village but that did not work. Then someone told me I could come here without paying money. So when they sent an ambulance, I came and had my baby. Here she is."

Dr Michael Koroma, the senior medical officer at the Princess Christian Maternity Hospital, stands next to the bed.

I ask him what would have happened if Mariama had stayed in her village.

"She would have died. In many cases in this country, women deliver their babies but then develop



A caregiver attending to a patient at Sierra Leone's only hospice. Picture courtesy: BBC

complications which cause extreme bleeding. If this is not treated properly, they die," he says.

A policy of free healthcare for pregnant women was introduced in Sierra Leone two years ago. The government — with help from foreign governments and aid agencies — introduced the measure as a way of targeting the biggest killer in the country, which, ironically, is birth.

In the harsh conditions of Sierra Leone, giving birth is a dangerous business for mother and baby.

*So, is it making a difference?*

"Yes, I think it is," said Gabriel Madiye, an experienced health administrator. "We have evidence that in recent years the average lifespan has increased from about 40 to around 42 years."

This would nudge Sierra Leone above several other African and Asian nations in the UN league tables for life expectancy.

Madiye runs the Shepherd's Hospice on the edge of Freetown.

It is not a hospice in the Western sense — a place where people can stay and get permanent end-of-life care — but is more like a pain relief centre. It is a modest place, and relies on financial help from abroad.

It is the only health facility in Sierra Leone that has a licence to administer morphine — a drug that is crucial for relieving pain in cases of terminal cancer.

## Efficiency

"The patients here become our friends," says Hannah Ngobeh, the senior nurse in the hospice. She's a big woman, a bustling, efficient presence, but she is also gentle and reassuring towards her patients.

"We see the patients every day. We go to their houses and get to know their families. They are our friends," she says.

Hannah pauses. "Then someone tells you your friend has died."

This is certainly an extremely

poor country that suffered decades of misrule and military conflict after independence. Now, by contrast, it has an elected government that is trying, albeit ever-so-slowly, to change things for the better.

In the maternity hospital I meet women with healthy, newborn babies. Many are rural women dressed in the simplest of clothes. They look as if they are surprised, and in awe, that they are here in this modern place.

The hospital is modest by international standards but here the rural women are seeing, many of them for the first time, doctors with stethoscopes around their necks.

And in the hospice I see Hannah gently hold the hand of a terminal cancer patient. She then expertly administers some painkillers.

If I were dying, I think I would like someone like Hannah Ngobeh to hold my hand.

— BBC Online

# Hope for fistula survivors as US leads on management

...By Duncan Mboyah

On International Women's Day the United States of America congress has introduced a bill that would help end the shame and pain of millions of fistula sufferers around the world.

The Obstetric Fistula Prevention, Treatment, Hope, and Dignity Restoration Act of 2011 would require the US government to provide comprehensive assistance to prevent and treat fistula.

The proposed law, sponsored by Representative Carolyn Maloney, Democrat of New York, would require the US government to address a key gap in current efforts to reduce fistula — preventing the injury in the first place.

This would be achieved through support to programmes that help women get skilled care during pregnancy and childbirth as well as after delivery.

It also would require the US government to support programmes that would address the underlying social and economic contributors to obstetric fistula such as early marriage and a lack of access to education for girls, since adolescents are more prone to developing fistula.

The Bill would also provide support for fistula repair surgery. Current programs to address fistula largely focus on treatment, but much more needs to be done to reduce the enormous backlog of women needing repair surgery. The Bill authorises financial support for training fistula surgeons, including "south-to-south" training and learning.

According to Ms Agnes Odhiambo of Human Rights Watch an important element of the Bill is its strategic and sustainable approach to reducing fistula.

Odhiambo notes that the Bill requires the US government to promote coordination among donors, governments, multilateral institutions, private sector as well as non-governmental and civil society organisations.

"Giving birth should not mean living death," said Odhiambo, who is the Africa women's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch.

Obstetric fistula is a devastating childbirth injury causing leakage of urine and faeces from the vagina that largely afflicts poor, rural and illiterate women in developing countries who lack access to emergency care or money for repair surgery.



**"Fistula strips women of their dignity, and makes them outcasts in their own families and communities."**

— Agnes Odhiambo,

Human Rights Watch

The World Health Organisation estimates that two million women and girls are living with untreated fistula and between 50,000 and 100,000 are affected each year, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Fistula sufferers are often stigmatised and ostracized in the community they live in.

Reintegration and rehabilitation programmes to help women return to full and productive lives are, therefore, central to the Bill. According to Human Rights Watch these elements are largely absent from existing programmes.

"Fistula can only be conquered with investments in local expertise and health systems," says Odhiambo.

She observes that the Bill marks an important shift away from treating fistula like a charity case and into seeing it as an integral part of maternal health care.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 55 fistula survivors in Kenya in 2009 and 2010, documenting the devastating impact of fistula on women's lives, as well as the barriers to prevention and treatment.

Fistula leads to frequent infections, painful genital ulcers, a fetid odour, infertility and nerve damage. Fistula

also triggers stigma and violence both within families and communities. It places a huge financial burden on already poor families and reduces their ability to farm or carry out other income-generating activities.

Obstetric fistula can be prevented by timely access to emergency obstetric care and the presence of skilled attendants during pregnancy and childbirth.

Family planning information and services also play a key role, including through sexuality education in schools. These services are weak in many resource-poor countries, including Kenya.

Women interviewed note that they had lived with untreated fistula for years because they did not know it is treatable. Many of them lacked money for treatment. In addition, there are few competent fistula surgeons or facilities who can do routine fistula surgery.

"Fistula strips women of their dignity, and makes them outcasts in their own families and communities," Odhiambo says.

She observes that the Bill holds so much promise to end the suffering of these women, and call on the US Congress to take a stand for them.



# Widows move from a culture of handouts to self sufficiency

...By Gilbert Ochieng

When Margaret Mugeni, 49, mother of seven, lost her husband who was the sole bread winner sixteen years ago, her hopes of survival became uncertain.

The untimely death of her husband, a former Warrant Officer with the Kenya Army in 1994 left her in a very awkward situation she was compelled to provide for her children's basic needs including their education.

Mugeni lived in Busibwabo village, Busia District. Having not worked before, she thought of a way that would enable her give her children a decent living.

Together with other widows, Mugeni realised that handouts were not a sufficient way of feeding, clothing as well as paying school fees for her children. They needed a sustainable avenue through which they could get a source of livelihood.

## Vulnerable groups

These thoughts led to the creation of Busibwabo Widows and Orphans HIV/Aids Women's Group. Initially made up of 17 members — five men and 12 women, the organisation has grown to include 20 members with 16 women and four men catering for 271 orphaned and vulnerable children.

Mugeni is the chairlady of the community based organization. The group was formed in 2003 with the aim of consoling women who lost their spouses.

"Most of us thought our survival had reached a dead end after the demise of our spouses who were the sole breadwinners," says Mugeni. She adds: "However, by virtue of the fact that we

were all bereaved, we gave each other support and the group has strengthened and even encouraged each one of us to work even harder."

The group members have been able to get relief food from the World Food Programme (WFP) aimed at providing them with nutritious food for those living with HIV/Aids.

Having embarked on an ambitious project where they keep local poultry and sell to various hotels and individuals in the region, the members have every reason to wear a smile on their faces as they have bid farewell to poverty.

"At the moment, we are undertaking a local poultry project with a grant of KSh102,000 which we received from the Department of Agriculture in 2006 under the 'Njaa Marufuku Kenya' programme," explains Mugeni. She adds: "Each member was provided with five chickens — four hens and a cock."

The project has bailed them out of poverty and overdependence on handouts from well-wishers especially politicians who have always taken advantage of their situation to manipulate them for political mileage.

Mugeni recalls that when her husband died, her first born son was just about to join secondary school. Through the group, she has been able to pay his school fees and he is now at Egerton University undertaking a computer science course. The other children are in various secondary schools in the province.

Just like Mugeni, the group's secretary, Ms Lillian Vihenda, has been able to educate her children, buy them school uniforms and as well as cater for their health needs since her husband died a few years back.

At the moment the group boasts of 420 local poultry at their respective homesteads. One of the beneficiaries, Ms Margaret Oduori said dur-



Members of the Busibwabo Widows and Orphans HIV/Aids Women's Group with the chicken that they are rearing in a poultry project which has made them self-reliant. Pictures: Gilbert Ochieng

ing the December festive season, out of the 150 chicken, she managed to sell 100 cocks each at KSh600. She used the money to complete her brick house which had stalled following her husband's death five years ago.

## Poultry project

"I took 100 cocks out of the 150 which I sold last December and got a total of KSh60,000 that enabled me to complete our brick house that had stalled since the death of my husband five years ago," says Margaret Oduori, adding that the project has changed her life a great deal.

"As a group we have no regrets over embarking on the poultry project because there is ready market," says Mugeni. She adds: "We are determined to achieve a lot out of this project."

Apart from the local poultry project, the group has also embarked on the cultivation of orange fleshed potatoes from which they bake chapati, cakes and buns and sell to the local shop owners

and individual consumers among others.

"We also grow traditional vegetables and finger millet as well as operate a table banking system on a merry-go-round where we contribute KSh20 per member and share the cash collected on rotational basis," explains Mugeni.

The group is in the process of recruiting more orphans and widows so they can also benefit from the same and be able to improve on their standards of living and be self-reliant.

However, the biggest challenge facing the group is that they have not been spared by chicken thieves who have on several occasions broken into the poultry sheds and stolen their birds at night.

"We are appealing to the Department of Agriculture and well wishers to help us construct strong sheds and ensure the safety of our poultry which are our only source of livelihoods," they said.

# Grant changes women's lives from grass to grace

...By Gilbert Ochieng

Women form the largest constituency of the world's poor. However, it is known that with a little push, a woman can make a difference not only in her home but to her community.

This saying has come to pass for the women of Alakara Group who with a small grant have been able to turn around their lives. Theirs is a true case of from grass to grace.

Alakara is a Teso word for togetherness. Members of the Alakara Women's Group within Busia County are full of joy following a KSh120,000 grant from the Department of Agriculture, under a programme known as Njaa Marufuku Kenya. The money was given out in 2006 and they invested in various income generating activities.

Alakara was among the 15 community based organizations that had benefited from the programme aimed at reducing the high levels of poverty in the region. It was hope that the money would empower them to engage themselves in diverse income generating interventions.

The group's secretary, Ms Florence Aunya says they have every reason to wear a smile on their faces since they have achieved so much. They are now in a position to fend for themselves and their families without depending on handouts.

## Merry-go-round

The merry-go-round group was formed in 1998 with a membership of 5 men and 10 women. It was registered with the Department of Social Services the same year.

"In 2001, our group was identified by the Department of Agriculture and the members were trained on how to process and do value addition to cassava and sweet potatoes at the Busia Agricultural Training Centre (ATC) under the auspices of Kenya Industrial Research Development Institute," says Aunya.

They were also trained on processing of cassava porridge flour, sweet potato porridge flour and Soya beverage among others.

Prior to getting the grant, the group was operating a food kiosk at Chepkube trading centre along the Busia-Kisumu highway. However, from this business they could not generate much profit due to the exorbitant cost of foodstuff.



Florence Aunya Secretary of Alakara Women's Group holds a packet of flour that the group produces and sells to earn income. Picture: Gilbert Ochieng

However, with the grant things changed and they diversified to more profit generating products.

"Some of the products the group members are able to produce include porridge flour, pure cassava flour, pure orange fleshed porridge flour, pure finger millet flour and peanut butter," says Aunya.

The purpose of forming the group was purely to improve the members' standards of living by empowering them to undertake

**"In 2001, our group was identified by the Department of Agriculture and the members were trained on how to process and do value addition to cassava and sweet potatoes."**

— Florence Aunya

various income generating interventions.

"The grant has enabled the members to undertake various income generating activities of their liking that have in the long run empowered them economically hence improving on their lifestyle and self-esteem," explains Aunya.

Most of the members have been able to educate their children from their profits. Majority of them had been leading miserable lives, engaging in hand-to-mouth businesses that would not make ends meet.

One of the group's members, Ms Wilkistah Emodo, a mother of five, says initially she used to sell sukuma wiki (kale). "This could not give me adequate income to fend for my family taking into consideration the fact that my husband is just a casual labourer," explains Emodo. She adds: "The grant as well as the loan from the group enabled me to invest in the fish business which has brought me a lot of income."

## Financial matters

The group is also doing table banking and providing loan facilities to its members at an interest rate of ten percent.

"Our products are in high demand and we also sell them to local shop owners and traders as well as various open air markets at KSh50 each," Aunya explains. Apart from selling the products for profit, they encourage their consumption because the products are nutritious not only for the families but even to those who are living with HIV.

So far the group has saved KSh86,000 with a local bank. They are planning to acquire their own processing machine as well as a motorised chipping machine instead of depending on the one that was provided to the Busia Agricultural Training Centre by the Kenya Industrial Research Development Institute (KIRDI).

However, Aunya expresses concern over the high cost of raw materials which are quite expensive.

Piracy is also a major challenge to the organisation as some groups with ill motives are pirating on their products and hence spoiling interfering with the market.

The Busia District Agricultural Officer, Mr Samson Khachina says the Government is committed to funding the various community based organisations in the region with an aim of empowering them financially so as to make them self-reliant.



# The ultimate test for a teacher

...By Kipkoeh Kosonei

While the research which was recently released by the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) on the sorry state of early childhood education in Kenya was an indictment on parents, the government and teachers, the latter carry the greatest burden.

The findings showed that 60 per cent of pupils in Standard Three had repeated a class and that more than half of those interviewed could neither read nor write to the required standard.

A demanding educational system and a society which over emphasises academic excellence put a great deal of pressure on weak students. There is, therefore, need for teachers to handle them with patience and understanding.

Teachers continue to be blamed for the poor methods they use in class. They are accused of using traditional teaching approaches, which are teacher-centred and learner-intimidating.

## Underachievers

The learners, however, who bear the biggest brunt of this inefficiency, are the underachievers. How a teacher treats these disadvantaged students is his/her ultimate test.

It will be instructive to note that most of the world's who-is-who started off as apparent failures whose stewards — teachers and parents — either dismissed them as dullards or did not do enough to encourage them.

Albert Einstein and our own Ali Mazrui easily quickly come to mind. The former is the legendary wizard of Physics and Mathematics who was a late developer but ended up developing the much-acclaimed law of relativity.

Professor Ali Mazrui is a renowned scholar who started off being denied Makerere University College entry for the dubious reason of being 'unteachable' only to end up a university chancellor and a globetrotter who at one time taught in five universities across the world.

## Learning process

It is mind-boggling to imagine the number of would-have been movers and shakers of history who are now languishing in poverty and mediocrity because they were not given an opportunity to learn or were out rightly discouraged by their teachers and parents as non-starters. It will not be strange to find out that majority of these are women and girls. Yet learners have unique strengths, potentials and problems. Only individualised attention can bring out the best in them.

Through motivation by teachers, a weak student will surmount his or her willpower to overcome weaknesses and improve on his/her strengths.

What options are open to a classroom teacher or educational manager faced with the daunting task of handling a weak student?

Many have taken extra tuition as a quick solution to meet this challenge. This otherwise noble intention has, however, been abused.

What with commercialised tuition everywhere that lumps together all kinds of students and uses the tried-and-tested lecture methods only aimed at clearing the syllabus in readiness for the much dreaded exams. Little attempt has been made to meaningfully reach out to the slow learner.

Still some educators advise repetition or retention as a way of dealing with school under-achievers. Supporters of this method say the students who repeat get their morale boosted and regain confidence when they perform better as a result of repeating a class. Critics, however, warn that forcing a child to repeat can be counter productive in that it kills their attitude and embarrass their parents as well who tend to see themselves as failures.

Indeed many schools have in the past been accused of repeating under-achievers and registering only the bright candidates hence dubiously finding themselves in the newspaper headlines for being among the best schools when national results are released.

Some educators advocate routine class promotion irrespective of performance. Opponents of this practice fear that this would lower standards and kill the drive for hard work.

There is, therefore, need to balance between the negative effects of haphazard retention and the gains that can be made by meaningful retention following consultation between parents, teachers and the affected child. When a student repeats a class, intensive help on specific areas is encouraged.

Alongside these measures, the affected students need to undergo guidance and counselling. Guidance facilitates self-discovery and appreciation of ones strengths. E. K. Mutie and P. Ndambuki in their book Guidance

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A teacher with students in class. Teachers need to encourage students, and girls in particular instead of discouraging them when they perform poorly. Picture: Kenyan Woman correspondent

and Counselling for Schools and Colleges, say personal guidance should be aimed at assisting students to acquire necessary emotional stability to facilitate academic success.

Like some doctors who have been accused of treating the disease and not the patient, some teachers may be knowledgeable in their areas of specialisation yet remain illiterate in disseminating knowledge with the human touch essential for successful teaching and learning.

## Performance

It is not uncommon to hear teachers condemn a class wholesale for its purported poor performance. 'Form Two is a terrible class. Look at what this boy has written for me!' Now, the student in question is being anonymously referred to as 'a boy' and 'Form Two'. This scenario underscores how teachers give the pedagogical principle of individual difference a wide berth.

Another scenario is how teachers write comments on students' report forms. Such general remarks like 'very good' and 'work hard' do not show individualised attention given to a learner's work. Similarly, telling a child with a D 'very poor' is not only demoralising, but it does not mean much. Whereas everyone knows D is a poor grade, it is only a concerned teacher that gives hope and suggests how the learner can get out of the woods. Individualised attention of learners shows them you care and they will reciprocate by hard work.

## Aids candlelight memorial set for May 15

The Global Health Council (GHC) and the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+) will hold the international Aids candle light memorial on May 15.

The event will be hosted by GNP+, which together with GHC will collaborate closely to ensure a seamless transition.

The Memorial is an advocacy tool and promotes human rights issues with an emphasis on access to HIV services for all.

This year's International Aids Candlelight Memorial will be marked in communities around the world on Sunday, May 15, with the theme "Touching Lives".

Community-based organisations in some 115 countries will use the event to remember those who have lost their lives to Aids, to support those living with HIV and affected by its impact and to spur calls to action for greater awareness.

"GNP+ is an ideal host for the International Aids Candlelight Memorial, which since its inception has provided a global platform for people living with and affected by HIV to reflect on the epidemic's past and future and advocate for change," said Jeffrey L. Sturchio, Global Health Council President and CEO. "We're pleased to transfer this important grassroots program to Kevin Moody and his colleagues and are confident that under their stewardship the candlelight programme will build on lessons learned and continue to bring new voices to the fight against HIV/Aids."

"The Candlelight Memorial increases HIV awareness in local communities around the world with strong participation of people living with HIV. This enhanced awareness leads to empowerment for one's own health, respect for the human rights of people living with HIV and demand and delivery of HIV treatment, prevention, care and support," said Kevin Moody, International Coordinator and CEO of GNP+.

"GNP+ is proud to enable and promote the leadership of grassroots civil society in the HIV response through the Candlelight Memorial."

The International Aids Candlelight Memorial, started in 1983 in the United States, is the world's largest grassroots movement against HIV/Aids and one of the longest running public health campaigns in the world today.

Combining a memorial with celebration, the event was created before World Aids Day by a small group of people in a display of hope and courage.

Courtesy of Global Health Council



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E-mail: [info@awcfs.org](mailto:info@awcfs.org)  
www.awcfs.org

Executive Director: Rosemary Okello-Orlale

Editorial Director: Arthur Okwemba

Managing Editor: Jane Godia

Sub-Editors: Duncan Mboya, Joyce Chimbi

Contributors: Musa Radoli, Kevin Karani, Frank Ouma, Odhiambo Odhiambo, Evelyne Ogutu, Duncan Mboya, Mercy Mumo, Odhiambo Orlale, Karen Allen, Roni Caryn Rabin, Neil Macsarquhar, Naomi Wolf, Claris Ogangah, Fred Okoth, Musembi Nzengu, Amelia Thomson-Deveaux, Christinus Omar, Mark Doyle, Gilbert Ochieng, Kipkoeh Kosonei

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