

CONVERSATIONS WITH PATHFINDERS

**KENYAN WOMEN IN POLITICS, LEADERSHIP, SOCIAL MOBILISATION
AND CONSTITUTION MAKING**



EDITORS WANJIKU MUKABI KABIRA • PETER WASAMBA • RUTH WAMUYU • BRENDER AKOTH

Conversations with Pathfinders

Kenyan Women in Politics, Leadership, Social Mobilisation and Constitution Making

“When women mobilise around a plan as they did during the constitution making process in Kenya, change is inevitable”

Maimuna Mwidau

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you”

Poet Maya Angelou

Editors: Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira • Peter Wasamba • Ruth Wamuyu • Brender Akoth

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University of Nairobi

African Women Studies Research Centre & Women's Economic Empowerment Hub

P.O Box 30197-00100 Nairobi, Kenya

E-mail: awskenya@uonbi.ac.ke & weehub@uonbi.ac.ke

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DEDICATION

*Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die
Life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.*

*Hold fast to dreams, for when dreams go
Life is a barren field frozen with snow.*

Langstone Hughes.

This anthology is dedicated to the many pathfinders who held fast to the dream of a world that recognizes the potential of men and women in society and the creation of a new world order. The pathfinders who we celebrate in this book played different roles in the women's journey towards gender equality, women's empowerment and social transformation. The path finders are many, some of them have been on the journey for almost a lifetime. There are women who have been in the struggle for independence and who have passed on. A few of them, including Field Marshal Muthoni, Muthoni Likimani and many others are still alive, albeit at an advanced age. Prof. Wangari Maathai, Jane Kiano, Rahab Wabici, Grace Ogot, Asenath Odaga, Sarah Wambui, Maggie Gona, Wilhemina Oduol, Milcah Ocholla, Margaret Wambui Kenyatta (Senior), Margaret Ogolla, Wanjiru Kihoro and many others have already gone to the next world. We also dedicate this book to them and to many others who have passed on. We honour you and you remain in our memory. We also honour those who have been in the line of duty for over sixty years and continue pursuing our Dreams. These women include Hon. Phoebe Asiyo, Julia Ojiambo, Eddah Gachukia, Grace Onyango, Jael Mbogo, Muthoni Likimani, Muthoni Kirima and many others not covered in this book. For you pathfinders, we honor you for remaining steadfast and keeping the women's dream alive. For we must tell our women and younger women. It has been a privilege to continue your journey as we envision the journey towards the sunrise. We celebrate and honour you.

We stand on your shoulders and we salute you.

Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira

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FOREWORD

Throughout history, Kenyan women have fought many battles in order to occupy their rightful place in the political, social and economic arenas. Their determination and resilience has seen them through divisive politics and broken cultural barriers that for so long rendered them voiceless. Yet history books have given prominence to (his) story excluding (her) story from mainstream discourses. This book comes in to celebrate and immortalise the stories told by women in their own words as they struggled for inclusion on the decision making table during the constitution making process.

The book documents the life narratives of trailblazers such as Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima - who is a pace setter in women's participation during the liberation movement- Hon. Phoebe Asiyo, Prof. Julia Ojiambo and Kamla Sikand who have worked consistently with other women, governments and civil society organisations to open up space for women in leadership positions and drive forward the gender agenda. Hon. Rukia Subow, Hon. Martha Karua, Jael Mbogo, Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, Prof. Eddah Gachukia, Hon. Beatrice Elachi, Prof. Patricia Kameri Mbote, Hon Mumbi Ngaru, Ms. Daisy Amdany, among others, believe that women can transform the country when given a chance. Evidently, women have been waiting to tell their story, document their experiences and dream for a better Kenya. This book tells (her)story by challenging the more popular and dominant (his) story, and demonstrating that women have claimed their place in time and space. These women are celebrated in their roles not only as caregivers, mothers, wives and home-makers, but also as significant contributors to the national economy, political and legal developments.

As the Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes we strive to empower women and promote gender equity and equality with the aim of improving the lives of Kenyans. This book is evidence of the work that has been going on at the UoN Women's Economic Empowerment Hub, which is very useful in the ministry as we seek to fulfill our mandate. As government, we acknowledge that empowering women economically is a key component of sustainable development. We are guided by the National Policy on Gender and Development (2019),

whose overarching objective is to provide guidance and facilitate the implementation of gender equality provisions in the Constitution and other instruments through legislative, administrative, policy measures and programs required to address the gender inequalities and existing gaps by both levels of government and non-state actors, including the private sector. It also provides for the review and harmonisation of all gender-related laws and policies to align them to the Constitution, to ensure that they adhere to the principles of equality and nondiscrimination. The Ministry is also guided by the Constitution of Kenya 2010, which seeks to provide women and men with the right to equal treatment and opportunities. Article (27) (6) provides for legislative and other measures, including affirmative action programmes and policies designed to redress any disadvantages suffered by individuals or groups because of past discrimination. The government has taken steps in this regard and established affirmative action funds to redress some of the inequities experienced by women and other marginalised groups.

The Kenya Vision 2030 agenda is another document that guides our work as it supports the coordination and monitoring of gender mainstreaming across government. It also seeks to effectively push forward the economic empowerment of women and other marginalised groups. At the global level, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 5 on Gender Equality is a guiding principle for the constitution. This is in addition to the Big Four Agenda which the president, His Excellency Uhuru Kenyatta, emphasises as critical areas of development.

The research generated by the Hub is crucial for supporting development of policies and programmes important for our people. This is because the government supports women's economic empowerment through affirmative action programmes including the Kenya Women Enterprise Fund, Uwezo, the Kenya Youth Development Fund, among others. In addition, the establishment of the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) programme has enabled women to do business with the government as 30 per cent of its contracts have been set aside for the disadvantaged. The government will therefore benefit a lot from research that can inform review of policies and legislative frameworks to serve the women of Kenya efficiently and effectively. I am glad to say that the ministry is already collaborating with African Women Studies Research Centre, which is the host of the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub on policies such as AGPO, and regulations related to the affirmative action funds, which specifically target women and other marginalised groups. In this regard, the government works towards making policies and pieces of legislation to

bemore inclusive. The documentation of the life narratives of the women pathfinders will directly contribute to the larger trailblazers programme that the Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes has established which we are very proud of. I note that this is Volume I of women's narratives and will soon be followed by Volume II on Pathfinder's in Economic Empowerment.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm the ministry's commitment to collaborate with the University of Nairobi in this very important programme and look forward to working together to explore areas of common interest as we create a better environment for women's economic empowerment.

Prof Margaret Kobia, PhD, MGH,

Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizen Affairs and Special Programmes.

MESSAGE FROM THE VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

Research is a core mandate of a university. The Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Hub focuses on a specific area to bring together the expertise from different disciplines and generate research to advocate for policies that can transform our economy and promote women's economic empowerment. The African Women Studies Centre brings together various disciplines including economics, sociology, history, agricultural studies, health sciences, among others. As the leading university in research in this region, the University of Nairobi is privileged to be incubating this very important programme to deliver cutting-edge research on Women's Economic Empowerment. As an academic and research institution, the university remains a centre of academic and research excellence recognised in Africa and beyond. The university underscores the significance of research and its management in determining decisions relating to development, including policy formulation and implementation.

The WEE Hub, which is domiciled in the African Women's Studies Research Centre a multidisciplinary centre - is well placed to provide cutting-edge research hence contributing knowledge and experience to this country, Africa and indeed globally. As often said, research is not only about generating, but translating new knowledge into action to impact the lives of women in our communities, and nations. This publication is a great milestone in women's studies scholarship, as well as a greater focus on collaboration with policy makers and other stakeholders for utilisation of research and innovation to transform the lives of Kenyans.

The University of Nairobi continues to play a leading role as a centre of excellence and a thought leader in research through different disciplines. The Hub has played a major role in providing research and innovation opportunities at the University of Nairobi and in other universities globally. As the Vice Chancellor, I acknowledge the great team of scholars, who have demonstrated high level of scholarship in the documentation of the stories of key women in the country who set the pace for leadership. I am confident that their contribution as experts in their various disciplines has made the WEE Hub a place of choice for anyone with the desire to understand African Women and Economic Empowerment. This publication is very important for policy makers in improving the

economic status of women, which has a ripple effect on the country's economic development. The 21st Century is increasingly becoming a knowledge-based economy and this underscores the significance of research and innovation. New knowledge is critical in addressing the challenges of sustainable development in the society. Such knowledge can only be through research and innovation. In addition, this research will continue to increase the visibility of women's experiences and knowledge which has traditionally not been part of knowledge development. This is a major contribution to knowledge making by African Women Studies Research Centre.

As the Vice Chancellor, I also acknowledge that it is a great honour for the University of Nairobi to house the WEE Hub. Our institution will do whatever it takes to ensure the Hub continues to be the thought leader in each of the four broad research areas: Affirmative Action Funds and Entrepreneurship; Women in Formal and Informal Employment; Child Care and Women's Work; and Women's Movement and Policy Advocacy for Women's Economic Empowerment. I am confident that the able and experienced leadership in the Hub will continue to spearhead this kind of research and develop new knowledge to advance WEE and gender equality in Kenya. No doubt, this is an initiative that can be emulated globally.

Prof. Stephen Gitahi Kiama, PhD, BVM

Vice Chancellor, University of Nairobi

MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT HUB

Gender inequality – the existence of differences with regards to rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women, men, girls and boys – has remained one of the global concerns of the 21st century. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres on International Women of March 1, 2018, observed that “gender equality and empowering women and girls is the unfinished business of our time and the greatest human rights challenge in our world”. Women notably lag behind in all economic spheres and in leadership while their voices are arguably low if at all heard and their contribution in economies has remained largely invisible. Globally and Kenya in particular, gender gaps are pervasively explicit in access to opportunities, education, health and in leadership and decision making.

The *Conversations with the Pathfinders* book does not only entrench the voices of Kenyan women involved in politics and the making of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 in the books of History, but also identifies and documents the strategies that these noble women used to ensure key provisions for the rights of Kenyan women were entrenched in the Kenya law. These women empowerment champions, with great determination and courage, created paths and walked them, though unfamiliar and uncharted political waters and against the current of cultural norms, discrimination, exclusion and persecution. The rewards of their labour are the constitutional rights which provide the legal basis for increased access to, control and ownership of factors of production by women in addition to a possibility of increased participation in all the spheres of the economy. In their conversations, I particularly gather that in the march towards Women's Economic Empowerment a lot matters: all women, courage, self-determinant and resilience, unity of purpose, awareness, knowledge and capacity, networks, research, partnerships for the goal including partnerships with men, keeping focus, lobbying, strategy, mobilisation and rallying, transparency and accountability. The theme of the book, speaks to the general philosophy of the University of Nairobi's Women Economic Empowerment (UON WEE) Hub “Initiatives for What Works for Women Economic Empowerment -IWWEE”. These noble women are icons, providing vital lessons and creating paths for the Hub on the journey towards

Women's Economic Empowerment. The Hub will learn from the strategies they used, upscaling and amplifying them to inform and influence policy to strengthen what works for women for their enhanced participation in the economy. Just like the strategies worked in the creation of women beneficial changes in the Constitution of Kenya 2010, we believe if we harness them in our quest for women's economic empowerment in Kenya, then achievement of women's economic empowerment is inevitable.

Dr. Mary Mbithi

Senior Lecturer of Economics and Director of Research at the University of Nairobi
Women's Economic Empowerment Hub

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We acknowledge the pathfinders who gave their time and passionately shared their stories and experiences in politics and the constitution-making process which gave rise to the Constitution of Kenya 2010. We acknowledge and celebrate them. These pathfinders are Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima, a pace setter in women's participation during the liberation movement, Hon. Phoebe Asiyo, Hon. Martha Karua, Jael Mbogo, Prof. Julia Ojiambo, Kamla Sikand, Prof. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, Prof. Eddah Gachukia, Prof Achola Pala, Prof Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Dr Nancy Barasa, Hon. Idah Odinga, Salome Muigai, Alice Yano, Fatuma Hassan, Ambassador Rukia Subow, Maimuna Mwidau, Hon. Beatrice Elachi, Daisy Amdany and Hon. Mumbi Ngaru. We are aware there are many other women who were leaders in the negotiations and making of the constitution and who are not featured in this book. The documentation of these stories is so critical in development of women's knowledge that researchers must continue to tell their stories and bring their experiences into mainstream knowledge making for posterity and in order to correct the unbalanced recognition of women's role in building our nation and our continent. There are other women who are not this book but played different roles in politics and constitution making and whose stories will also be told. This book is the first in a series of documenting women's experiences which is the mission of African Women Studies Centre that houses the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub.

The African Women Studies Research Centre and the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub wish to thank the team of interviewers namely: Prof. Elishibah Kimani, Prof. Philomena Mwaura, Prof Tabitha Kiriti Nganga, Dr Joy Kiiru, Dr. Mary Goretty Akinyi, Beatrice Kamau, Agnes Mugane, Amanda Magitsu, Reuben Waswa, Mary Wambui Kanyi, Kennedy Mwangi, Dr. Dorothy Njiraini, Emily Owiti, Maimuna Mwidau, Dorothy Khamalla, Samuel Njuga and Gideon Muendo. Special thanks too to the team of research assistants Caudesia Njeri, Gideon Muendo, Wangare Muigana, Brender Akoth, Fredrick Kimotho, Eunice Atieno, Esther Ochieng, Nancy Akinyi, Linet Monda, Joakim Sande, Kelvin Muriuki, Grace Ndegwa, Samuel Njuga, Dorothy Khamala, Beatrice Kamau, and Francis Githuku who worked on the transcriptions of the audios.

Dr. Simon Peter Otieno led a team of filming crew comprising Cynthia Awuor, Solomon Munji, Jackline Nduta, Eric Bundi, and John Kanja, in documenting the pathfinders' stories. The African Women's Studies Research Centre and the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub is grateful. Special thanks to Elizabeth Auma for contributing to the writing of the Introduction Chapter of this book. We also wish to thank Prof. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, Prof Peter Wasamba, Daniel Iberi and Njeri Rugene for devoting time to review and proofread this book ensuring coherence. A team of editors put together Hub would like to thank Prof. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, Prof. Peter Wasamba, Brender Akoth and Ruth Wamuyu. This project would not have been possible without the leadership of the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub Management comprising of Prof Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, Prof Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Prof Tabitha Kiriti Nganga, Prof Collins Odote, Dr Mary Mbithi, Dr Agnes Meroka Mutua, Dr Dorothy Njiraini, and contribution of the two is highly appreciated.

The Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes, UN Women, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, African Women's Studies Research Centre and the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub University of Nairobi, deserve special mention for jointly funding this publication. The WEE Hub Management sincerely thanks you.

Women's Economic Empowerment Hub Management Committee.

Abbreviations

AAWORD	Association of African Women for Research and Development
ABSA	Amalgamated Banks of South Africa
AGPO	Access to Government Procurement Opportunities
AIPCK	African Independent Pentecostal Churches of Kenya
ALGAK	Association of Local Government Authorities of Kenya
AMREF	African Medical and Research Foundation
ANC	African National Congress
ANC	Amani National Congress
ATP	Advocates Training Program
AWSC	African Women Studies Centre
CAS	Chief Administrative Secretary
CCGD	Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGS	Credit Guarantee Scheme
CID	Criminal Investigations Department
CoE	Committee of Experts
CMD	Centre for Multiparty Democracy
CNC	Chief Natives Commission
CRE	Christian Religious Education
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
COTU	Central Organization of Trade Union
CKRC	Constitution of Kenya Review Commission
DP	Democratic Party

Abbreviations

EACC	Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission
EAWC	East African Women Conference
EBS	Elder of the Order of Burning Spear
ECWD	Education Centre for Women in Democracy
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FEMNET	African Women's Development and Communications Network
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FIDA	International Federation of Women Lawyers
FORD	Kenya Forum for the Restoration of Democracy- Kenya
GGP	Gender and Governance Programme
HAC	Help A Child
ICIPE	International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology
ID	Identification Document
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
IPPG	Inter Party Parliamentary Group
KAU	Kenya African Union
KADU	Kenya African Democratic Union
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KAPE	Kenya African Primary Education
KBC	Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KCSE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education

Abbreviations

KEWOPA	Kenya Women Parliamentary Association
KICC	Kenyatta International Convention Centre
KGGCU	Kenya Grain Growers Cooperative Union
KNUT	Kenya National Union of Teachers
KRA	Kenya Revenue Authority
KSL	Kenya School of Law
KTN	Kenya Television Network
LDP	Labour Democratic Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
LPK	Labour Party of Kenya
LSK	Law Society of Kenya
MCA	Member of County Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
MYWO	Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation
NARC	National Rainbow Coalition
NASA	National Super Alliance
NCCK	National Council of Churches of Kenya
NCPD	National Council for Population and Development
NCWK	National Council of Women of Kenya
NCC	
NCBA	National Cooperative Business Association
NDC	National Democratic Coalition
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHC	National Housing Corporation
ODM	Orange Democratic Movement

Abbreviations

OGW	Order of Grand Warrior
OP	Office of the President
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PEV	Post-Election Violence
PNU	Party of National Unity
PwDs	Persons with Disability
ECK	Electoral Commission of Kenya
PWD	People Living with Disabilities
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SUPKEM	Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims
TSC	Teachers Service Commission
TTC	Teachers Training College
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UN	United Nations
UoN	University of Nairobi
UWT	Umoja wa Wanawake Tanzania
USIU	United States International University
WCW	World Conference on Women
WPA - K	Women Political Alliance - Kenya
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Introduction

“You must not lose your identity as a woman if you want to be successful.”

Rachel Gatabaki

Kenyan women’s determination and their unrelenting spirit has seen them through divisive politics and broken cultural barriers that for long have silenced them. They have been the victims of marginalisation, locked out of political, economic and social spaces that are dominated by men. Upon gaining consciousness of their relegation, women realised the power within them and started voicing out their concerns and negotiating for spaces in the supposed male jurisdiction.

The women’s movement has a long history, particularly in Kenya. Until 1985, when the UN Conference was held in Nairobi, much of this engagement was focused on social development issues, and it was mostly pursued in politically neutral language and strategies. However, as we moved towards the 1990s, women’s voices became more audible. The National Women’s Convention held in February 1992 became a turning point in the history of women’s movement. The National Council of Women of Kenya and The African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) brought together more than 2,000 Kenyan women from all parts of the country, marking a turning point in the orientation of women’s collective action. The Convention inaugurated a purposeful agenda to push for women’s access to elective positions and political/public decision-making and leadership roles (Kabira & Kimani, 2012). Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD), started in 1976 by a strong team of feminist academics from Africa including Achola Pala, was at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), collecting data on women’s political path. The speakers included Prof Wangari Maathai, Hon. Phoebe Asiyo, Hon. Charity Ngilu, Hon. Martha Karua, Prof. Maria Nzomo, Hon. Lilian Mwaura, Njoki Wainaina among others.

In describing the ‘women’s movement’ in Kenya, these scholars emphasise the importance of not losing sight of the diversity of organisations. They argue that while the movement in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s tended to be characterised by a limited number of national organisations, the 1990s witnessed the development of a wide range of women’s organisations, which revitalised the energy to continue pushing for women’s agenda. These included religious organisations for instance, Muslim Sisters Network (MSN), welfare organisations such as Widows and Orphans Welfare Society of Kenya and civic education networks which included The Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD), League of Kenya Women Voters, African Women in Research and Development, Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), FEMNET, among others.

The movement started to evaluate the depth of gender-based disparities and the subjugation of women. Among the issues identified were: equal property rights for women, employment opportunities, gender-blind legislation and violence against women as matters that required policy reforms. Hence, this called for a multiplicity of approaches that would jointly enable the women’s movement achieve their emancipation goal. The late 1990s saw the birth of other political women’s organisations including Women Political Caucus and National Political Alliance, and a revitalisation of others among them the National Council of Women in Kenya (NCWK) and Maendeleo ya Wanawake.

To secure external institutionalised support, Kenyan women in the movement actively engaged in global and transnational conferences that pushed forward the struggle for women’s empowerment. They sent delegations to the UN-led women’s conferences right from the beginning in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995). The women used these global conferences to articulate their unique challenges and rally support for the implementation of homegrown solutions to their prioritised needs.

Hon. Julia Ojiambo asserts: “The women’s movement in Kenya benefitted greatly from the global development in women’s rights, especially the UN conferences on women. The Kenyan government started implementing international resolutions on women’s rights, an impetus to local women’s empowerment efforts. As a signatory to United Nations Resolutions on women, our government experienced a turning point for women’s development in this country”.

Recognising that women are not a homogenous group, Dr. Eddah Gachukia, who was critical in the organisation of the 1985 UN Conference on Women, gives prominence to the African woman, particularly the Kenyan woman during the international conference in Mexico. She says:

“I shared with women leaders in international conferences held in Mexico, Copenhagen and Beijing that women’s empowerment in Africa required a novel approach. It was easier to address the plight of women and the girl-child through participatory community development and not quest for equality as in the West. When the women in the West were removing bras to prove they were equal to men, we argued that our women did not even have any to remove. Women in Africa could best be served by addressing water, food and education issues. Those were the women’s priorities in Kenya.”

These conferences thus broadened the understanding of the women’s movement on the shared plight - patriarchal oppression, contextually different plight of women and girls in Africa. For instance, issues that disproportionately affect Kenyan women and girls such as poverty, illiteracy, health, gender-based violence (GBV), and property rights, were identified and it was agreed that they be addressed.

Consequently, women-led organisations were formed to mobilise support and engage women in various empowerment programmes and projects at national and community levels and to champion the protection of their rights. Key among the formal organisations that emerged and impacted significantly on the focus and direction of the movement were: Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYWO), which evolved into the main women’s organisation that officially represented the women’s voice from late 1990s; The National Council for Women in Kenya (NCWK) set up in 1964 as a national umbrella organisation with the purpose of strengthening and uniting women’s organizations across Kenya; and the Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya (FIDA), which became a central actor in the constitutional reforms.. Others included: The League of Kenya Women Voters and the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) formed in 1992, against the background of changing momentum in Kenyan civil society towards greater autonomy of social movements, by pushing for more substantive democratization – and constitutional reform (Zezeza, 2014), and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), to advance the right to access quality education for women and girls.

With the opening of political space following the return to multi-party politics, there was a noticeable increase in the politicisation and autonomy of women's movements. Key issues in the emerging agenda of feminist action included gender mainstreaming, advancing women's presence in politics – increasingly through the principle of affirmative action – and addressing violence against women. In 1998, the Kenya Women's Political Caucus (KWPC), a coalition of women's organisations mobilised around gender equality and affirmative action was established. A year later, Women Political Alliance was established and together with the Kenya Women Political Caucus, Maendeleo ya Wanawake, League of Women Voters and FIDA, provided the much-needed collective action to drive the women's agenda in the constitutional review. This became a key factor in the early stages of negotiating space for women's participation in the constitutional reforms (Kabira, 2012).

Akin to other African women, Kenyan women have made great contribution to the question of gender equality and equity. Through these organisations, they have relentlessly struggled for their progress by bringing women's agenda to the mainstream discourses and ensuring that their issues are an integral part of the country's development agenda. Their solidarity, unity of purpose, selflessness, determination and strong passion for inclusion in the drafting of the new constitution then cannot be gainsaid. The spirit of togetherness they embraced contributed to their success. Hon. Adelina Mwau attests to this. She says: "We were very much together; we were a coalition and alliance working together. The strategy of togetherness and of women's movement looking at issues from one perspective is strategy that I don't see today."

It is my view that the success and opportunities that women enjoy today are as a result of a struggle staged by women of the second liberation struggle. Women today stand on their shoulders, sadly, with limited knowledge of what they underwent due to scanty documentation of their experiences. These women trailblazers knew that their presence and participation in the negotiating table would ensure that women's interests are addressed. In this book, *Conversations with Pathfinders: Strategies that Worked for Women in the 2010 Constitution Making Process*; their stories are captured in detail as well as the spirit that guided their pursuit. While writing the foreword in *Time for Harvest* (2012), Prof. Kameri-Mbote reiterates Carol Smart's words; "It is imperative that the stories told by these women in their own words, unmediated by foreign languages and unadulterated by legalese which a number of scholars have argued is male and promotes male values" are immortalised. In this book, the voices

of these women continue to live and transform generations of women. In addition, the stories are archived and scholars, activists, historians, educators, students of women's studies can access and listen to them.

The book documents the narratives of gallant women warriors such as Field Marshal Muthoni Kirima who is the pace setter in women's participation during the liberation movement. She stands out as the woman who was actively involved in the country's liberation from colonial rule, having lived in the forest for more than 17 years fighting for independence. Together with the other freedom fighters, she looked forward to a free and fair nation where everyone would be treated equally.

Secondly, this book records women's experiences in the Kenyan political parties through conversations with key women including Hon. Phoebe Asiyo, Hon. Martha Karua, Jael Mbogo, Prof. Julia Ojiambo, Kamla Sikand, Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, and Prof. Eddah Gachukia, among others who took the mantle in the constitution making process and in the second liberation struggle. They passed on the baton to the younger women and created the opportunity for the voices of Daisy Amdany, Hon. Beatrice Elachi, Prof. Patricia Kameri Mbote, Hon. Mumbi Ngaru, among others captured. Ethnic, religious, cultural, economic and political factors notwithstanding, these women worked together because they were pursuing the same goal, that is, women's inclusion in the new Constitution.

In their narratives, these women have emphasised a number of strategies that helped them achieve their goal. Among them are: self-mobilisation, solidarity among themselves, civil education and consciousness awareness, working with men, grassroots mobilisation, engagement with the State through taskforces, sisterhood and organised protests and demonstrations. They also talk about the need to strengthen accountability mechanisms to maximize the chances of protecting any legal gains achieved through constitutional reform. Through networking, lobbying and strategic engagement in different areas, these women narrate how they used their political acumen to build strategic alliances and coalitions, including lobbying male politicians and key power holders at different levels to champion their agenda. The women's movement, also held context-specific dialogues with key gatekeepers, such as religious and community leaders for sensitization on many of the issues. These interconnected strategies stand out for the women's movement in the 1990s and the early part of the 21st century, leading to the Constitution of Kenya, 2010.

It is important to note that the women's movement in Kenya sprung from a strong desire by individuals who came together to change the status quo and ensure that women's issues were development rights that needed to be addressed. Prof. Kameri Mbote in her narrative refers to this strong desire as passion from within. This selfdrive proved effective in bringing women together to fight for inclusion during the constitution making process. Their collective action is captured succinctly in Ms. Maimuna's words, *"when women mobilise around a plan, change is inevitable, like in the constitution-making process."*

Women's resilience during this critical time again cannot be ignored. Looking at the experiences of these women described as "silent gardeners and nurturers" (Kabira, 2012), resilience was key to their achievements. To mention a few, Idah Odinga braved being sacked while her husband was in jail. Having been abandoned by the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), she started an organisation that would give women a voice in leadership and decision making. She got support from other women. Hon. Phoebe Asiyo's resilience in her fight for women's inclusion is also outstanding as her story indicates. It is evident that women struggled for their voices to be brought to the mainstream. Prof. Kabira's use of Margaret Ogola's novel, *The River and the Source* (1994), graphically paints the picture of Women's Movement in Kenya which has had moments of great force, moments when it only trickled, moments when people thought it had dried up because they did not see it on the surface, and moments when it meandered as it sought the path of least resistance on its onward journey to the sea. The important thing, however, is that, it eventually reached the sea on August 27, 2010 (Kabira, 2012).

It can precisely be argued that the women's movement was a gradual proliferation of feminist consciousness in three interlinked phases leading to the 2010 Constitution. The expanse of activities of women's movement during these phases are narrated in the main compendium of conversations with the pathfinders.

The struggle by these pathfinders and many others has been a long winding path full of challenges and milestones. The fight has been sustained by sacrifices of women of Kenya united by a joint call: to create a more just, humane and equal society for women and girls, boys and men. We believe that documenting her stories is critical for immortalising the courageous contributions of these women. We hope that these stories will inspire the women's movement, refocus it on the unfinished agenda and inspire young women leaders to pick up the mantle.

This collection of narratives from the pathfinders brings together twenty-two testimonies of women leaders. The narrators belong to different generations, geographical, social, political and economic backgrounds. From Samia to Mombasa, Kendu Bay to Embu and Kiambu to Taita Taveta, these heroines present a mosaic of Kenyan women's gallant struggle for a better society built on the foundations of gender equality, democracy and human dignity.

To accord women pathfinders the opportunity to tell their stories, we adopted the life narratives methodology. This approach allows the women interviewed to speak on milestones in their lives. Narrators not only recollect fragments from their past but also structure and give them broader meaning in the spaces in which they operate. In this project, we were not limited by historical correctness. Her story is about what women heroines remembered about their contributions to the women's movement with greater focus on the journey towards the new Constitution promulgated in 2010.

As you read through the book, you will notice that the interviewers limited themselves to asking questions that invited the respondents to tell their stories. The narrators told their stories without any inhibition. The interviewers were more like cultural students learning from experts. The methodology is a tool for empowering the hitherto marginalised groups in society. Having the power to speak is a prerequisite to reclaiming one's humanity suppressed or denied. It gives the women an opportunity to speak in their own tongues.

We asked women leaders to tell us about their childhood, education, adult life and contributions to society, especially in politics and constitution making. Constitution making is political. We also asked them to share what motivated them to join the women's movement and organisations. In addition, we focused on strategies of getting to the centre of constitution making and ensuring that the women's agenda was embedded in the new constitution. The narratives depict women's struggles, setbacks, triumphs, and milestones. We record these outstanding efforts by women because they have lived lives of selfless commitment to the women's agenda worthy of emulation. A majority of the contributors are veterans advanced in age, while others are mid-careers leaders. If we do not immortalise their achievements in their lifetime, future generations may not know that the freedoms enjoyed are sweet fruits of the selfless sacrifices of their progenitors. Listening, documenting and analysing these narratives of women's experiences, immortalises feminist knowledge.

Her story is a faithful chronicler. Reading the personal narratives of the heroines in this book, one realises that life stories of women's struggle towards their liberation is like a river with many streams at the top. The streams start from different geographies but converge downstream into a powerful national movement whose roaring flow cannot be stopped or diverted. At times, the speed slows down, but still, the river flows to the sea.

While these narratives are from different parts of the country, the story is one. Hon. Jael Mbogo and Hon. Phoebe Asiyo, both from Nyanza, have dominated Kenya's political scene like a colossus. Jael has accomplished many firsts and inspired many young women leaders. She is an accomplished social worker, women's rights campaigner and a successful politician. She was among the founders of the Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD), one of the political parties that championed the struggle for the second liberation in Kenya. She also competed against male candidates and won when it was almost impossible for a woman to be accepted as a leader. Phoebe Asiyo, likewise, demonstrated her political prowess by successfully challenging the Secretary-General of KANU in a very tight election. Phoebe is a trailblazer. She is a fighter for freedom from pre-independence days. She was among the women who visited Mzee Jomo Kenyatta at Kapenguria to know his plans for women. The narratives of Jael Mbogo and Phoebe Asiyo confirm that women can make it in politics.

Julia Ojiambo's story brings the power of education in creating space for women in society. As the first Kenyan-born woman to join Harvard University, Julia holds an enviable position. Early education prepared her for political leadership. She has served as an MP for Samia, an assistant minister and a politician, passionate about teaching and women's leadership. Young women with political ambition should read Martha Wangari Karua's testimony. Hon. Karua is a revered Kenyan politician and an advocate for social justice. A former long-standing Member of Parliament for Gichugu Constituency, a cabinet minister and an advocate of the High Court of Kenya, Martha is an example of a woman politician guided by the quest for social justice. Martha has never shied away from remaining alone in defence of values of democracy, human rights and gender justice.

Though not active in elective politics as a candidate, Ida Odinga has been instrumental in incubating women for political leadership. The former prime minister's wife, Raila Odinga, Ida, has worked with many political formations committed to democratic

change. Fondly called the Winnie Mandela of Kenya, Ida's life is a lesson on women's capacity to persevere to keep the political struggle on course.

Kamla Sikand, like Ida, chose to support women's quest for political leadership through mentorship. She challenged racial discrimination in colonial Kenya and continued with the struggle in the post-colony. Kamla, who passed on in August 2019, took the lead in the Asian community in Kenya to work closely with other women in the fight for empowerment and gender equality. During the constitution of Kenya review process, Kamla provided a sanctuary in her family home in Westlands for women leaders to meet, network, strategise and respond to challenges. She called for unwavering love and sacrifice for peace and unity in Kenya. Gender justice is one of the ways of solidifying the unity of the country. Kamla died two years after this interview. The WEE Hub honours her selfless sacrifice for the women of Kenya with this publication.

The book also features life narratives of women academicians and how they use their knowledge and skills to influence policy in favour of women's empowerment politically, socially and economically. The women leaders are Prof. Achola Pala, Prof. Eddah Gachukia, Prof. Wanjiku Kabira and Dr Nancy Baraza. Prof. Achola Pala is a grounded intellectual. She is among the pioneer Kenyan women intellectuals. Her cultural anthropology background with a bias toward gender justice has been invaluable in Kenya's women empowerment discourse. She brings in an ideology of women's liberation grounded on African cultural ethos. Her discourse on African women's empowerment is premised on African social and knowledge systems. Prof. Achola deconstructs the Eurocentric view of African woman's victimhood and highlights the positive portrayal of women in society. Prof. Eddah Gachukia, an educationist, shares Achola's ideology. She believes that African women intellectuals must lead in opening the pathways to women's empowerment by promoting research and education of the girl child without neglecting the boy. She demonstrates that the women's movement benefits a lot from the intellectual and ideological stewardship of educated women who are in touch with grassroots realities. Prof. Gachukia is a woman of many feathers: a researcher, politician, scholar and passionate promoter of women's empowerment. The renowned scholar injects a pan-Africanist ideological slant that celebrates the resilience of women in the continent as they work towards Africa's total liberation. Reading Prof. Kabira's story is like reading the map of women's movement in Kenya. A mentee of Prof. Gachukia, Kabira's story resembles a life devoted to getting women leaders to the decision-making structures in our society's political, social, and

economic spheres. Prof. Kabira is a scholar of Literature and African Women Studies. She founded and incubated the African Women Studies Centre at the University of Nairobi. The Centre's vision is: A centre of excellence committed to promoting African women's experiences and worldviews in scholarship, policy, institutional and community development. She has published widely in the area of literature, gender and culture. One of the celebrated publications is *"Time for Harvest: Women and Constitution making in Kenya (2012)*. Prof. Kabira is the bridge that connects women of different ethnic, social and political persuasions to the movement. Her grasp of women's issues and egalitarian disposition is unfathomable. Further, Prof. Kabira's stubborn hope in women's liberation is invaluable to the women's empowerment movement. She ably simplifies ideological and theoretical terms in women's liberation jargon and applies the same to the Kenyan situation with ease. She demonstrates that the women's movement is more robust and focused when theory and practice come together in an environment of accommodation and mutual respect.

Dr. Nancy Baraza is the last block in the league of women intellectuals. A law scholar well versed in women and the Law, Dr Baraza, gives rich insights into how jurisprudence in women's rights has evolved over the years. She joins the women intellectuals like Achola, Gachukia and Kabira in injecting legal intellectual stewardship in women's movement. Dr Baraza is a former judge and the first Deputy Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Kenya. She has been a champion of gender justice for decades, stretching from her days as the Director of FIDA Kenya. Dr Baraza was very instrumental in the Constitution of Kenya Review Process as a Commissioner.

The principal contention in the women's movement often exploited to divide them is the gap between the presumably elite and village women. Life narratives of educated women show strong bonds of sisterhood that bind women together in a collective voyage. The rural-urban, educated-elite dichotomies are always hyped by forces keen to divide women for other reasons. This is not to ignore contextual variations that may exist. These life narratives tell a different story. In specific historical moments, Kenyan women have come together and self-mobilised to address historical issues. This was the case during the Mau Mau liberation war, the rebuilding of their future after independence during the one-party State period, the critical moment of constitution-making that led to the current constitution and even after the 2007/2008 post-election violence that almost broke the spirit of Kenyan societies.

The narratives of Alice Yano, and Kamla Sikand, celebrate the resilience of women from the various communities. They reveal that women of different backgrounds come together to solidify the struggle for women's movement. This can be achieved in different ways: Achola calls for reviving African ethos eroded by colonialism and foreign religions; while Gachukia roots for the girl child education and research on gender. Another passionate advocate for mainstreaming rural women in women's movement discourse is Alice Yano. A brilliant lawyer from the Marakwet community, Alice served as a commissioner in the defunct Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC) and worked with other commissioners to ensure that women's issues were mainstreamed in the new constitution.

Salome Muigai, Daisy Amdany, Hon. Beatrice Elachi, and Fatuma Hassan, were among the youthful leaders in the women's movement. Salome displays the multifaceted nature of oppressed women. There are women with disabilities who suffer double discrimination because of their gender and also based on their physical challenges. Yet, as Salome's testimony elucidates, disability is not inability. She brings on board her personal experiences, skills in gender analysis, and sensitivity to PWDs to make women's lobbying realistic and compelling. She reminded everyone as she worked in the CKRC that the diversity of women and focus on their different challenges and interests were not negotiable. Daisy Amdany and Beatrice Elachi were young vibrant and self-driven women leaders as the struggle for constitution was ranging. They were foot soldiers. Today, they are leading in the women's movement. They have, with many other women taken over the baton, and taken charge of the race.

Conclusion

As you read these exciting life testimonies of courage, persistence, solidarity and hope, it is our desire that you will draw the inspiration that has kept the movement alive over the years. The call for unity of purpose among women, devoid of differences along party politics, ethnicity and status in life, must be heeded. The pathfinders have played their part. The gains are immortalised in the Constitution of Kenya 2010. The baton has shifted to young women leaders to ensure that all the women friendly provisions of the constitution are implemented. Young women should remember that the gains women enjoy did not come on their own; neither were they gifted by the governments of Kenya. The women fought consistently for these gains. Some of the women have paid a high price while others will live with emotional and physical scars, forever.

We have come from far and we still have a distance to cover. Though the journey may look sluggish, we draw inspiration from the words of hope shared by Martin Luther King Junior, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” It is the same with the struggle for women’s movement and constitution making and implementation in Kenya. Change takes time, but it surely comes.

Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, Elizabeth Auma, and Brender Akoth

CHAPTER ONE

Setting the Pace in Women's Participation in the Liberation Movement:

A Conversation with Field Marshal Muthoni



“When they discovered where we were, even if we were camping, we would ‘fly’ so that they don’t trace our footsteps.”

~ Field Marshal Muthoni

Biography

A top-ranking female fighter in the Mau Mau freedom struggle whose story subverts history that has for so long suppressed the sacrifices women made in Kenya’s liberation struggle and political leadership for years.

Muthoni is the only woman who gained the reputable rank of a Field Marshall, emerging from the forest in 1963 after the country attained independence.

Interviewed by Amanda Magitsu

Question: Thank you, Field Marshal. Your exploits during the struggle for freedom is an inspiration to many women today. If you allow, we can start with the story of your childhood.

Response: I was born at Kiawara, Kieni Sub County, Nyeri County and then moved to Ruirii (still in Kieni), about 10 km from the shopping centre. Since I was too young to walk long distances, I was carried on a donkey cart. The place is semi-arid, but we had to move since my father did not want to live near the Whites. While there, famine struck and Kieni suffered food shortages. My mother went to Endarasha, where his brother lived to look for food. The potatoes were in plenty. They were being fed to goats. Our uncle gave my mother two donkeys to transport potatoes to us. When my father realised that we would die of hunger, he asked for permission from the British to take care of his ailing mother.

My father engaged in a 'Karaya go slow' because he was limping. His employer was a British settler who was given land at the end of World War I. He agreed to employ my father for the children to offer labour on his pyrethrum farm. I grew up on that farm and got circumcised after attaining the age. I got married in 1949 after which we moved to Tetu. I was the third born in a family of 10: four boys and six girls. My two brothers and sisters have since passed on. Our first born is still alive, though she does nothing because of her advanced age.

Question: Do you recall events during the Mau Mau struggle for independence?

Response: Yes. I went to the forest in 1952, but before then, I was a businesswoman. I sold chicken in Nairobi. I also sold cows and goats, and thus, I was more informed than my husband. In fact, he did not know the political status of our country.

Question: Before you decided to go to the forest, what was the situation like?

Response: I understood the political status of our country better than my husband. That is what I want to explain to you first. Even before I went to the forest, I reported to Dedan Kimathi (the freedom fighter) and others about the political status. I used to wake up early in the morning, leaving my husband behind in the name of getting fodder for the goats. I could take the report to Kimathi and then come back. When he realised what was happening, he said, (while singing)... "*Bururi uyu wa Kenya ni witu,*

twaheirwo ni Ngai na tutikauma kuo” (Kenya is our country, we were given by God, and we shall never leave it). When I heard that I asked him, “where did you get that song from?” He said, “you don’t know what is happening,” assuming that I was the fool; little did he know I was reporting to Kimathi and his colleagues. When I realised this, I took him to the warriors fighting then, but I lied. I told him that his sister was being called by his father in law. That the father was in the neighbouring forest; in fact, his home was there, the other side of the forest, and in between was a river. Little did he know that this was where the warriors were camping. He asked me if we were going with Wanjugu (his sister), “are you not going with us?” I told him I would since I knew I had already made arrangements on the other side.

Question: That one you had really planned!

Response: On arrival, he was given a warm welcome unlike to others because they used to be beaten thoroughly to gauge their courage. I had already made prior arrangements by taking sheep which was a requirement. I was also known to them as I had worked with them. When he got in, he was sworn in. Since he was a courageous man, he was entrusted with the task of spying on the village since Kimathi was no longer available. The homeguards were spreading all over. They suspected that my husband had gone to the forest. They came to me demanding to know his whereabouts. I told them he had gone to Nyeri the previous day. I added that I had even given him eggs, but he had not come back. I told them I was not sure whether he had gone to Meru.

Question: All this time that you were doing this work, had you taken the oath yourself?

Response: Why would I be collaborating with them? I had known all these things for about two years without sharing with my husband? This is what I didn’t want to mention. The guards returned on the third day and asked me whether he had come back. I told them he had not and I did not know what had happened, or whether he had gone back to Kieni where he lived before. I noted that they were suspecting something. I had some money... thousands.....I had eight hundred shillings. I decided that I will not keep it in the house but somewhere outside, where there was grass. I dug a hole and hid it there. The soul is in the stomach! If God has said you will not die.... you cannot perish! In fact, I don’t know why people leave the word of God and rely on other things!” I was beaten until I started bleeding from every opening: from the nose, and other parts. They started digging all over, including rolling out stones while looking for money as they knew I was a businesswoman.

Question: Why all these beatings. Did they want you to disclose where your husband was?

Response: How will I disclose that he had gone to sell eggs in Nyeri? They left me a helpless person. In fact, they thought I had died. I was rescued by people while in critical condition and treated using proceeds from the sale of chickens, cows and goat, because many loved me.. Nyathogora!(in reference to Nyathogora who was listening to her story). People were united, and they loved each other! When we were fighting for freedom, we were united. I don't know where the love we had for each other has gone to. They took me to my sister-in-law's place. She was living near the forest. They treated me by washing my body using warm salty water. They also bought me medicine. I did not know where my belongings, including clothes, had gone except the one I wore at the time.

Question: So, did the guards take your belongings?

Response: I don't know who took them, including cows, goats and the chicken, because I was unconscious. While at Wanjugu's, I used to go to the forest, pretend that I was fetching firewood as I checked whether there were home guards around. I did that for three days, and on the fourth day, I did not go back to Wanjugu's home.

I did not go back to Nyathogora! There was suspicion that people had entered the forest. I stayed for some time without seeing the rest.

Question: How long did it take you to find the rest?

Response: I stayed alone for a week, spending nights on top of trees. I would first check that the elephants are not nearby, and at dusk, I would climb and sleep there. I used to eat strawberries and other wild fruits. "I have been interviewed by people even from California, and no one has ever fought for us (meaning freedom fighters). We just read in the books, but we have not benefited in any way."

Question: Were the men looking for you?

Response: Yes. They started looking for me when they heard that I had gone into the forest. I thought if I had gone to where I used to fetch the food for the boys, I would meet them. You could not go during the day; you had to wait until 6.30pm in the

evening as we feared the rhinos. They were the most dangerous animals in the forest. So, I went tiptoeing while on the lookout for the rhinos. When I approached the place, I saw the fighters; they were at a hideout though there were no home guards around. When they saw me, Nyathogora! They lifted me out of happiness. They told me that they had been looking for me and were worried that I may have been attacked by wild animals. From there, I became a fighter. We fought and were beaten as the British did not know the forest well, but were led by an ordinary person like you, Nyathogora. I stayed for three months without meeting my husband.

We travelled through the forest from Nyeri to Nyandarua and up to Murang'a, spying on the British. The good thing was that we had befriended even their cooks. The cooks colluded with us on their whereabouts. They could not report if they spotted us anywhere in the forest. As we moved on, we damaged the bridges to frustrate their movements. When the cooks brought food to the British, they could whisper to us, "He is eating now and on hearing that we could pop-in without their knowledge. Upon seeing us, they raised their hands in surrender, pleading with us not to kill them. On seeing that, we took advantage and confiscated all their guns. without shooting them.

When they discovered where we were, even if we were camping, "we would 'fly' so that they don't trace our footsteps." Three days did not pass before they discovered that I had entered the forest. Even Chief Muhoya knew that I had entered the forest. They were looking for me. Often, we went without food, forcing us to break into the white man's stores to steal wheat. This was too dangerous because it could cost someone's life as the *wazungu* guarded their stores. "Imagine how raw wheat tastes? We ate it that way! God!" Before then, we used to get food from women and men in the village. They cooked and delivered it; a woman like you would grind maize and cook for us.

After some of us surrendered, things changed for the worse; if they disclosed that Nyathogora, for instance, was the one who had brought us food, the person would be arrested and detained. They told us not to ask for food from them. We wore sacks; those were our clothes. When our clothes got torn, we mended them. ... (*Muthoni becomes emotional and starts crying on recalling what they went through*). "People now sit in the parliament and start proposing this country's way forward without caring about what we went through. Let us stop it there!"

Question: You have worn sacks!

Response: They used to get tattered, and if I tell you, Nyathogora, that I used to tie a rope on the bust and the waist and then insert leaves from *Mukeu* (a particular type of tree), you may not believe it, but that is how it was. Things worsened as the number of those surrendering increased. It was challenging for us to get food. Even when we picked *sukuma wiki*, we could not leave the stem behind as it would sell us; we uprooted the whole plant. Let me be sincere with you, Nyathogora. Even if we stayed with you here for 300 years, narrating the forest story, it would not end because it is full of many problems and temptations. We made guns using water pipes that we disconnected from British water connections. I can tell you, the homemade gun was more potent than theirs. When we fired our guns, they wondered what kind of a weapon it was. Some died while others became sickly and weak. We directed the sick out of the forest while others surrendered.

I was a leader in this group. I started at the rank of a Captain and then climbed higher to be a Brigadier. I presided over the anointing of Kimathi, even though not many in the forest knew that he was ordained. I was elected by others to preside over the ceremony. We wore unique gowns that were only for those who had demonstrated they' were brave.

Question: Was this after five years?

Response: Yes Some were in the forest and don't know that. We continued fighting. After some time, I met my husband, but we never had sexual intercourse. We could not, and it was not even allowed.

Question: How about the young men who were in there?

Response: They could not, and if you did so, you would be hanged on a tree if caught.

Question: How many women were in there?

Response: They were many because every camp had girls, and the camp could not exceed 100 persons to avoid raising the alarm.

Question: Were all these women in the forest active?

Response: They were all heroes because young girls were left to guard the camp; others fetched firewood, cooked and dug trenches where the fire was lit. Others could even get guns from the soldiers and bring them to the men.

Question: How about when you were going to war?

Response: When we went to war, everyone was asked to prepare and take care of themselves. The girls could cook. Men also used to cook. At the time, Kimathi was known as the leader, and they were looking for him. One day, we saw a hidden newspaper and we asked the owner to give it to us. The following day, we read it and found out that on December 12 1963, Kenya would be attaining independence.

Question: When was this now?

Response: It was in November 1963, about a month before. After we had read that, we decided to send someone to Nairobi. They agreed that they will send me. They bought me shoes, clothes and a headscarf. They also hired a vehicle which belonged to a man called Kariuki. I was told to sleep at the back. I was then covered with cartons so that nobody would know that there was somebody in the vehicle. I was taken to a building at Jeevanjee Gardens in Nairobi to a room upstairs. I had come to confirm from Kenyatta what we had read in the newspaper; that Kenya will attain independence. The report was taken to Kenyatta, and he enquired where I had come from. I explained that I had come from the village. They investigated to establish the truth because they feared that I could be spying on Kenyatta. They even went to the senior chief Muhoya who said that I was among those who had started MAU MAU in Kenya. In fact, he added that they were looking for me. I had helped some girls who had gone to fetch firewood – a correct claim because I had actually helped some girls get the firewood out of the forest. The senior chief said I was from the woods. This is the report that made me gain access to Kenyatta. After a week, I went to see Kenyatta at Jogoo House. When he saw me, he started crying. He asked me, “Muthoni, all those years, you have been in the forest?” I responded in the affirmative.

He also asked me what I had been eating, wearing or sleeping. And all this time, Kenyatta is still crying. It was raining heavily, and you know whenever there is war it is usually dry but here it was raining. So now, when I told him everything was provided by

God, he kept quiet. So, he wondered how we survived because he used to be taken to a small room whenever it rained, and he also used to be given some ugali to eat. I told him we ate God, slept God and dressed God. I told him I was sent to confirm whether on 12th December Kenya would indeed be independent so that we come out of the forest. Kenyatta assured me that Kenya would attain independence. "Tell them that it is me, Wa Muigai, who has told you so when you get back." He asked me how I got there. I informed him those others who had not surrendered hired a vehicle and bought me clothes. On hearing that, he said now the car that brought you would not be the one that will take you back. He told me that Wa Muigai will issue a vehicle to take me back to the forest where I had come from. On 12th December, he said that he would also send a car to bring me to Uhuru Park to witness the British flag being lowered, and on 16th, at Ruringu.

Question: If I may take you back, where was Kimathi all along? You have not been mentioning him?

Response: We seldom met. At times, he would send for me. I was called Mama Thonjo because you could not call yourself by your name. Others called themselves a trunk or anything to avoid real names. Nobody was called by their name.

Question: What happened in Ruringu on December 16th?

Response Only a few of us went there, because the vehicle could not carry many people. When the flag was being raised, we stood up and started singing:

Riria Kimathi witu ambatire kirima iguru (when our Kimathi climbed up the mountain)

Nietirie hinya kuma na iguru (he asked for power from above)

Wakuhota Nyakeru (to defeat the whiteman)

Many people joined us. We had no ordinary clothes. We sat down. I used to carry out the roll call for Kimathi, in which he used to fill in our details. I was acting like Kimathi's personal assistant.

Question: Let's go back to the 16th.

Response: It is the one which I have told you. We were brought in a vehicle. Imagine the cowards who surrendered! They had been given guns to shoot us so that some of us do not come out. I had made a flag and decorated it as it is now with a skin, came with it and handed it over to Kenyatta. I stood on a pulpit and gave a speech. We had come out of the forest officially.

Question: Did Kenyatta come to the occasion on 16th?

Response: As I have told you, he is the person who climbed on the table and spoke. I even asked him to allow us to be going back to the forest once a year so that we could go to Nyandarua and Kirinyaga to remember the bones of those that we had lost in the forest. This never happened. "I want you to get this; don't forget, even if you ask the British, they will tell you that only three from Nyeri came out of the forest; in Embu, only four came out."

Question: Were there women who came out?

Response: They were there although others had died. I was one of those who came out alive. On the 16th, only three of us from Nyeri came out because some had surrendered, while others had been detained. Those who submitted used to do this; if they persuade you to surrender and you don't, they later on chased you, caught up with you and forced you to submit. And if you still refused, they shot you.

Question: Complete the story of those who came out of the forest.

Response: Meru had 25 people who came out of the forest. Some surrendered, while others died. We are the only ones who fought to the end. We were very young and newly married. We used to call them Ngorobu; though not their real names. I have forgotten the names of others. Those who helped us were detained. For instance, (Mama) Ngina had been arrested because of Kenyatta. They are the ones who prepared the Jomo Kenyatta Sports field.

Question: Did those who were detained tell you what they went through?

Response: If you ask me about the detail, I will lie to you.

Question: So, you don't know what they underwent?

Response: They suffered so much, but I don't want to dwell on that because I don't know much. Let me tell you because giving information has no shame. Women conspirators were severely punished. The wife of Mathenge had a weighing machine tied to her breasts, and she was made to swing it. Others were sexually harassed by inserting devices in their vagina (Muthoni starts lamenting how careless the current generation has become). They joke around with independence, oblivious of the price we paid for it. We were really beaten and had it not been for God, I don't know where we would be. And they are now living carelessly without safeguarding the country. I wonder who will be left behind to protect the country since they are all lost to drinking and abusing drugs. We sacrificed our lives for a better life with our generations to come, but now it seems all is lost in alcohol.

Question: I heard you talk about (Is this in reference to Field Marshall Mwariama?)

Response: No, she died. Kenyatta did not favour any side. Remember, he promised us the land which we fought for. Moi gave us someKsh.200,000 to write the story you want me to narrate, but some people like you came. They were 20, and didn't know that we were aware of it. In fact, there was a time when Moi said, if you give birth to a child and then abandon it, who will take care of it? This is because the Kikuyu are aware of the work we did fighting for independence, but they have no business. We wrote the story, but the books are still in the library. I am saying this is just the skeleton that I am giving you; the details are withheld. Uhuru said he has investigated, and he has realised it is indisputable that Kimathi and I climbed up to raise the flag.

Question: I would like to ask you about your hair.

Response: I have been promised so much money, but I have received nothing. However, I shaved the initial hair I had at Ruringu; it was longer. The hair is significant because it signifies that we are not ruled by the British. Some black people are worse than the whites who oppressed us. Look at the kind of life we lead instead of enjoying the freedom we fought for.

Question: If you are told to go back to the forest, would you go?

Response: I would and train others. I hear our people are dying in some regions. I wish I could tell them if you have war, you don't sleep. I can train them to fight their enemies back. Kimathi went to different places such as Kirinyaga, Nyandarua or even

Murang'a. He even used to send me to Murang'a to get items since we were the ones who had been elected. In Murang'a, Kihonge and I had been elected. Our responsibility was to lead prayers, and God used to hear us. In fact, Kimathi was not killed. He was betrayed by a woman who went to him to find out whether he was still alive. This war was brutal because some among us made things difficult for each other, while others, while were collaborators. Kimathi was captured in the same place where the woman who betrayed him came from.

Question: Did you discover that Kimathi had been captured?

Response: Yes. We were informed by those who were there. The British would have gone very early. We made life difficult for each other because Kimathi was not shot by a white man. In fact, it was my relative (her aunt's husband) who shot Kimathi. Up to now, I don't believe Kimathi was killed by the white man. All the same, it is okay. Their lawyer, the Miller, called me in his office and asked me to write the names of those we were with. There are three categories of these people – those in the forest, in detention, and those in the villages supporting warriors.

Question: Can you remember the year Kimathi was captured?

Response: I can't recall the exact year, but it is about 1959 because we were almost getting out of the forest. It was about two years before then, but I cannot remember the exact date. Those who can tell you the same date are those who were at home. Have you ever gone there? It is in Ihururu, Tetu, on the other side of Chania. We will be going there next month.

Question: So, you don't know what happened to Kimathi after he was captured?

Response: Yes, we don't know.

Question: When you were in the forest, Kenyatta did not go in there because he was in exile. Were you communicating with them because they also claim they were fighting using books?

Response: They used to write letters. J.M used to write with others like Nderitu Gaturwa from Mathira; he is the one who used to guard us at Ruring'u after independence. We stayed at the camp because our homes had been burnt. We had to wait desperately for the government to settle us. After three months, the policemen were sent to us

to chase us away from Ruring'u. They had guns and were ready to shoot. It rained heavily. They had to go away even though we had told them that we were prepared for anything. What we had gone through was worse. They did not shoot. However, we were taken to Nairobi at Jeevanjee and given rooms there, but those from Meru went back. We were asked to leave three months later, helplessly – people who fought for freedom". We were mistreated to the extent that we slept in the toilet. "I want to tell you, I don't enjoy anything, even eating and drinking. I can forget everything except my trust in God."

I do not know where I get money from, even now but I am now focused on building the church. When we were in the forest, we prayed to God and promised Him that if he helped us win, we would make Him a Church to worship Him. In fact, I have built several churches, not only in Nyeri, but also in other places like Meru. One of them is the AIPCK, where I worship. I am a patron and chairman but I don't campaign for those positions. They just elect me. I am an ordained preacher, and I have even gone to America to preach. I encouraged everyone to trust in God while in foreign land since God is faithful. For twenty-two years in the forest (day and night), he was with me, and I came out alive.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

CHAPTER TWO

A Conversation with Jael Mbogo



“Leaders come and go. If the leaders knew that leaders come and go, there would be no crime, no pressure, no anger, no grudge and no nothing. They would serve faithfully and be prepared to hand over the baton to the next leader”.

~ Hon. Jael Mbogo

Biography

Hailing from Eldama Ravine in Rift Valley Province, Hon. Jael Mbogo is a Kenyan leader of global repute. She is an accomplished social worker, women’s rights campaigner and a successful politician, hence a source of inspiration to many young women leaders. She was the Secretary-General of FORD Kenya in 2002. While working with the Education Centre for Women in Democracy (ECWD), she advocated for foundations that supported women in politics.

Interviewed by Agnes Mugane

Question: Thank you, Jael, for granting us this interview. Kindly tell me about your childhood.

Response: I was born in 1933 in Eldama Ravine, Rift Valley. My father was a farmworker on a *Mzungu's* farm. He resigned from his work and returned to the village following my grandfather's death in 1942. This was expected of a firstborn Luo male child. So, he took us all to Ugenya in Nyanza. I didn't know the local language; some traditional rituals I witnessed scared me. I played with other children in the village, which enabled me to learn the local language faster to express myself. I was taken to school around 1945/1946. It was an elementary school with only one classroom. Our books were the floor where we scribbled. In the corridor, on the floor, that is where our books were. We put some stones around and wrote with our fingers. Our teacher marked our work with a stick, either right or wrong. If you got the assignment wrong, you were beaten on your left hand.

The beauty of it was that progress to the next grade depended on how sharp you were. In four months, I moved from pre-unit to class one, and in one year, I covered two Classes. In 1949, I did what you call Common Entrance Examination. It was a national examination in class four. I passed very well and started writing on a piece of paper using a pencil. Otherwise, our sticks and our classrooms were outside under the tree. I joined an intermediate school at Samia Girls in Standard Five. I remained there for three years until I sat the KAPE, the equivalent of what you now call the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Again, I passed very well and was admitted to the Alliance Girls in Kikuyu. I now moved from Nyanza to Central Kenya.

Education for girls was not accessible in those days. I was allowed to go to school on the condition that on Saturdays, I grazed my father's cows. I remember an incident in class four. I came home, and I was number one in our class. My father was annoyed when I told him I was number one. I was beaten and punished for being number one only while other classmates were getting large numbers. How could I get number one out of thirty-five? That day I was disciplined. I did not go to school that week. My father complained that I should have worked hard to be in position twenty-nine or, better still, the whole thirty-five. I tried to explain to him that my being number one meant a lot, but he could not understand. He complained that I went to school to play while others were working hard in their studies, which is why I had only number one; at least twenty was better than one.

A while later, I remember our pastor coming to look for me in the cow shed when they missed me at school. He took me to my father. He explained to him what being number one meant. He explained to my father that number one was the best in our class. He used the local example of our local musician called Abugi. He was a blind musician that earned trophies in all performances. Abugi always led the choir as they sang and danced, moving in a circle. I can never forget Abugi because he was always number one, meaning *achiel* in Dholuo. My father listened to the pastor attentively then he started scratching his head. He then asked the pastor: "is that what it meant being number one?" The pastor answered in the affirmative and emphasised to my father the school wanted me back as soon as possible because the other children were preparing for exams. The pastor added that the school would rank better if I sat my exam with others.

My father eventually understood that position one meant that I was the best in the class. Henceforth, he supported me throughout my education up to secondary school. His peers rebuked him because he had kept me at home for far too long without marrying me off. I was not very young, and by the time I joined Alliance Girls, I was already eighteen years old. According to Luo traditions, all girls who had attained the age of fifteen years and above were supposed to be married off straight away. Therefore, my father was committing a grave mistake in the area. I was of marriage age, but he ignored it in favour of my education. In fact, he asked me if I wanted to continue with my education, to which I readily answered yes.

I eventually got married because there were only three jobs for girls at the time: teaching, nursing and the third one was 'marriage'. I opted for nursing because I did not like teaching. However, I could not bear the sick. Eventually, I left the hospital. Even though I got married, I did not stop my quest for higher education. In 1960, I went to the United States to pursue the degree course. When I got married, I told my husband that I wanted to continue with my degree course, which I had not finished. I returned in 1962 and worked briefly in Tanzania as a Private Secretary to Nyerere when he was the Prime Minister.

I joined politics when I came from Tanzania because it was an independent country, with Nyerere as the Prime Minister. The following year, Tanzania was destined to become a Republic. I came back really motivated. When I went to America for two and a half years, it coincided with the time John F. Kennedy was campaigning, and my scholarship came through the League of Women Voters of the USA. I was awarded the scholarship and a political training tour after winning a competition. I later joined the

Canadian League of Women of the USA. We campaigned vigorously for JF Kennedy and he won. He was still the President of the USA by the time I returned to Kenya.

Back in Kenya, the country was getting ready for independence. The Kikuyus and the Luos had already ganged up in Nairobi to fight for freedom in Kenya. We said we wanted space now and not tomorrow. We fought hard until we got our independence. Before going to America, I had joined the political party then, KANU. I was a councillor in Nairobi, nominated by the colonialists to represent the interests of Eastland's natives. We were called the natives, not Africans but the natives in the Eastlands. We were there with Lydia, (can we possibly get her second name?) James Kasyoka, Amalemba, and Shoni (their second names?). We were the first six nominated councillors to represent the interest of the Eastlands region: these were Kaloleni, Makongeni, Mbotela, Kariokor, Bahati, and Makadara. We had one person representing the interests of the sick at King Georges Hospital, which is now Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH). I remained in this position for two years before I went to America. When I came back, six other women and I demanded the leadership of Maendeleo Ya Wanawake. We went to the ministry, and eventually, Maendeleo was surrendered to us by the British colonial wives. We were given one round table, a typewriter and the constitution. We started working and established Maendeleo ya Wanawake. We elected Phoebe Asiyo as the President.

All this happened before independence. After independence, Phoebe was appointed the Commissioner of Prisons, and she had to resign from Maendeleo. I was the Secretary-General, but the women insisted that I take over as the president. So, I succeeded her. I was the President of MYWO for ten years. We were only two presidents in Kenya; Mzee Kenyatta and Jael Mbogo.

In my work at Maendeleo, I realised we had a challenging task of uplifting women to leadership positions in this country. The colonialists used women as the labour force, and getting them to come for the club meeting was a challenge. Even when they came, they could not contribute meaningfully because they had little children on their backs or laps. The woman had no time for self-improvement, not even time to improve their skills. At the time, women were not getting any penny for their labour in White man's farms because, as squatters, their work was free. They got small places to live in and received *posho* in return for their labour at the end of the week. *Posho* was *unga ya kilo mbili mbili* (two kilograms of maize flour) for every family. I was very annoyed; I started engaging in research and discussing how to get the women out of this trouble. I organised many clubs for women and even got permission for them to

start attending the club activities. I was arrested many times, especially in Rift Valley, until they understood what I wanted.

At the clubs, I taught literacy – reading and writing – knitting, baking cakes and scones, did embroidery work and tapestry to decorate our homes. We also opened up a nursery school for the babies so that women could come to the club while their children are taken care of. This did not please the *mzungu*. One particular woman called Mrs. Picford in Londiani ordered my arrest in Nakuru after a few days. I was charged with interfering with the smooth running of the farms in the Rift Valley by inciting women to leave work and attend club meetings twice a week. I argued my case, and later on, Pickford opened a club on her own farm where women attended learning sessions. Progress in uplifting African women motivated me a lot in my work. I missed the 1963 elections narrowly because I was attending the All-Africa Women Conference in Germany. Muthoni Likimani and I were in Germany for three months. We learnt how to conduct ourselves as women leaders in a free country. I came back, and the KANU nominations were on for the 1963 elections. But even KANU, as a party, did not have self-declared candidates. The candidates came after elections when the ballots were put together, and it emerged that KANU had won. That is how people like Achieng Oneko were posted in Nakuru North, someone was posted in Marsabit, and my friend Kibaki was posted in Bahati where I was. For six years, the people of Bahati did not know who their representative was because there were no direct campaigns. After 1963, came the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). The elections were delayed until 1969. I declared myself a candidate for Bahati in Nairobi. This is the time I decided to plunge into elective politics with full force. Wambui Otieno also announced her candidature for Langata and Westlands. At the same time, Beatrice Kanini in Embu also faced off with Jeremiah Nyaga in a political contest. Beatrice was smart; *ni Kanini kweli and Nyaga ni mrefu; but alimuangusha lakini akanyang'anywa tu kama mimi* (Like her name, Kanini was a tiny woman but she faced off with Jeremiah Nyaga who was tall and well built. Unfortunately, she was rigged of her electoral victory like me).

In Kisumu, it was Grace Onyango, my teacher at Nyena Girls, when I was there. We campaigned vigorously, and Grace won, but I was not lucky. Not because I did not win, but because Mzee said, “Why has ‘*kamutumia*’ (a mere woman) taken the seat of the Finance Minister? *Njoroge angalia hiyo maneno!*” (Njoroge, look into that matter). After four days, Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner. Again in 1974, I went back to the game, and this time I told Kibaki, “You have to go to Othaya because this time you are not going to parliament”. This is the time I resigned from Maendeleo Ya Wanawake. However, I was given an ultimatum: “If you are not stepping down for Kibaki, we are

going to remove you from Maendeleo.” Rather than surrender to blackmail, I resigned from Maendeleo. I had a vision for the women of Kenya, and I was committed to it. I knew what I wanted and what I was fighting for; at the end of the day, it was the woman of Kenya, and she had to be liberated and emancipated. Nobody would do it, and nobody else understood it well except me. I let go of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake seat to open the doors of parliament for women leaders. When you ask me what motivated me, it is the plight of the women and the fact that I was brought up in the Rift Valley. Later on, during the peak of emergency, I was living around here, and I saw it all; women’s pain remained with me for a long time. The people who suffered most during the state of emergency were women. We opened up the Dagoretti Children’s home when I was at Alliance. We rescued children left behind by their parents when they either died or were detained. We would pick up children every weekend and take them to Dagoretti Children’s home in Kikuyu.

I did not know why all this was happening. However, still, when I look back, I don’t regret it because I was not looking for self-glory or fame, I was looking for the place of women to be acknowledged and supported. I have not had many big jobs in big companies in my life, but I have remained a faithful servant of women. I recently resigned from a position I started in 1993; the Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change(4Cs). The 1992 elections also left a big dent on us when all the women we prepared for elections did not make it through the political party nominations. That angered us a lot and from there, about thirty of us went to Mt. Kenya and established an educational centre for women in democracy. That is where I worked for over seven years on the women catalogue that you see now because I headed the desk for support for women in public life.

For each election, I worked with 25 women, preparing them, supporting them and educating them on how to go about successful nominations and election campaigns. I also helped them with their personal research on various issues. I employed researchers for them. We also gave financial support to them during nominations and after nominations. I am glad that some of them have made it: Cecily (Mbarire) was one of our trainees. Charity Ngilu was there earlier, as well as Julia Ojiambo. When Julia came, she was terrified because Ochuada (other name?), her political opponent, was a huge man. I told Julia not to worry because it was not her own energy that would carry Ochuada and put him down, but it was the brain we would use. Julia made it.

When (Okiki) Amayo gave Phoebe a hard time in Karachuonyo by-elections, I was there to offer solidarity. I spent some time with her on the ground, campaigned for her, and

told the people that 'Phoebe was not Okiki Amayo'. I told them the parliament is a dirty house, and it needed a broom to be swept by people who can do it. We carried brooms, and we went sweeping the roads: the symbol for Phoebe was a broom. We convinced people that the house had dirty corners and Amayo could not clean them because he is a man. We did it, but it was very rough because it was a by-election. Phoebe had won, but Moi insisted that it was Amayo that he wanted. So, I told the people that we would initiate a quiet campaign because we knew Phoebe would not win, for even if it meant rigging, Amayo would do it. So, I told the men if they are supporting Phoebe, if you meet with her, just adjust your jacket, and that is all. If you are a woman supporter of Phoebe, when you see her, raise one shoulder up and even if it is in the market. You want to greet another woman, just increase the shoulder and say 'hae'. So that was it. When women met, it was 'hae', 'hae' while raising their one shoulder and for men the same way while adjusting their jackets, and they all knew it was Phoebe. And Phoebe went through three times!

The other thing that you wanted me to say is that I am still committed, but I have retired from active politics. I cannot go to the rallies because I cannot run and I have been sick. I am recovering from a very major operation. However, I am available here for anyone who wants my advice and support. This is because only God has graciously donated these few years to me, and in July 2013, I was eighty years old, so I said enough is enough. Let me now sit back and leave these offices to the young digital girls like you people to continue. I am currently a 'resource centre'; I am like a library where you come and dig out what you cannot get from wherever you are. If you want to know about a,b,c,d, I am available here. I am now the custodian. I was the chairperson, of the 4C's (Citizens, Coalition for Constitutional Change), but when our executive director resigned abruptly, I had to take over the management. I did the management work at the 4Cs until we employed a new Executive Director before I left. I now do some consultancy work only when it is necessary but not on a full-time basis.

I want to mentor the young women who want to join the race because this is a continuous process. We come and go like the day. We should be like Taita Towett. He was asked to give a speech and hand over an organisation he was leading. He came, well dressed as usual, in a Leso that was hanging from behind and a Kofia, and he said, "Leaders come and go, I came and I am now gone therefore even the one who will come will also go." Leaders come and go. If the leaders knew that the leaders come and go, there would be no crime, no pressure, no anger, no grudge, no nothing. They would serve faithfully and be prepared to hand over the baton to the next leader.

The 4Cs fought explicitly for the new constitution and by the time the new constitution was being promulgated on 27th August 2010, the struggle had taken over 20 years. We demanded a review of the Kenyan Constitution. We came up with a mock constitution and called it 'Kenya *Tuitakayo*' (The Kenya We Want). It was a draft constitution. We worked for it tirelessly at all levels, and in 2010, the constitution was promulgated. The 4Cs had to change its name to Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Culture, not change.

I had an impact while working with Education Center for Women in Democracy (ECWD). We identified potential women leaders, empowered them with education, and supported them politically. We also ran a training programme that lasted three years for those who wanted to contest for elective positions. Those who graduated went out for nominations with various political parties. I think I did my part and it reaches a time when you look back and say, I need to sit back and appreciate what I have done. That is why I am telling you that you will have to hand over the baton to the next person.

I can confidently claim I am a pioneer. However, it was hard, including being called names. Some women were even beaten up for associating with me. They were asked, "*ulikuwa na yule mama? kichwa mbaya, Mwenda wazimu, mwenye anataka kwenda Bunge, Bunge si ya Wanawake!*" (Were you with that woman? That mad woman, the one who wants to go to parliament? Parliament is not for women!). Even while with Maendeleo, I could escort women back to their homes and ask their husbands to open the doors for them: "Baba Salim, open the gate for mama Fatuma." Then they would ask me: "Are you the one who was with her?" And I would say: "Yes. *Tulikuwa na yeye.*" (I am the one who was with her). They had built trust in me, but some never believed nor trusted me. They thought I had taken their wives out for dinner to teach them how to run away and become politicians like men.

May I say to women that we are leaders even when we are at home with our husbands and sons. When the men come back home and find that food is ready, the house is clean, and the children are happy - this is leadership. Who can do that if she is not a leader? That is leadership in a big way. I did what I could do, and I think we are not severely off except for some work that needs to be done, especially now when we are going for general elections (2022). Women are quiet. I am not sure whether they are campaigning behind the scenes. I usually see vocal women in Mombasa but here at the centre, there is nothing; it is all silent. We had only one lady elected, Millie Odhiambo. You know we had Grace Ogot, Grace Onyango, Julia Odhiambo, Phoebe earlier? In this

last election (2013) only one lady was directly elected. I don't know in Western whether we had any woman elected and in Kisii.

Question: I think there isn't any in Western and in Kisii.

Response: In County Assemblies, they had enough, but in the parliament, it was terrible. In the County Assembly, we had comparably many women County Reps because seats had been reserved for women. Still, it is in the direct election that we will have a voice. Personally, I could have been nominated many times and way earlier but I refused because I wanted to stand in the house of parliament to air my views and be heard. When I am nominated, I am there to clap or to vote as directed.

If you are talking about gender issues and the two-thirds gender rule, there was a time we went for party elections at Limuru. FORD Kenya had started the two-thirds gender rule a long time ago. There was one seat reserved for a woman from the Western province, but there was no woman. Martin Shikuku told me that I should represent women of the Western region. We asked him to go back to the dressing room to offer him an extra skirt to wear. This did not happen, but that is how serious it is. In some instances, men can put on dresses inside and trousers outside and claim to represent our women's interests. Only women can reclaim what belongs to them. Only a woman knows where the shoe pinches.

I want to hear more voices, more vigour from the women. I am a bit saddened to see some beautiful organisations that we started falling apart because of corruption. They should be soliciting funds, supporting women, and creating a foundation to finance women's political agenda. But corruption is a serious matter. It is not only in government, parastatals, and private sector, but also within women organisations. You still find some corrupt women. These are the women who are killing our efforts, killing our initiative and killing our dreams of moving forward. I still believe there is still more room for more committed women organisations to come up and ask women to come together and push the agenda forward. It is not a competition. We should not compete with one another but try to complement one another to achieve our goal. I believe that Kenya can have a woman president, and it is not a dream; it is something achievable. What is needed is proper planning and unity of purpose. This mumbo jumbo that you hear in Kenya will only end with a woman president. I want the dream of women's leadership to be realised in my lifetime.

Question: Can you tell us your reflections on Affirmative Action within political parties?

Response: Affirmative Action within political parties is missing because when it comes to nominations, men always carry money in baskets. However, women have been let down by their low socioeconomic status. When I was at ECWD, I always advocated for foundations that would support women in political life. The foundation would give them money, publish the materials, do research for them and help them campaign. Do you know the difference between women and men in politics? I am sorry to say this,, but women always like to talk about issues while men will always talk propaganda and conduct 'thorax' campaigns. When I was a leader, I thought it would reach a time in Kenya when no one offered themselves as candidates. Instead, the delegation that you have lived with would approach you, "Mama, please dress up we are going to take you to a rally where we are going to nominate you as our leader." The electorate would plead with you to lead them. They honour you because they have seen you, listened to you, watched, gathered information about you, understood you and realised that you can be a leader.

The kind of politics in which one carries a briefcase full of money and dishes out goodies to people to buy their support is wrong. When I vied for an elective post in 1969, the people of Eastlands came for me in my house at Parklands. They told me that they have come to me to be their leader, *ni wewe tunataka*, (you are the one that we want) because we know you, have been with you have worked for us, and want you to represent us. Even in 1974, I went back again because people had seen my work. If that happens, the issue of money will be a foregone case. Voter bribery will be history. After all, you had not gone there because you had a lot of money or the monopoly of knowledge. Your track record, character, and substance spoke for you. This is too superior; my idea of leadership has earned me many more enemies than friends because of the position I take. I don't want to go out and tell people, I wish to *ongoza* (lead) you! Who are you to *ongoza* them? They should be the ones who come to you and tell you that among us here, it is you that we want to be our leader. Then there will be no question of paying them, no point of buying them, no matter of bribing them because they are the ones who have come for you.

Corruption has been everywhere to the extent that we say even the insects are now corrupt; *hata inzi wenye unaona hapo kwa mlango wangu* (even the flies that you are seeing on my door) are corrupt. Corruption is profound, and it started in a small way, but now it is in billions. Have you ever heard of a country where doctors are in prison?

Ushawahi sikia nchi Dakitari wamewekwa jela na watu wanakufa? (have you heard of a country that has imprisoned its doctors and people are dying). Even in the colonial time, doctors were never allowed to go on strike because of the kind of service they give, their type of profession. It has happened nowhere except in Kenya. And you start saying *eti unataka kura* (that you want votes)? *Kura ya mtu amekufa itafaidi wewe?* (how will a dead man's vote benefit you?) That is a straightforward question, *unaweka kila kitu chini, unakaa chini na daktari* (you need to put aside everything else and have a candid talk with doctors) and you sought them out to go back to work, whether good or bad. *Tena, only doctors wanakaa University miaka saba, mtu anakaa university miaka saba alafu anatoka anaenda jela?* (It is only doctors who study in the university for seven years only to go to jail afterwards). That is ridiculous and unheard of! I have travelled far and wide but I have not seen these. *Hii dunia nimetembea, hakuna mahali sijaenda* (I have travelled extensively across the world), and I have never heard where the doctors have gone on strike for seventy-two days. Then their leaders are put in jail. *Mimi nimeshtuka* (I am surprised), but I hope someone will come up with a solution because it is dire if you are sick and there are no doctors to attend to you. *Kama mimi* (for instance), in 2015, I was ill. If the doctors were on strike, *leo hamngenipata hapa* (you would not have found me here) because I had a major surgery that took 20 hours. Even doctors were wondering whether I could make it at my advanced age. I told them to stop looking at my age because *mimi ni mgonjwa na nataka mnisaidie* (I am sick and I want you to help me). I am only eighty years. They (medics) wanted to put me on chemo, but I told them the only thing my children and I will authorise was surgery because I knew chemotherapy will not work for me at my age and that I could not even last five sessions. So I told the doctor, I was strong physically, spiritually *na wewe utachinja, utoe kila kitu na nitaamka!* (you will perform surgery, remove all the unwanted parts, and I will wake up) I will not disappoint you! So he agreed, and he told me that he will try and convince his colleagues. The surgery was done and it lasted for twenty hours, and here I am. But now, what I want is to have young women at least once a week for mentorship. That is what I miss. I used to have three students here, one is an orphan, and we have lived with her for eleven years. Now she is in Form Two. One has finished Form Four, the other is sitting for his exams this year, and the one you see here is an orphan; I assist her while looking after me.

I found a lot of energy in the young people, and I would like to see them go up, set their goals, and you only need to give them some little guidance here and there. The only thing about them is that they don't know how to look after themselves. The majority are messed up because they have nobody to guide them. I grew up in my grandmother's

hands after leaving Eldama Ravine, and for 10-years, I lived with her. The teachings she gave me have helped me up to date and there is no single day that I will ever forget to refer to her advice because she was such an amazing woman. She never went to school, but her school was the best for me. We were 18 of us, and she brought us up, moulded us and any time we asked her even the most stupid question, she always had an answer. I long to be discharged because I visit my doctor every three months for review. This time they gave me an appointment after six months. I hope I will be released and be given a certificate of heroism.

Question: Thank you very much for that discussion. Was your party the DP?

Response: God forbid. My party was FORD Kenya.

Question: How gender-responsive was FORD Kenya?

Response: I told you we were always together, but women were left out when it came to nominations.

Question: Is it that there was no constitution and the manifesto?

Response: Ford Kenya had the best constitution, and it had catered for the two-thirds very well. But when it came to nominations, I will tell you one thing, I wanted to contest for Embakasi in 2002. This is after Section 2A was repealed, and I was the Secretary-General for FORD Kenya. I had gone round the whole country establishing branch offices for the party. Still, when I said that I wanted to contest in Embakasi, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta called me and told me that he wanted me to run the elections from the office. I had campaigned, and the whole ground was Jael. Mzee said he had nominated Munyua Waiyaki to contest in Embakasi. I then asked him, "And me?" He said that he wanted me to remain in this office because the elections will not run smoothly if you leave. I know you, I know your energy, and I know your organisational skills. I want you to nominate candidates in all the 221 constituencies. He was somebody I respected, and therefore I told him "it is okay Mzee". I was sleeping in the office at a table like this, and I nominated 165 candidates that year.

I brought Orié Rogo Manduli to contest in Starehe by force. But in her first rally, Manduli came out in a miniskirt, and she was saying, "FOOOORD.....Kenyaaaa!" I looked at her and said, my goodness, who has a 'leso'? But she was a good candidate, nevertheless. She came second. Mzee had asked me if I could get candidates in Nairobi and I told

him that I had six. However, I had no one in Starehe and Westlands. He said that I had to get them! So I called Orie and gave her the nomination papers, and asked her to sign. Then, there was Wanjuguna; Wanjuguna was a coffee grower, and I took him to Westlands. Afterwards, I took the list back to Mzee and told him things are in order.

The political parties must change and start embracing women leadership. There is a lot of discrimination and undermining of women in political parties. Women must fight hard to find spaces in political party leadership. Suppose you are in a high position like the vice-chair or the secretary-general. In that case, they will be ashamed of leaving you out there but being a member *ile ya kupiga makofi na mdomo tu*, (that which you just applaud through clapping) will not take you anywhere. This is my advice to women because the political parties have not embraced women leadership. *Na hiyo maneno ya* (and that issue) gender balance is not coming out clearly. So my advice to women is that they should seek leadership positions within the parties and they should not be mere members. They should participate in party elections, party re-organisation *mpaka waone wameshika kiti ile muhimu* (until they seize that important position/seat) where they have a voice. You have to start from the political party. *Lakini* (but), nowadays, I don't see it happening.

Question: So, moving forward, which other opportunities do you see for women?

Response: Well, there was a time we were talking about women-led political parties, and I studied one: the Labour Party led by Julia. I noted that half of the time, it was dead and would only come up during elections. That is not good enough. The others are the parties led by Charity Ngilu, Martha Karua, Wanyiva Ndeti, and Mrs Akumu. *Mimi naona hizo tu* (those are the only ones I notice). In my view, Ngilu and Martha should have formed a coalition of women-led political parties to have a more substantial bargaining power when dealing with mainstream political parties. We thought having so many women-led parties is good, but the idea is not working well. *Kama ile ya Julia, si* (like that of Julia) Namwamba has taken, and he is now the Secretary-General.

I discovered another weakness when I campaigned. These young women; *hawa wenye watoto wawili watatu* (these with two or three children), they don't have voters card, *Bwana akishachukua kura wanasema, si bwana atapiga kura*, (when the husband has been listed as voter, he will just vote) and that is all. They also don't have Identity Cards. You find only one card in the house *na ndiyo wanatumia* (that is the one they use). *Akipata Simu* and she wants to register, *anachukua ID ya bwana yake na ana register nayo* (when she gets a phone and wants to register, she would use her husbands' ID

card). We must encourage them to take the IDs and register as voters through civic education. Civic education is very critical in all these things that we are doing, I must say that. It is important to have caucuses, workshops, conferences, and teach the citizens about their rights and their expectations.

Question: And this is what the government does not want.

Response: The government should support civic education because a government denying its people education is a sick one. What have they done about the other civic education on the constitution? Have you seen a president in the past going out to campaign? That is civic education. Otherwise, people will just be 'bought'. There was a time I went to Nakuru to meet women professionals. They asked me what was good in politics when all our councillors were illiterate. Look at the sewerage system; it is pathetic, the health conditions, the roads are all unfortunate. So, I asked them, how many are medical doctors here? They raised their hands. How many are nurses? How many are lawyers? How many are engineers? They all raised their hands. I asked them: "So, what stops you from coming out of your offices and going for those jobs?" There is no difference, only service when you are a lawyer or a doctor. You have your doctorate or your certificate. Still, you are also a councillor leading and heading and helping people solve their problems. You are an engineer; you know why we need a sound drainage system. We need good roads to minimise road accidents and reduce the cost of maintaining cars. Get out of those cocoons and run for these seats and start serving people! I was so hard on them. Two of them were elected the following year. They were selected, and they called me. *Hapa tu* (just here in) Nakuru.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your rich insights on women's movement in Kenya.

CHAPTER THREE

A Conversation with Hon. Martha Karua



“We resisted being forced to nominate women whom the male politicians would have favoured. We selected women, not from men’s ‘pockets’, but women whom we had faith in. We did that together as women from all the political divide” (referring to nominations of women commissioners to be in the CKRC process)

~ Hon. Martha Karua

Biography

A revered Kenyan politician and an advocate for social justice in the High Court. She has served as the Minister for justice in Kenya and is also among the founders of The League of Kenyan Women Voters – the first women political lobby group in Kenya. For 20 years, she was the Member of Parliament for Gichugu constituency. During her tenure, she championed women empowerment so that the younger generation of women and girls, do not have to pass through the thorny path she walked. Hon. Karua also served as the Cabinet Minister for Water Resources.

Interviewed by Agnes Mugane

Question: Thank you, Mheshimiwa for granting us the opportunity to interview you. We are happy to document your reflections on women and constitution, and gender equality in Kenya. Maybe we can start by you telling us about your childhood.

Response: I will not tell you when I was born because I don't think it is relevant. But I can tell you that I was born in Kirinyaga. I was raised and went to school in Kirinyaga up to the secondary school level. Thereafter, I joined a Nairobi school, now known as Moi Nairobi Girls, for my A-Levels, before proceeding to the University of Nairobi. So, I spent my formative years in my home county Kirinyaga. Actually, I have developed a special bond with my home county since those days. When I started working, after my university days, I was posted as a magistrate in July 1981. I worked in Nakuru for one year and came back to Nairobi in 1982. I worked in the Judiciary for a total of six years. I was on a three-year renewable contract. When my second contract ended in July 1987, I opted not to renew it and started a private practice.

While in private practice, I became active in the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) politics. That was the time of a one-party system in which Kenya had become a one-party state by law. KANU was the only political party. This is the time Kenyans were complaining about the emasculation of their rights by the single party. KANU had this appetite to swallow everything on sight. They had affiliated the worker's body Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU), which became a KANU affiliate. KANU had also swallowed the largest women's organization Maendeleo ya Wanawake, through affiliation. President Moi then announced that KANU would have the Law Society affiliated with it. The Law Society of Kenya was targeted because it was vocal on the rule of law and human rights issues. As young lawyers, we protested the Law Society leadership having a cosy relationship with the government of the day. Our agitation within the Law Society saw me, a year later, join the contest for a seat on the Council of LSK.

As you can see, my activism was born out of trying to protect the independence of our professional body, the Law Society of Kenya. We realised that, as lawyers, we did not practice our profession in a vacuum but within a social, economic and political context. We had to respond to our total environment.

I quickly learnt that the politics of the day determines the environment in which you are working. We started asking the government to enlarge the democratic space by respecting human rights and upholding the rule of law. In those days, there was a

culture of fear with people apprehensive about speaking out freely; the newspapers carried our statements daily. We gained prominence in the media. When KTN started showing at the beginning of the 1990s, we would be headline news, on KBC Radio and TV as well as in the newspapers. Eventually, when the country returned to multiparty democracy in December 1991, it was only a natural progression that I got interested in political office. I contested for the Gichugu parliamentary seat.

Although I was well-known in Nairobi, it never occurred to me that I could run in Nairobi. Having grown up in Kirinyaga, my home county, there was a strong bond with locality during my formative years. Automatically, I chose the home seat. That's how my political career began. It was difficult. Although people knew I was an activist, a pro-democracy, pro-human rights activist. They took me seriously in working together with other colleagues. My bid was not taken seriously because I was told Central (Kenya) doesn't elect women. And that I can only make my name well known, that is the furthest I would go. But I was determined to win in the contest because my name was already well-known. I was a household name in Kenya even then. I told them I would get elected.

I campaigned seriously the whole of 1992 up to the end of the year. When the elections were held, I was victorious. I had to endure gender-based insults and violence, but I persisted, and we carried the day. From then on, having satisfactorily worked for my people, I was re-elected, which is a vote of confidence. I was re-elected three other times in succession. For 20 years, I was the Member of Parliament for Gichugu. I gave it my best. I was consistently rated one of the top debaters in Parliament. You can confirm this with Hansard. With regards to the substance of my contribution, you will notice that I was a prolific Member of Parliament involved in the legislative activities, serving my people and availing myself for consultation. I had a specific day every month in which I sat in the constituency office from morning to evening religiously. I received my constituents on a first-come, first-served basis, listening to their issues. That was not the only day I was in the constituency, but the day for the open clinic. Where you see people, you see groups, you see anybody. My phone was active and anyone could reach me. If not by call, then by text, and I would call back and follow on their issues. I was not only engaged in Parliament but also in the constituency.

In the course of all this, I was also active in the women's movement. In 1992, just before the elections, in May of 1992, to be specific, we formed the League of Kenya Women Voters, the first-ever women political lobby group in Kenya. All the other women organisations at that time were quick to explain that they were not political and

just women's welfare. But the League was formed as an abode for women's political Lobby. We advocated for the election of women, taking up space in leadership and decision-making in the political arena. We started going to the grassroots to discuss these issues with women. And very quickly, there were many other organisations, mainly led by scholars like Prof. Wanjiku Kabira and Prof. Maria Nzomo, which started preparing Women for politics. Soon, even the women's organisations that previously denounced political inclination joined us. We continued advocating for women's space in politics even after the 1997 elections. We joined hands together in 1997 to form the Women's political caucus, a network of all the women's organisations in Kenya. It was unregistered, but a powerful caucus that saw the women's voice solidified during the Inter Party Parliamentary Group (IPPG) talks.

Although I was the only woman in the parliamentary Constitutional and Legal Affairs Committee, over the IPPG, I worked closely with the women outside Parliament. With one voice, we were able to get amendments to the Constitution to outlaw discrimination based on gender or sex as expressed in the Constitution then. We were also able to get the second Amendment, which shared all nominated seats, the 12 in Parliament, and the many in the local authorities equally between men and women. The specific provision was that there will be gender parity in nominations. Parity is equality.

The law was not followed in exact terms because, in 1998, five women and seven men were nominated instead of six women and six men. We went to court even though the five nominated was an improvement from the single woman who used to be appointed by patriarchy at their discretion. For the first time, in all local authorities in all corners of Kenya, women were nominated. At the same time, in 1998, the formal constitutional review commenced. Following the pattern of IPPG, women approached the opportunity with one voice through their political caucus. When the legal framework for reviewing the Constitution was being made, we could negotiate that all the review organs must have one-third reserved for women. We also created space for people with disabilities. If you go to the records, you'll see the first Constitution of Kenya Review Act 1998 reserved one-third space for the women, all the review organs. That is how the journey of women's reserved space in the Constitution culminated in the gains of one-third rule in the Constitution. Although these gains do not spell out how we achieve onethird in Parliament, you can see it in the County Assemblies and county governments. Also, this can be seen in the commissions and public service. I believe we are a nation of the rule of law, even though we have failed ourselves twice. I think Parliament will still have to provide for how we shall achieve gender inclusivity in Parliament. We have fought many battles. They cannot all be detailed here.

I cannot say it's a journey that I have walked alone. We have worked with the women and men of Kenya. Although it was the inclusion of the women, minorities and persons with disabilities we were fighting for, we wouldn't have achieved much without the support of men who believed in inclusion. In Parliament, we were the minority. Women are still a minority in Parliament. We need to continue with the partnership of the genders to achieve inclusivity.

Question: Thank you, Mheshimiwa. It has been a long journey indeed.

Response: Yes. I said that women went in as a constituency in 1998 when the formal constitutional review process started. When the committee drafting the legal framework for review was selected, it was agreed at the outset that the committee must have one-third of women. The plenary decided that a 15-member committee be nominated. I was one of the joint secretaries. The other secretary was Prof. Kabira. The committee had five women and ten men. The five women were Martha Koome representing FIDA, Zipporah Kittony representing Maendeleo ya Wanawake and the two of us.

After receiving the contribution from the groups in the plenary, we came up with the three-tier organ of review, which was started at the county level. There were the commissioners, national delegates conference, and the Parliament. That was the three-tier structure that included people participatory approach. Remember, the plenary had NGOs and Kenyans of all walks of life, including religious groups. That 15-member committee was chaired by Bishop Philip Sulumeti, who was presenting the religious constituency. At that time, women worked very closely with the religious community, people living with disabilities, NGOs, and political parties, especially opposition parties. That is how the women's voice with its partners carried the day.

Question: Taking you back to the League, what role did you play?

Response: We were the founding members, and I was a founder chairperson and stayed in this position for 10 years, before handing it over to Idah Odinga. The League was a multiparty organisation and some of my board members were also members or affiliated with KANU, such as Catherine Nyamato, Phoebe Asiyo, and Prof. Julia Ojiambo; all of who were members of KANU. We said that as women, our bonds spread across the party lines. *"We thought that we should concentrate on what bound us, and when we went back to our parties, we took the sound information or the resolutions we had. That holds good even today. However, women's exclusion extends even to specific*

political parties. We should put our voices together and solidify to open up spaces for women in our political parties”.

Question: When we were discussing with Idah Odinga, she said that you wanted the League to become a political party.

Response: No. I handed the League to her in May 2013, when it was still a civil society organisation for women, a women’s political lobby. If they had thoughts of converting it into a party after I left, she would be best suited to explain that. It was basically a political lobby group. We never belonged to the same political party as her. We came to belong to one party in 2002, ten years later, during the National Rainbow Coalition–Kenya (NARC–Kenya). Yet, she was my treasurer in the League. She belonged to Ford Kenya. I had gone to Ford Asili and then migrated to DP. Can you see that we were on opposing sides, and all-time I remained the chairperson of the League? She also was in various political parties, first in Ford Kenya, then in National Development Party. Then, again, we converged at Labour Development Party and a while later, the National Rainbow Coalition. The League was a multiparty forum for women. During my tenure, The League had a memorandum of understanding with Maendeleo ya Wanawake, the most prominent women organisation. We worked with them in Civic Education, which enabled us to form a women political caucus. Remember, I said Maendeleo had been affiliated with KANU. This is when Maendeleo came back from political affiliation to become a women’s organisation. It revived and claimed its space once again.

Question: Mheshimiwa (Honourable), when did the negotiations about the new constitution stall. What happened?

Response: It happened in Naivasha. I can’t give you all the details because there are two constitutions. There is the 2005 referendum, where women were split according to their political affiliation. Women affiliated with the opposition, it was not really opposition because it was part of the government and the opposition in the Orange Team which was saying “NO” to the Constitution. Women affiliated with the ‘banana’ to the then Kibaki’s side. For the first time, during the constitution-making, women were split along political lines. But women found their voice once again. After the coalition government came into place, women started to coalesce and push for their agenda. We went to negotiate in Naivasha. I had always played a central role in Parliament in the constitutional review, not just a minister as I was, but also a Member of Parliament.

I remained on the constitutional review committee of the Parliament. In 2010, during the negotiations in Naivasha, our male colleagues could not agree to have the Constitution's quotas. They had no problem with the allotments at the county assembly level but they did not want the percentages in the Parliament and the Senate. The review committee and negotiations almost collapsed because of this and other issues. "When everybody was very exhausted, the current Deputy President, William Ruto, and I sat together. We consulted and agreed upon five points that were accepted in the plenary. But before then, when the disagreement was very hot, women from across the party divide walked out. We were not going to be a party that excluded women's political participation in the new Constitution. At the end of the day, we sat down with the current Deputy President and suggested five consents. One of them was to have 16 women in the senate. The number was random and thus was not based on the explanation".

We also agreed on having the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) entrenched in the Constitution as it was a thorny issue. We thought it will be foolhardy to have all the teachers against the Constitution. We also appeased the religious community, which never worked at the end of the day. *"Still, we calmed them by putting objection to abortion in the Constitution. We did not think it was a constitutional issue, and we opposed it. However, we included it as a compromise, 'that life begins at conception' and that 'abortion is not allowed, except if the mother's life is in danger.' These matters were not meant to be included in the Constitution but we included them as a compromise to move forward. Unfortunately, the church was not satisfied with that. We also retained the Kadhis courts even though the religious community wanted them out. However, it was noted that the Constitution was supposed to expand rights, and not take away rights from any group"*.

There was one compromise we were not happy about, but it was allowed nevertheless. I will not say that this one was negotiated because personal law was not congruent with rights in the previous constitution. Muslim women's rights were tied in the bill of rights that personal law would be accommodated. It was a mixed bag. I must say thanks to the leadership of our committee under Abdikadir Hussein Mohammed and Ababu Namwamba. They ensured that the 'two-thirds gender rule' was included. We added a clause mandating Parliament to make a law to ensure that Parliament (the National Assembly and the Senate) complied with the rule. They were supposed to do that within five years. We are actually in utter disobedience of the Constitution. *"As a nation, we must ask ourselves what we need to do to comply with the document we made. You cannot talk of amending or doing away with the rule before even complying with it, yet women are a part of this country"*.

So, when I hear people saying that Parliament will be bloated, it is insincere because it is already bloated by men who fill it. It is a discriminatory way of arguing. When a room is being made for women, you talk of being bloated. Parliament already has 349 MPs and more than 280 are men. So, who is bloating the parliament? Consider new jobs created by the Constitution in the county assemblies; the majority is filled by men. If we want to downsize, the best way to do it would be to adopt a different electoral system such as the one that is being adopted in the Scandinavian. We can do away with the “firstpast-the-post,” and we assume proportional representation. Proportional representation brings near parity; that is why South Africa is at near parity. That is why the Scandinavian nations are near parity. Rwanda adopted Affirmative Action and proportional representation, and they have shot beyond likeness to get women dominance in the Parliament. We are not even seeking power. We are saying let’s come towards 50/50, which is the reality in life. Let’s also admit that talent resides in both men and women. Let’s open doors to tapping the best talents in this country from both genders. Let’s abandon gender-based violence (GBV) and violence during elections because those are some of the things that discourage women. Let us stop vote-buying as this also prevents women from gaining political seats. Political parties should take the lead.

Question: As a closing remark, share with us any other effort you made to advance the cause of women?

Response: I champion women’s empowerment so that my daughter and grandchild do not have to pass through the thorny path I have walked. When a woman is in a position of leadership and decision making, at whatever level, they need to ask themselves: what have I done to contribute to my community, especially girls and women? Or do you get there and get this sense of entitlement and think that it’s your effort alone that got you there? And you forget to look back and hold the hands of others. “Even if it is your education in which you passed an interview, remember, there was your mother and women around you who acted as your role models as you grew up. We also owe that debt to society to bring up others and to lend them a hand”.

Question: What was your experience with the Ufungamano process, especially mobilizing women?

Response: May I say that I never became part of the Ufungamano process. I am talking of two Ufungamanos: the Ufungamano process that came in before the IPPG. You know, that was an NGO process for advocating for constitutional review before the

formal process began. I did not go to Ufungamano, although my party leader (President Mwai Kibaki) was there. I chose to remain in Parliament, where we came up with the IPPG. We got that breakthrough in 1997.

The second Ufungamano process heated up when the government refused to accept the nominees for women commissioners, causing a split in the Constitution review process. The government of the day superimposed their own women commissioners. Therefore, the opposition and civil society refused to go to that constitutional review process and decided to build their own review process as an alternative process. We were part of this process as the opposition. The women commissioners we nominated at Ufungamano were Prof. Kabira, Nancy Baraza, Phoebe Asiyo, Salome Muigai, and Abida Ali. The political parties also had commissioners who had been chosen to review constitution. When the government realised that they could not succeed without bringing the country together, they brought in Prof. Yash Pal Ghai around 1999 or 2000. Prof. Ghai managed to merge the two competing review processes by 2001. That's how now again, the formal review process started officially. So, when I talk of Ufungamano, I refer to two Ufungamanos: an Ufungamano looking for the KANU government to agree to a formal review process that's pre-1998, which I didn't go to and the second one, when the review process split after the women commissioners, were named. "This was a momentous occasion for women because we resisted being forced to nominate women whom the male politicians would have favoured. We selected women, not from men's 'pockets', but women whom we had faith in. We did that together as women from all the political divide". In that nomination committee, I was the chairperson, while Martha Koome was the secretary. Members included Jane Kiano, Zipporah Kittony, and Julia Ojiambo. I am not able to give all the names, but those were some of my members. We were even taken to court by fellow women sponsored by the government, but the court determined the matter in our favour. I do remember the Cabinet Secretary for Defence, Rachael Omamo, was then our lead lawyer in court. She asked the judge to send home the ladies who were protesting the outstanding nomination of the women commissioners. And indeed, they were sent home.

It's been an exciting time. There is so much detail I can't give you any more, please. I have to send you home as well. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Thank you, Hon. Karua.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Conversation with Hon. Phoebe Asiyo



“I implore our leaders to start thinking about nationhood, especially in terms of politics. You cannot continue to leave half of the Kenyans out of governance. It is not correct. It is evil. We are all Kenyans. We are not Kikuyus or Luos, Luhyas, Pokomos, Pokots or whatever. We are Kenyans. We are one, and we want to depict that picture to the world. You cannot do this by denying women the opportunity to participate in these fundamental issues.”

~ Hon. Phoebe Asiyo

Biography

Born in 1932, Hon Asiyo is a former Karachuonyo constituency Member of Parliament and the first Kenyan woman to be inaugurated as an elder. She has worked consistently with women, governments and civil society organisations to open up space for women in leadership positions. She joined the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation in 1953 and was elected president of the same organisation in 1958. She also served as an ambassador to the United Nations Development Fund for

Women (UNIFEM). She managed to earn the respect of men in prison where she worked as an officer, after a long time of discrimination. Ultimately, she pushed for the adoption motion to be included in the Kenya's Constitution. After retirement from politics in 1997, she was appointed to the defunct Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC) as a commissioner. She has since devoted her time and energies to community work and philanthropy.

Interviewed by Agnes Mugane and Reuben Waswa

Question: This is a project that the African Women's Studies Centre is implementing in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes and, the Department of Gender. We are profiling women who have made contributions to women empowerment and gender equality in Kenya. We are publishing a book to be launched during the international women's day. We shall also be able to have a documentary which will be unveiled on the same day. We shall share the book with you once we are through with it. We will also invite you to the launch because I believe you are still committed to the course of women issues. Waswa and I will interview you on matters about Affirmative Action, constitution-making and women empowerment issues. We are keen to learn how the women's movement has grown since independence, because you have participated in it throughout.

Response: Okay.

Question: To start with, you can tell us about yourself and what inspires you to fight vigorously for women's rights.

Response: My name is Phoebe Asiyo. I was born in Gendia, not far from Lake Victoria. Gendia was a mission center for the Seventh Day Adventist church. My father was a pastor at a Seventh Day Adventist church in Gendia and this explains why I grew up in Gendia. At that time, many women and children were dying. I remember seeing many children die at home. In addition to the church, Gendia also had a Seventh Day Adventist Mission Hospital. I sometimes went to help in the hospital as a young girl. I went to school at Gendia and later Kamagambo. I then joined a Teachers' Training College in Embu. When I completed my course, I came back and started teaching. When the state of emergency was declared, I joined Nairobi City Council as a social worker. My primary duty was to collect children whose parents had been detained, killed or went to the forest to fight. I still remember the Lari Massacre, where many parents were killed. Children were left alone in the villages around Limuru.

I picked up the orphaned or abandoned children following the massacre and brought them to Nairobi. The only place we could take these children to was Aden Bell Children's Home, which was being managed by Catholic nuns. At that time, it was overflowing with children. In cases where we could not find shelter for them, we had to look for foster parents. I also fostered a number of these children. I saw many injustices and violence committed by British soldiers who killed innocent women in and outside Nairobi during the state of emergency. I started feeling a very strong urge for social justice. I became passionate about the need for fairness, human rights, and even the place of women in our society.

Question: Tell us about the growth of the women's movement and your role.

Response: In 1952, I had just come out of Embu Teachers Training College (TTC), as a teacher. In Nairobi, the British women and the wives of District Commissioners started Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation. Initially, they simply wanted information from the African women, nothing more. Therefore, they included them. I joined. In 1954, Mrs. Beecher, the Bishop of Eastern Africa and the Leakey family, showed some interest in African women's development and involvement in Maendeleo ya Wanawake. I worked with other women from other parts of the country, but that is where it stopped. There was no full involvement in decision making in Maendeleo. This somewhat disturbed us, and we even sought the help of Tom Mboya to start another rival women's organisation. In fact, I remember the name we used to apply for the registration; *'USAWA ya Wanawake Katika Kenya (Women's Equality in Kenya)* was rejected. However, our application was turned down. We went back to Maendeleo and started scheming on how we could join the real executive and decision-making of the organisation. Mrs. Beecher had no problem with African women participating in the leadership of Maendeleo. Still, the other wives of the white settlers rejected us. At the time, they could not entertain the notion of sitting down with African women to discuss women's issues

I remember leading a protest march from the secretariat building called Jogoo House. The protest went through Muthurwa to Makongeni. When we reached Makongeni, we were arrested and taken to Muthurwa police station. There was a gentleman called Musa Mathemba, a close ally of the British. We informed him of our arrest and detention in Muthurwa. He visited us at the station and secured our release after negotiating with the police. This marked the beginning of our active participation in Maendeleo Ya Wanawake matters.

The British women were not ready to give us space to introduce our agenda in the leadership of Maendeleo. All the same, we managed to change the agenda of Maendeleo, which was very shallow at that time. We added the economic empowerment of women and agriculture. I remember agriculture was critical because women were the farmers, and they needed to get information on better farming methods. Thereafter, we started discussing politics.

Jomo Kenyatta was in detention at the time and many men went to see him and have a chat about the future of the nation. In most cases, women were not included in those delegations. We raised some money and, of course, with the help of men like Tom Mboya, sent Priscilla Abwao, a nominated Member of Parliament, to Lancaster to represent us. She came with a lot of information from Lancaster House discussions. We started feeling that we were getting there because, in Great Britain, there was a woman's voice.

There were only two political parties: Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) and KANU. I was in KANU, and Priscilla was in KADU, but our main issue was the women's agenda. We converged at this point. KANU and KADU drafted the Lancaster house agenda meetings. We went to the Chief Natives Commissioner called Artikens to visit Kenyatta in detention to discuss the role of women in the independent government. It was evident that Kenyatta was going to be the President of Kenya. We wanted him to know the expectations of women ahead of time. We also tried to convince him to give women more remarkable space in leadership and governance.

After some time, we met with the governor, Benson Reinson, and I remember him asking us: "Do you have a woman who can drive you to Lodwar?" We told him, "But they are giving planes to men to go to Lodwar?" He said, "No we can only give you a range rover to take you to Lodwar?" He then asked us, "Do you have a woman driver?" We told him we don't mind a man driving us to Lodwar. But then someone came with the name of Josephine Muthoni, a woman who had a driving license. She was the only woman who could drive a vehicle at that time. He said, "No, you don't have a woman driver?" he said. We brought Josephine to the meeting with the Chief Native Commissioner, and I remember him laughing. "Then I will give you a man." He then gave us a man to drive us to Lodwar. I remember we left at 3.00 a.m. and reached Lodwar late in the evening. Unlike others, we brought a lot of green vegetables, fruits and lots of flowers. Mzee came and opened the gate for us. When he saw the women come out with green vegetables, flowers and fruits, he clapped and started laughing loudly. He ushered us into the house.

Ida Mutera, a newly converted Christian of the Anglican faith, gave a mighty prayer and introduced us. I looked at this man, and I was lost for words. After the introduction, I hesitated on the best way to initiate the conversation. However, we eventually started talking. Kenyatta listened keenly. He empathised with us. Mzee knew the place of a woman not only in Kenya but also in Africa. He was very much concerned about the heavy load that women carried. Women were dying at this time during childbirth due to a lack of hygiene. The conditions of African people, especially for women and children, were terrible at that time. He promised that his government would take care of our concerns. We were looking at 50/50 representation in the government and the local authorities. He looked at us and said, "Fine, but do you have women who are educated as men to occupy these seats?" Unfortunately, we had not carried any documents to show, to prove it. He said, "But you see we have men who occasionally go to India, South Africa and to Britain to further their education, do you have such kind of women to occupy seats in my government?" We said, but we are here, Mzee, and we can.

When he came out of detention, Kenyatta set up the commissions on marriage, divorce and inheritance to protect the interests of the African women. The law was skewed at that time. Those commissions made excellent recommendations, but parliament refused to adopt them. Whereas the Kenyan parliament declined to adopt the recommendations by the two commissions, Tanzania took the same advice and enacted them into laws. That is where the fight for women's space started because we realised our leaders did not see the need to include women in policymaking for our nation. In most cases, they argued that we belonged to the kitchen. They wondered why women were not contented with being in the kitchen. They considered policy formulation and law-making too demanding tasks that only men could grapple with. They asked: "What is your problem? What is it really that you want?"

It has been a very long walk. When I look back, I get disappointed because even while the new constitution has given us many gains as women, they have been neglected. The two-thirds gender rule is a gone case, yet it was decided by the Kenyan people and not the women alone. The men and women sat at the Bomas and agreed on the two-thirds gender rule in representation. It is embedded in the constitution. The law is yet to be implemented in the County Assembly, Senate and National Assembly. But, at least we have one seat reserved for women parliamentarians. We also have powerful women in the Parastatals and the ministries.

Nevertheless, the political leaders have not honoured the new constitution. This worries me. I don't know what the future holds for women who have done so much for

this country. They have worked very hard to feed our families, educate the children, run communities and government departments. Strangely, men in our legislature will not allow these gains to be realised by the women of this country in this age. This is a huge disappointment.

Question: That is quite a weird way of dismissing women?

Response: They argued that women's place was in the market, *shamba* (farm) and in the kitchen, and yet women spent only one hour in the kitchen. "You know the kitchen issue was a very British thing." Why do women take so much time in the kitchen? It is because they don't have workers. You know we have done very well, and if I may take you back to where I was then, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) was established in Nairobi's industrial area. They discovered that there were no toilets for women. That is where we are coming from. It is as if they were not supposed to be there in those factories, and industries. Women were there in numbers, but there was no provision for them, even restrooms. That should tell you where we are coming from. We did not exist. After that study, which was aired by the media, the industries started making provisions for women toilets even in the government offices. Yes, there was room for men, but there was no space for women. So we really had to exert ourselves to get what we wanted. We knew what we needed. This included human rights - fundamental human rights for each of us. There is no way we could sit back and accept this notion of women being in the kitchen, which was not valid.

I became a senior prison officer, and the junior men would not salute me. When a senior officer meets junior officers, they are supposed to compliment you. I remember one man saying that I cannot raise my hands to salute a woman. I told him that he will salute me because if those hands can go up for a man, they can also go up for a woman. It was tough, but eventually, they got used to saluting Senior Women Officers. Ultimately, many women were in senior positions in this department. Men got used to the state of affairs.

Question: How did they change to saluting the women if they did not like it?

Response: Saluting is a respectful way of greeting in the uniformed service - you salute, saying *jambo* (hallo) and the senior officer reciprocates. When I saw them coming, I would change direction. It was complicated in prison. Other issues in prison would disturb you as a woman. I remember on one occasion when I was preparing a woman to hang, and the son visited her. He told the son in her mother tongue, "You

know son, I am dying in your place. Please take care of the family.” When the son left, I asked her why she told the son she was dying in his place. She refused. She only told me, “*imekwisha hakuna kitu ya kusema* (I am done, I have nothing else to say) and she smiled. I insisted that she will have to tell me. After lengthy persuasion, including prayer with her, she eventually agreed to tell me. She said, “You know, my son killed his father he is the only child and I am past the child-bearing age”. She continued, “He used an axe to kill the father *na nimemsamehe* (I have forgiven him). I told him to change his clothes and I took him to my sister. I then took the axe to the police station and surrendered, saying: “I have killed my husband.”

The woman was charged, convicted, and sentenced to hang due to her admission that she had killed her husband. She pleaded guilty and was sentenced to hang. This was when she was being prepared to hang and I knew there was no time because the hangman wanted to come and take the neck’s measurements. Fortunately, Kenyatta was the President and I knew Margaret Kenyatta (Jomo Kenyatta’s daughter). I also knew Beatrice Ghai, who was in charge of the Anglican Church. I called Margaret and Ghai. It was a long story, but eventually, I reached Mzee and told him this story. The President called the Attorney General. We had the Secretary-General at that time, and they decided that she would not be executed.

If I had not taken the time to listen to this woman, I told myself, she would have been executed. I wondered whether other innocent women had been executed. I went through every file and I found two other women who had not killed their husbands. They smiled when they were being executed because of trying to save their children. I am happy that this hanging thing is gone. Kenya no longer hangs convicts. The death sentence is retributive and does not change the guilty party. Neither does it deter crime. As a Christian, I was not happy about these killings. The *Holy Bible* tells us: ‘Thou shall not kill.’ Those convicted of capital offences should get alternative punishments like life sentences. The Prisons service has really improved, better than even in some developed countries. For example, nowadays they teach women to be lawyers who can represent women in court. The last time I visited Langata Women’s Prison, I heard that two women who had been charged with murder had won the cases. Things have now changed.

Question: That is very interesting. Now, had you gone through any training before you became a prison warder?

Response: Yes. There were several pieces of training programmes.

Question: Which ones?

Response: We went through the Penal Code training. I went to court to listen to a woman who had been taken to court, and she looked as if she had committed that crime. You know she was turning up her clothes, and she had her monthly periods. The police were not providing any sanitary towels at that time. She was covered with blood all over. She could not even look at the magistrate. Of course, the judgment was passed because the magistrate thought this was a criminal or a petty offender. I raised this issue after I met the prison officers and the custody police. I mistakenly said we needed sanitary towels for women. Then came the question “Why do you want women to be given towels and not men and all offenders?” I had to start explaining that this was not a privilege. After my explanation, they understood. Thereafter, the police started giving women in remand or prison sanitary towels.

Question: So which one came first; the prison officer or the warder?

Response: I started as a warder then became a prison officer. My duty was mainly the rehabilitation of women offenders. Most of the women offenders committed crimes of necessity, and they were really not criminals as such. Their crimes included brewing *changaa* (local brew) without a license and selling vegetables in the streets without permits. There were few hardcore women criminals like those who had murdered their husbands or their cowives, which we could understand. I left the Prisons service after Tom Mboya’s assassination in 1969. The Speaker of the National Assembly asked me to take over the work being done by Pamela Mboya at the Law Society because she could no longer cope. Pamela was very hurt following the tragic death of her husband and became indisposed.

Once I had taken my assignment, I asked the President to set up a commission to make child adoption laws a bit elastic. The rules were too rigid and denied parents who had opted for the adoption of children, the opportunity to do so. This was part of colonial law. President Kenyatta set the commission to look at adoption, as requested. I was selected to join the commission, and we did an excellent job. Parliament adopted our recommendations and passed them into law. Adoption became more accessible, and the number of couples applying to adopt children increased. I know have recently worked on the adoption law, but these are some of the laws we have dealt with since independence.

Question: Before taking a look at your life as an MP, let us go back to Maendeleo.

Response: I was nominated by the President to parliament.

Question: Before you became the chair of Maendeleo ya Wanawake, who was the chair?

Response: It was Mrs. Beecher, the wife of Reverend Beecher.

Question: Was she white or African?

Response: Of course she was white; they were all white, there were no Africans. Mrs Beecher was from the Leakey family and married to Rev. Beecher of Anglican Church of East Africa.

Question: Let us talk about politics, *Mheshimiwa*. From being a teacher, child welfare officer, prison warden and social worker. How did you get into politics?

Response: After the many experiences as a teacher, a prison officer, and a social worker, I felt the need to influence policy change in this country. I knew I didn't stand the chance of being nominated, so I started looking for a constituency. The only option that I had was the constituency I was born and raised in. But I had only one problem because there was only one party, KANU. The national chairman of this party was the sitting member of the parliament of my constituency. So I didn't see how KANU would accept me to vie or nominate me. This is why when I indicated that I would contest the constituency seat, many people made fun of me. It was challenging, but I had advantages to capitalise on. I was born and married in the constituency. I had done a lot of work locally, and many people knew me. My mother was also born in the constituency. My father, though from Nyakach, had been a preacher in this area for a long time. My grandmother was a well-known woman fighter who participated in many tribal wars. Even when the first Europeans arrived, they came to my mother's home before setting up the mission centre. I was able to use all these connections and my grandmother's fame to approach people. When Oginga Odinga left the Luo Union of East Africa, he was like my father. He was elected by East African delegates to take over from Oginga. This gave me an upper hand in the politics of this area.

Initially, my candidacy was an uphill task. KANU was in complete control, and the MP representing my constituency was the chairman of the district branch and the constituency chairman. He also became the chair of the notorious KANU steering committee. Our campaigns were engaging nevertheless.

Hon. Okiki Amayo and myself were brought up in the SDA Mission Centre in Gendia. He knew my family, including my sisters. Consequently, there was a lot of restraint as we fought to be elected. It was a very hot campaign. Many people were hurt, including myself and some of my supporters. Chiefs were the worst because they took sides in the campaign and never apprehended those who unleashed violence against my campaign team. They gave me a headache. I remember when President Moi visited our constituency and told the people to elect Okiki Amayo because he was the faithful Nyayo follower.

The people said that he can recommend his own, but they will elect their own person. A few people were arrested, put in a police lorry, harassed a little and then left free. I think this hardened the people of this area more.

I was elected in 1979, but my victory was contested. A petition was filed, and after eight months, I was thrown out of parliament. However, they did not disqualify me from contesting the seat again and that I could compete for the same seat the second time within that year. This time, I was elected with a more significant margin. I proved to the people within that one year that what Amayo could do, I could do it even better. I performed exceedingly well in development, food security, education, women's health, and children welfare, which brought me closer to the people.

During the 1988 election, the government used the infamous *mlolongo* (queue) system to elect the leaders. I remember the chief from the area where my mother was born, pushing my mother from behind my picture and dragging her to Amayo's line. A few days later, my mother suffered a stroke. I was furious. These chiefs were notorious for rigging elections in favour of pro-establishment candidates. There were only forty people on Amayo's line, and they just added zero to make it four hundred. I lost in the *mlolongo* elections. They rigged me out of parliament, but this gave me time to work with the people. I worked with women, children, teachers, farmers, fishermen, and so I worked with everyone. This helped me a lot because in the subsequent elections. I was elected without any problem, and this time around, there was no petition.

Question: When was this?

Response: This was in 1992 after the notorious 1988 elections. That has been my political history. It has been gratifying but also very challenging in terms of patriarchy. Even today, men still have the same feelings about leadership positions in politics,

churches, and the community. But at least, it is very different in this area because these people knew me for who I was, and they elected me four times, and then I retired. I did not want to continue because it is not easy. Even though we got the multiparty system, the mindset remained the same. The chiefs are still the same. It takes a long time for people to change their thinking about political leadership. I must say; currently, people have started accepting women leadership. Women are doing very well in specific fields, some areas even more than men. As I talk to people in this village and elsewhere because I meet them in the churches, funerals, and other gatherings, they are very clear about women's leadership now, except at the top. Women are accepted and are doing very well; in churches, schools, and the community. I worry that patriarchy is a massive problem at the national level, and women don't seem to be winning these wars that we have fought and won in the past. I don't know what the future holds for Kenyan women. They must go back to the drawing board, especially after defeating the two-thirds gender rule in the parliament. There is a constitutional crisis because we have not met the threshold set by the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

The men of goodwill and women of Kenya must implement the constitutional provisions for both men and women. We have a nation that has become too tribal. The engagement of women in leadership will perhaps help the people of Kenya to think about nationhood. Keeping women out of our political arrangements and administration will not allow this country (to progress?). It hurts us more. We hope both men and women of good intentions will ensure that they include women in policymaking without reservation. It is a pity it has not worked for us. But maybe, we need different approaches from what we have used to get men to accept women and work with them.

Question: That is very interesting. In 1979 and these other parliaments, women were very few? How did they relate with men?

Response: In parliament, men gave us a lot of respect those days. Whenever I got into the chamber, men could help me get in – allowing me to get in first. I wonder whether they do the same today. We worked very well together, that is, men and women. But when I was presenting the Affirmative Action motion, I remember many women leaders like Prof. Wanjiku Kabira worked with me to prepare the draft motion. When I was about to table the motion, we invited women from provinces to come and listen in. Little did we know that parliament would not allow the women to go into the galleries and listen to us. Some male Members of Parliament said that if we bring local women

to the galleries to persuade MPs, they must know they will not get in. They were very defiant.

I remember one of them telling me: “You want these women to grow horns?” And I replied: yes, horns of development and peace is not a bad idea. Our strategy didn’t work; my motion was badly defeated. I remember Hon. (Julius) Sunkuli telling me that it was a hazardous motion. And it will harm the relationship between men and women because women will start thinking they were getting nearer to sharing the national cake and even the decision-making process. Even the Vice President was very hard on me. I don’t know how I was able to continue. Remember someone suggesting that I should be taken back home and given re-orientation because I was an African. There is no way I could try to bring change and upset the laws of the land, and the relationships men and women enjoyed in the villages. He asked me, “What is wrong with you?” because women in the villages are pleased about men representing them, and they will not elect another woman. It was challenging for me.

Eventually, when Beth Mugo brought this affirmative action motion, much later, they accepted it but did not implement it. Now they asked the review commission to look at it and do something about it. They would have implemented it after they accepted it. They would have put the arrangement in place because Beth Mugo was very clear about what she wanted for the women of Kenya. But they took it but did not implement it. Instead, they left it to the new constitution review committee to operationalise it. This should tell you that women have no genuine leadership acceptance and position in the political and governance system.

We worked on it with Wanjiku and other women for six months before presenting it in the house. Once again, women from all over the country came to parliament but were denied admission. It took the intervention of the MP for Kamkunji for them to be ushered in. That is when the women were allowed in. It was like telling us you don’t belong here. The Acting Speaker, Deputy Speaker, told women to keep quiet, even those in the gallery. He threatened to throw women in the gallery out after they booed an MP who had made a very disparaging remark. You could feel the hostility even when we went for tea. Women could not believe the defeat of my motion after working so hard. Even the men that we had lobbied turned against us. They were so embarrassed. They avoided women colleagues. Few men helped us. (John) Michuki was very good, and he really gave us a lot of support. Dr Mukhisa Kituyi was also excellent. The others said no, and I remember one of them saying that he will never step back in parliament if we continue bringing all those women. It was very hard.

Question: How many women were there?

Response: Ngilu was already there. I think we were around nine, 10 women against two hundred. Initially, they were about three women. Eventually, many more made it there.

Question: When was that?

Response: It was in 1979.

Question: Grace Ogot mentioned something that her husband said? When she was the only woman in parliament, the men were all over trying to date her.

Response: I never heard that. Maybe I was not attractive enough for anyone to date me, but the men will take you for who you are when you are serious. They may joke, but they respect you. In those days, you could only be the chair of the catering committee, unlike these days where you can chair other committees. I remember I chaired this committee once but never again because I did not want to cater for anybody anymore. You know, those attitudes.

Question: What role did you play in constitution-making?

Response: It was tough to be elected as a commissioner in the review commission, but Martha Karua was very powerful. She chaired a committee that selected women as commissioners. Initially, there were two commissions; the Ufungamano and the other one of Parliamentarians. Eventually, we came together as one with Prof. (Yash Pal) Ghai. What interested me most is that we collected views from the people, and the women articulated the issues very well. Although there were women who had prepared them for this, it was because they knew where they were coming from. They really expressed the need for a constitution that was very friendly to women, children, people with disabilities, youth and everyone in Kenya. They gave views better than professional groups. *“When we went to sit down and write the constitution at Bomas of Kenya, the women did exceptionally well in every committee. Before any meetings, they sat down together and strategised on the issues that concerned them the most. That is why there were many gains for women. Every district brought three people, and one was a woman, which complied with the two-thirds gender rule”.* These were powerful women and had extreme views about the future of our country and the place of women in the governance systems and the country’s law-making organs.

The work was very strenuous, going around the country and collecting the views of the people. But still, we eventually converged, and the people of Kenya got the masterpiece of this work which is now the new constitution. We initially had problems because we had the zero draft constitution that was not accepted by the President. Ultimately, we came back together, and the ideas in the zero drafts were brought into the new draft. *"This new constitution is perhaps one of the best constitutions worldwide because we consulted widely within Africa and outside"*. My only disappointment is that we are not implementing the ideas. Coming from the law of the land, the politicians should respect and execute it faithfully. Many are the times, we disagreed, but we came back together for the good of our people. Eventually, it worked. Kenyans who got involved gave very great ideas for the welfare of this country. I want to urge our leaders, the parliamentarians, to respect the new constitution. They should implement every aspect of it because it is good for us all; the men and the women and the Kenyan nation.

Question: How do you compare the referendum draft of the 2005 and the 2010 constitution?

Response: The Wako draft had no gains. You know some of them were trashed. Whatever we have will keep us going for now. Had there been many women in the constitution-making process, their gains could have been captured in the Wako draft. We can review that constitution again in the future because it is a continuous process. Constitutions are not static and they keep changing all the time. Young women will pick the Wako draft and bring the left out ideas at that time. The League of Women Voters was doing a lot of work educating women and making them aware of the need to vote in men and women. The Maendeleo ya Wanawake was a welfare and socio-economic organisation that dealt with the empowerment of women, women's health and institutions. Maendeleo only listened but was not actively involved in politics at that time. When Raila was detained, it is a pity that Maendeleo never attempted to assist Idah Odinga, whose husband was being detained all the time. But now we have the Federation for Women Lawyers doing excellent work. The League of Women Voters and many other women organisations deal with the human rights of the people, social welfare, and economic empowerment.

You remember the Mabati women; there was a time when the Kenyan government said it would bring every household water by 2000. Even now, that has not happened, but the women decided to build the *mabati* (iron sheets) roofs to provide water and, of course, to provide better shelter for their children. They did that alone. Even their

husbands did not help but enjoyed clean water, which women were drawing from very far rivers. This is the work of women of Kenya.

These women's SACCOs are doing very well. The table banking, and you know money from her hands will go to her house, her husband, children, and everybody. Money in men's hands may end up in bars and hotels, and the woman's money goes to the family. We need to laud the woman of Kenya for their work for her family, the community, and this nation. The women SACCOs are doing very well. The Member of Parliament in this area has done exceptionally well in empowering women. The government has also set up this enterprise fund for women. The women who were doing small businesses are now managing big firms.

Question: Did you play any role in the development of any women's movement?

Response: Yes, I did. In the 1960s, the African Women's movement started in Guinea, and Margaret Kenyatta was appointed as the coordinator for East Africa. I remember the first meeting was held in Dar es Salaam, chaired by Margaret Kenyatta. The league from Guinea coached Margaret. It was a real-life experience. It opened the eyes of African women. After independence, we had to work hand in hand with men because, at that time, some of the countries were still under the colonial government. We did some outstanding work, and it was after that the idea cascaded to individual African states. In Kenya, Margaret Kenyatta chaired the movement. It was called 'The Kenya Women's Seminars.' Eddah Gachukia was also very active in the campaign. In fact, the venue used to be Eddah Gachukia's home. That is how women worked to look at the policies that men were making for this nation and have their input. They were tremendous. They were not small, and I think women made significant contributions to the governance through the women movement.

The mindset of some of our Kenyan men is fear of the unknown. The men will not tell you that a woman will make a good president and leader. Patriarchy has brought us this far. It makes accepting a woman as a leader such a big issue, and we have got it to rule us. However, we have some good men who see women beyond leadership positions. They want women to partner with them as equals in running this nation. Patriarchy, in my thinking, has played a significant role in shaping the mindset of our men and even fears. Men are very comfortable with their mothers because their mothers love them, and they love them too. They also love their daughters, but they are very uncomfortable when their wives want to venture into politics. Women's

leadership is still a big issue in this country for some of our men to accept. I like men to start taking women as members of this society and as equal partners in development. Kenyan men would do very well if they came round to accepting women as equals and leaders. I still don't have answers because even educated men don't want to see this aspect of our lives. They know women preserve life, and all of them, men and women, who are leaders now were brought up and mentored by women, and they love their mothers. I was hoping that a particular woman organisation would sue the Parliament for not honouring the constitution. I don't know what will happen, especially if we will have the elections this year. By August last year, we were supposed to have a formula, but this did not happen. Fortunately for me, my husband was very supportive, and I wish he was here listening.

He would have talked about it. I guess it was the way he was brought up. Initially, the elders had declined to support my political ambition. Later on, they decided to help me. They came to my house and told my husband that they have agreed that his wife will be the leader in that area. They said to him that they had come to encourage him to marry another wife. I looked at them and asked them, "How can you come to my house to tell my husband to marry another wife?" They said yes because you will now not be available, and he can also not shout at you now that you will be a leader. Of course, he never used to shout at me. The elders offered to help my husband get a better wife. I wondered, in my house, "They tell my husband they will help him get a better wife?" I had to be very patient. They told him that they had chosen me to be a leader and not a woman. I would not be there for him, but I will be there for the community and the constituency. Therefore, if he wanted a woman, they were available to help him look for one available for him. This was the most challenging part of these things. Then they were asking him, "and you are still seated?"

They advised me to be home always before cows come back from the fields. I enquired from them as to why I had to do this and yet this is when I was meeting the people who will elect me. They said no, you have to be here before the cows, and they started bringing cows here; around five of them and this was very kind of them. But what they were telling me is that I should not be late in the dark because I might be hurt. They knew it was going to be very violent, and then they start telling me about cows. These are some of the issues I had to deal with as a Member of Parliament, but I had to respect the elders because they did a lot of groundwork for me.

Question: Maybe going back to Safari Park. How did they perform?

Response: That issue went to court, and the court decided it. Some women went to court and sued women picked by women organisations saying that the selected women were very urban. They did not know women's issues, and they wanted MYWO to remain the only nominating body. At Safari Park during the negotiations for the review of the constitution, I told the KANU Secretary-General Hon (Joseph) Kamotho from Murang'a that I represented women from Karachuonyo, which was very far from any city unlike Murang'a which is near Nairobi. So, I asked him "Who qualifies to represent who? They did not see the sense in that argument because the contention was that we were very urban. But they were friends of some strong women like Wanjiku Kabira, a mighty but quiet woman. You can't even know she is powerful. Others were Nancy Baraza and Abida Ali. All these women had been selected by fellow women, and they were so qualified. But they still took us to court.

Zipporah Kittony, the chair of Maendeleo ya Wanawake, intervened and said, "no, you cannot sue women who have been picked by their fellow women." Again, it was fear of well-rounded women: well informed, very educated, and qualified and with a lot of experience coming to challenge the patriarchal arrangements in our communities. That was the problem, but eventually, we won. The women from the districts were also very informed. They were delighted when they were brought to Bomas to contribute to the constitutionmaking. Although some were not well versed with what was happening, I think they were well prepared before they came to Bomas. In fact, we did the elections ourselves.

Question: Tell us about the Sulumeti Committee because there has been an argument that it was the beginning of the Affirmative Action for women in the constitution.

Response: Affirmative Action was there before the Sulumeti Committee. The Sulumeti Committee was, however, one of the best. In fact, if we had adopted it, we would have gone very far because it had covered the demands of women in governance and legislation. It would have given women more than what the draft eventually gave us if it was accepted and put in place. It was one of the best. Although it was religiousbased, it did not look at the women's position in the church. Catholics do not have women Bishops. Anglicans are still dragging their feet, and in my church, they have not truly included women in the church leadership. But Sulumeti Committee was perfect; they embraced the ideas from all corners of this country and considered the draft constitution.

All the provisions of the constitution benefit both men and women. For example, suppose you look at marriage, wealth, inheritance and succession. In that case, you find that women would be allowed to inherit from their fathers for the first time, unlike before. Today, there are many other gains other than this one disturbing us. Women, children, youths and people with disabilities are well taken care of in the new constitution. It has taken us too long. I mean, we started agitating for women's positions long before independence. In 1954, I was fully engaged in trying to get the women's voices heard, and we hoped that by the time we got our freedom, all our problems will have been solved. Women would share equally with men in all endeavours' and spheres of development of this nation. It has not happened, and it is a very worrying trend now. I wish that some leaders can look back and see where we are coming from. Men should accept women and embrace working together because women are harmless. Like everybody else, they are human beings, and God has even given them virtues that some men don't have. Refusing to accept women as leaders is refusing to listen to reason, a voice of wisdom that every man and woman has. Like Nyerere said, when he met us in Arusha, that men cannot continue walking on one leg. They must bring in women on board to walk with two legs.

Many organisations are empowering women and preparing women for the next general elections. But this is not enough. We need to sit down and discuss the way forward, especially on the political participation of women. We need to sensitise Kenyans on the value of listening to both voices. Once we have a group of men and women who can do this, who can decide yes, we need to bring women to this table. Our politics will not be this complex and hostile. You have seen people fighting and killing each other. When I was in politics, the women I have known will tell you that we don't need this violence. How we would bring both men and women to accept each other and work together as a community is what worries people. Now I know we have been torn apart as a country. We are not the country that I knew at the time of independence. We now see each other through tribal lenses. We don't accept other tribes when we are discussing specific issues. We would rather see these issues from the tribal lenses.

"I implore our leaders to start thinking about nationhood, especially in terms of politics. You cannot continue to leave half of the Kenyans out of governance. It is not correct. It is evil. We are all Kenyans. We are not Kikuyus or Luos, Luhyas, Pokomos, Pokots or whatever". We are Kenyans. We are one, and we want to depict that picture to the world. You cannot do this by denying women the opportunity to participate in these fundamental issues. Then, of course, you are double-edged for a woman: you are a woman and then your own tribe; for a man, you are a man, and you also belong to your tribe.

I don't know where this country will be fifty years from now if we continue going the way we are going. Something has to happen to shake hands, and you cannot shake hands that are closed. You have to open your hands to accommodate the other person. You have to live and let it live as a country. That is the cry of many Kenyans, and hopefully, politics will not continue dividing us.

I believe that men will realise that it does not work when you look at me through the lenses of my tribe. It does not work when you look at me through the lenses of my being a woman. We only suffer. We do not move; we don't develop on this basis. I don't have adequate words to describe it. Still, I know many Kenyans and even leaders are yearning for when Kenya comes together as a nation. When you hear some of our people say the things they say and suggest some of the things they want to see and due to specific tribes and groups, you wonder whether they genuinely would like to be called leaders.

The tribe is universal, but Kenya has suffered more because of tribalism. In Kenya, you belong to your tribe before you become a Kenyan. I hope the leaders we will pick this time will shed off this tribal tag and start seeing people as equals, not tribes. They start giving them work in the government, parastatals and anywhere else without looking at their names. I know a Kisii guy called Onyango, a real Luo name, and he has suffered. I was telling him to drop the name Onyango and get a Kisii name to stop his suffering. It is a huge problem.

Question: There have been women political caucuses through the development of the first women's political manifesto. Women empowerment league has also tried under the able leadership of Grace Mbugua. She mobilised women, and we developed women political manifesto. What do you think is the way forward to consolidate that voice for women?

Response: It is the women who will do it and not only for women but also for men and nations because the concerns of women are similar. "You don't have to be a Kikuyu to give birth differently." It will take the women of Kenya to bring that hope back. And the sooner they go back to the drawing board, the better for this country. Suppose they are to come back together as we have done before. In that case, men will come along with them. Now we have tools to investigate and develop new ideas acceptable to all tribes, men and women. I have learnt a lot from how people can tear each other apart. Perhaps, that is why the movement is not working together to undo the terrible things done and strategise for the future. I would urge women to come together again, and this time, they need not fail because we have seen what tearing the people apart

can do to our nation. Therefore, I urge them to come together and start working from where they stopped. They will surely get answers for this country. These days, we have very educated women whose vision and conviction can take this country very far. They only need to bring their beliefs, imagination, feelings, and way forward for this country.

Let us not be hard on women. We have men who are not doing well in both houses, and of course, we have women who are also not doing well. This is human nature. Give women a chance to be there in numbers. I know women are being accused, especially those representing the counties, of not doing much. We may not see what they are doing, but we might start seeing their work in five years. So, I can't agree that we don't need these women. Let us give them a chance and in large numbers.

What is lacking is civic education. There should have been continuous civic education after the promulgation of the new constitution. This can inform local communities on what provisions the constitution has for them, their children, their farms, or all the activities in their lives. Nobody has come to the village ever since 2010 to tell the people what the new constitution has for them. Let us have civic education to know what is in the new constitution or even reflect on what they don't know. Some areas have done very well, especially where the church and civil society has given civic education. Still, there should be an effort by the government itself and the UN and civil society organisations to educate people on the provisions of the new constitution. I have realised it is not easy to come up with a book. I have come a long way, and I am doing the final editing, and soon it will be published. You know my daughter read this draft, and she was telling me, "Mama, Wanjiku Kabira has been mentioned here twenty-seven times." But you see, she is the closest, and she has really worked for women in this country and at the University of Nairobi. Her ideas and contributions have been significant, and therefore, I cannot miss mentioning her severally. This book is lauding other women's work. I have mentioned Prof. Wangari Maathai a lot because she and I worked together a lot. Even when she launched the Green Belt Movement, I was with her, and I know if she was still living, she could have done a lot more for the environment. I am writing my own story as well as other women. It will be done soon; I am waiting for Wanjiku to write the foreword for me. I want her to read it now and when I finish, I will take it to her to make her comments. I am grateful that you people came, but I don't know whether I have given you what you wanted. I am sure you have picked two or three things in the process of our discussion.

Question: We have learnt a lot. We started informally, and we are also pleased.

Response: I think Kenyans will go far if we start acting together in the future. It is very disappointing now, but I believe things are going to change. But you know Uhuru Kenyatta has an upper hand; let us give him credit. He has faithfully stood up for women.

Question: In fact, we were looking at both the Chepkonga and the Duale bills, and the Duale one had nothing much.

Response: Yes, the Chepkonga one had a lot in it, but it would take longer. But there are these fears that make them not bring women to work together. Interestingly enough, when you talk to them outside here, they say they are committed to women's issues. However, once they are together in parliament, you see different people.

Ever since I retired, I have mentored women. I know what women have been doing. They have been going out to talk to young women, which I am also doing. I do it deliberately by visiting schools. Last Saturday, I was in a school talking to girls, and they had many questions. I wondered what would have happened if I had not gone to speak with them. These girls want to know about these careers and especially the political career. I think we need to mentor young girls. We should also document our experiences for girls to learn from: the struggles we have made and the challenges we have faced. They can then pick from where we have stopped. Women must tell their stories. You know it has not been documented, and that is why I want to write mine. Other women who have been in the struggle must also tell their stories so that this young generation can have something to refer to. Men and women should work together to achieve these goals that we are not succeeding. Now the world is talking about a 50/50 planet by the year 2030, and we cannot get this 50/50 planet if we do not sit down and strategise on how we will reach there. 2030 is not far; only 15 years, and we cannot afford to be left out by the rest of the world.

Question: I think there was a time you had left. During Moi Regime.

Response: During Mwakenya time, many of my supporters were arrested; I was also arrested. First of all, they came for me at 4.00 am, and I didn't leave that building until 3 pm. They were asking me questions that I didn't even know. They insisted that I was a Mwakenya agent in Luo land. I was very bitter because I didn't understand what Mwakenya meant. They kept asking me to tell them about it, and I looked at Koigi Wa Wamwere, and I pitied him. I knew him because we had worked with him in parliament, and this guy was a man of the people, one of the 'seven bearded sisters' at that time.

These men had a vision for this country; they were harassed for nothing, and this was not going to take us anywhere because you leave there when you are very bitter. It leaves a scar that can never heal. It will always recur because it is harrowing when you are harassed and accused of something you are not part of. It can be very bitter. I prayed over it since I was a Christian and fasted over it.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your time, Hon. Phoebe

CHAPTER FIVE

A Conversation with Prof. Hon. Julia Ojiambo



“We were also able to lobby the NCKK Chair Mutava Musyimi who was attending a conference at Limuru. That was a critical role that women played to end the stalemate in the constitution review process”.

~ Hon. Julia Ojiambo

Biography

The first Kenyan-born woman to join Harvard university in the United States. Hon. Ojiambo is a trailblazer who has served as Member of Parliament for Samia, an assistant minister, and is a politician with a passion for education and women’s leadership. Julia was the first student to obtain a PhD at the then new Medical School at the University of Nairobi. She embarked on her career as a lecturer at the University of Nairobi before immersing herself in the political arena. Dr Ojiambo set up the Centre for the Advancement of Women and Children, an NGO, to create awareness on human rights through civic education and other strategies at the grassroots.

Interviewer: Agnes Mugane and Kennedy Mwangi

Question: Prof, you are a woman of many firsts. Tell us about your childhood.

Response: I was born in Busia County in a sub-clan of Abaluhya called Samia. Samia is in both Uganda and Kenya. My mother is Samia from Uganda, and my father is Samia from Kenya. My maternal uncles are Ugandans, while my paternal uncles are Kenyans. I grew up in Samia and went to school, from playgroup, kindergarten, Sunday school and elementary school in an institution set up by my father in Samia. My father was an Anglican padre, those early missionaries who trained at St. Paul Theological College, now St. Paul University in Limuru. My mother was an early social worker trained as an educator at Kabete. So, my parents were both educators and missionaries.

My mother and father set up playgroups for children. They also spearheaded social development in education and spiritual leadership. After my pre-primary school, I did my Common Entry examinations at Butere. The test was done after class four. We had to walk to Butere from Samia, a distance of 60 kilometres. I will not forget this because I was about nine years old. It was a nightmare because it was far and torturous. There were no good roads. We stepped on thorns, and I remember my uncle removing thorns from my feet. It was excruciating. We crossed rivers, and I was afraid of the water because I didn't know how to swim. We overcame these challenges to reach Butere.

We passed the examinations and gained admission to Butere Mission Intermediate School for Standards 5, 6, 7, and 8. It was a boarding school for girls. Fortunately, I was one of those who performed very well. I passed my Kenya African Primary Education (KAPE) very highly and was among the eight girls selected to start the Alliance Girls. The school was cold and bare with few new structures. The neighbouring institution was Alliance Boys, headed by Carey Francis, who opposed the establishment of Alliance Girls.

It was as if his privacy was being invaded. The missionaries of the Church of Torch and other ministers from Baptist, Presbyterian and Anglican came together to put up a high school for girls. There was no school for bright girls who passed well in KAPE at that time. The girls could only do nursing or teaching after KAPE, while the boys had several schools like Maseno and Mangu.

At that time, only Margaret Kenyatta, the daughter of the late Mzee Kenyatta, the nation's founder, had dared to enter the boys' sphere of secondary school and was

admitted from the Church of Torch Kikuyu to Alliance Boys. It was like history. People heard about this, and it was not making sense. “How could she go to a boys’ school? And they were wondering what would happen after she completed school? Where will she go?”

Alliance Girls’ was African Girls Secondary which translated to Alliance Girls. As the pioneers at Alliance, the eight of us were like stars: Eddah Gachukia, Winfred Wanyoike, Rose Waruhiu, Grace Odhiambo, and Wangare, the woman who became the first chief education officer at Nairobi City Council. There was also Sarah Lukalo, the mother of Rose Lukalo, a veteran journalist. So there, we set the stage for the girls’ secondary school education.

We performed very well in the examinations and decided to proceed with our education. Traditionally, the only options available for bright girls were in teaching and nursing. Those of us who chose to proceed with education had to look for opportunities elsewhere. Makerere University was the next stop in East Africa. There was no place locally for girls seeking careers in mathematics and sciences. The only option available was to go to Makerere and do education or remain in Kenya and do the nursing course at the King Georges VI Hospital. Winfred Wanyoike and I opted to do nursing. Eddah Gachukia went to Makerere for Education course. The girls wanted to do science and technology but didn’t know where to go. The Kenyan government moved faster to make the Royal Technical College in Nairobi a constituent college of Makerere. This excited some of us who were keen on pursuing further education in the sciences. After Alliance, we went in different directions in pursuit of our careers. I opted to do the sciences. I had a lot of interest in things to do with Physics and Biology. This is where I excelled.

Question: Which course did you take?

Response: I wanted to do technical education, but there was nothing like that for girls. The only thing which was close to that was Domestic Science. I opted to do Domestic Science since it allowed me to do Biology and Chemistry. I joined Royal Technical College, which was a Constituent College of Makerere University. I did Biography logy and Chemistry and had the opportunity to become a Biology teacher at Butere Girls. I also taught Agriculture and Biology at Kamusinga Boys. Eventually, I went to teach nutrition at Lugaro Children Hospital in Kampala, Uganda. I also started engaging in research in health and nutrition. At this time, mothers were dying of Kwashiorkor and

Marasmus. I joined a team of professional scientists in East Africa. I was awarded a scholarship to do a course in nutrition in England. I came back and joined the University of Nairobi as the first African woman lecturer. I then qualified for another WHO scholarship to go to Harvard for a Masters in Science in Nutrition from there to McGill University to research nutrition techniques. I came back from McGill to the University of Nairobi to complete my PhD at the Faculty of Medicine in 1973.

I have also worked in other areas. As I said, from childhood, I was a social worker with mothers of children. I was with families, teaching them how to cook, look after their children, grow vegetables, and take their children to school. I have taught in nursery, Sunday, primary, secondary and technical schools, and then University. I have experience with women in development because we started with Maendeleo Ya Wanawake at Alliance. We elected Phoebe Asiyo because we wanted the African women to advance beyond just tilling the land to learn the skills. These skills were nothing more than knitting, cooking, hygiene of the home and ensuring that the children were breast fed. We fought to control MYWO in this country. Previously, Maendeleo was a community development outfit for the colonial government. European women were benefitting more from community development programmes at the expense of African women. We wanted the work of Maendeleo to help the majority of women in rural areas. Through Maendeleo ya Wanawake, we taught women how to advance and improve their lives, families and communities.

We started Eastern African Women conferences when the East African countries were fighting for independence from colonial domination. Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania were all looking for African leadership. The women felt that they should take part in the struggle. We wondered how we could participate in the process while most of the women were on the farms, working. They were supplying food to the freedom fighters in the forest and bringing up families under challenging conditions.

We decided to come together as prominent women leaders. Our members included Maria Nyerere and Maria Obote. Back in Kenya, initially, our leaders were still in concentration camps. The leaders of the independence struggle were still imprisoned in Lodwar. Maendeleo ya Wanawake joined the struggle for independence by expressing solidarity with the Kapenguria Six and agitating for their release.

A group of women leaders comprising Ruth Havey, Priscillah Abwao, Margaret Kenyatta, Esther Johns, Phoebe Asiyo and Ruth Ruiya travelled to Kapenguria.

They delivered goodwill and foodstuff from the women of Kenya to Mzee Kenyatta. The women expressed solidarity with the detainees. They also agitated for the release of Mzee Kenyatta and his fellow detainees. The East African Women Conference became such an extensive educational center that sharpened our thinking. I cannot forget when we were approaching our independence in 1960/1961. In 1961, the Kenya We Want Conference took place in Limuru just before we got Madaraka. The Kenyan women participated in this conference. I had just graduated from Technical College with a Diploma in Education. We served as secretaries to translate and write the documents in the language they wanted and record-keeping.

After graduating from the Royal Technical College, I was employed at Eastern African Railways and harbours as a principal welfare officer. This allowed me to work directly with children and mothers. My specific duties were to supervise women and children programmes over the networks of railway and harbours. I was on the ship that went around Lake Victoria. I was on the railway that went all over East Africa. I was on the roads ensuring the workers of the streets were looking after the welfare of the families.

The women's movement in Kenya benefitted greatly from the global development in women's rights, especially the UN conferences on women. The Kenyan government started implementing international resolutions on women's rights, an impetus to local women's empowerment efforts. As a signatory to United Nations Resolutions on women, our government experienced a turning point for women's development in this country.

Question: When was this?

Response: The UN Women's Conference took place from the end of 1974 to early 1975. Madam Shahani, an Assistant Secretary to the UN Secretary General, submitted the UN Resolutions to Geoffrey Kareithi, the Chief Secretary. He presented it to the Cabinet for approval. The Cabinet brought it back, and I was requested to translate it into programmes for women's implementation. Terry Kantai, a senior CDO in the Ministry, Department of Social Services, was my assistant. I handed the document over to Terry to translate it into programmes for women.

By the time we went to Copenhagen, we were sharpened. We wanted the World Conference on Women to be held in Nairobi for the world to see what women in Africa went through. We prepared our resolutions, went to face the world conference, and

demanded to bring the women's conference to Nairobi. It was like a dream; we picked telephones and talked to President Moi directly. We wanted them to know that we are not sleeping; we have Kenyatta International Conference Centre facilities.

Question: Did you spearhead the women decade conference held in Kenya in 1995?

Response: Yes, we wrote a resolution, and I spearheaded the process. I mobilised other Kenyan women, East African women, the Africa Group, the third world group. The so-called Third World at that time included the Pacific, Asia and the Caribbeans. They all came along with us, and we lobbied the more developed world to accept to come. It was not easy but it was a great struggle because we spent 72 hours of no sleep to ensure we won.

The Nairobi conference was a great success in terms of its organisation. It marked a significant step in the advancement of women globally. It is here that we developed the forward-looking strategies that turned around the world. We took the same report to the Beijing conference. The world produced a plan of action for the global community that touched women, families, and the entire human community.

The Beijing plan of action has helped a lot to advance women in education. Back home, all these things were transforming our lives. When I went to Parliament in 1975 and was appointed the first woman Assistant Minister in government, I was like a cartoon on a stage, alone. I was swamped. I had to be seen and felt by everybody. The government also wanted me to be a role model. I look back and marvel at the strength and speed I had at the time.

Terry Kantai and I initiated policies on women and women self-help groups. We ensured that these groups were registered and funded with donor support such as Danida, Swedish Embassy, and other European countries.

Question: If I may ask, were you ever an executive officer in KANU?

Response: An executive officer? I played various roles in KANU in my role as a politician. I was in KANU Youth from 1962. You know those days of KAU, we were little girl guides watching what was happening; later on, in the early 1960s, Tom Mboya brought us together as a KANU youth squad. I picked up my political interest from there, and later on, I became a vice-chair of the Busia branch. That was a very senior position. President Moi reorganised KANU to respond to the agitation for multi-party

democracy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He appointed me the Director of Youth and Women Affairs in KANU. I served in that capacity for 10 years.

It was a one-party system, and the arrangement was that nothing else existed; it was one voice, one party and one government. But again, we had robust networks; women had seen what was happening at the East Africa Women Conference. They had seen independence come, had participated in women groups, had developed themselves and were able to manage their own NGOs. We could see what was happening outside and from within KANU. We saw the need for the KANU women to relate to what was happening around them. So we participated quietly in joint sessions of KANU women with NGOs in political education, voter education, civic education and sensitised them on their rights to seek to be elected, not to just remain as women's leagues. I participated in that politics; Prof. Kabira will tell you when they were being chased. I picked the phone and told him; Bwana, please leave those women. They are not harming us; they are innocent; they are not opposed to us. And they were left alone. In my position, I acted more as a bridge between KANU and the women. It was a bit difficult, it was difficult balancing there, and I risked being thrown in, jailed or called a traitor, and I now became an enemy on both sides. I also lost opportunities to enjoy myself. I also lost financial support for my programmes as I used the money to promote destructive activities.

Question: How many women were able to contest for leadership during this time when you were in office?

Response: Contest for KANU positions or national leadership?

Question: National leadership elections

Response: Oh yes. Grace Ogot, Agnes Ndeti and other women came into Parliament.

Question: What about Nyiva Mwendwa?

Response: Nyiva Mwendwa was elected during my time in Parliament. Phoebe came after us, while Grace Onyango was elected earlier in the 1969 elections when I was at Harvard. I felt challenged. Nyiva Mwendwa and I came to Parliament in 1974. Eddah Gachukia was also nominated by the president. Parliament started to feel and see women increase in numbers.

Question: All these came in with KANU?

Response: There was only one party; KANU was *Baba na Mama* (father and mother).

Question: So, for you to be nominated, you had to be in KANU, right?

Response: You had to be very active; you had to show interest in the *chama* (party). You had to be very close to the system.

Question: Prof. how did you manage to break that glass ceiling?

Response: It comes from the internal strength because if you tell someone, “come and support me”, it will not take you there. If you develop your internal shock absorbers with a mindset on where you want to be, you cannot fail.

So, I went to Parliament, and I was appointed an assistant minister. I was told to present myself to the elders, and when I went there, they asked me, “We hear mzee has appointed you?” I told them “yes”. They continued, “Will you be able to sit at the Cabinet?” I told them that I was already seated there. “Will you sit in Thingira?” They asked. I told them that if I was invited, I will go and tell them what I want for our villages and our children.

Thereafter, we decided to rescue women from the suffering caused by the Female Genital Mutilation. I was then sent to Ouagadougou for the first human rights conference to talk about FGM and bring back the report to the government. Until this time, FGM was considered a cultural thing and untouchable. But I said no, it can be touched. The information that I brought from Ouagadougou was absorbed by the government. Immediately the chiefs and the assistant chiefs were told they must ensure these things are not happening in their areas. This marked the beginning of the fight against the FGM.

In 1977, when in Parliament, I was sent to Colombo, Sri Lanka, to attend the first conference on population and development. The first global conference on population and development with a focus on family planning. In Kenya, it was still taboo to talk about family planning. Bishop Kaimati, a nominated MP, and two other government civil servants were asked to accompany me. We represented our Parliament very well. It was a compassionate conference, and our contributions there were valid. When I returned

from Sri Lanka, I brought a motion in Parliament on population and development, which translated to our now National Council for Population and Development (NCPD). I had to face people like Martin Shikuku, who did not want anything on Family Planning. The motion took three months because Shikuku would take two days on the floor. It was complicated but went on. Eventually, the motion was adopted.

Question: Still looking at you as a political party leader, we know that you are the leader of Labour Party of Kenya (LPK). Tell us the role played by LPK in promoting women's participation in leadership?

Response: I am happy about that question. When we formed the party in 1998, our constitution provided for gender parity in leadership at 50/50. Today, it has been taken for granted, but that was a strict order. I am the longest living woman leader of a political party in Kenya. Wherever we go as LPK, we talk of 'Haki na Usawa' (justice and equality).

Question: A majority of women cannot participate in politics due to financial constraints. What strategies have you put in place as LPK to ensure that even the poor woman in the village can contest for an MCA position?

Response: We invite women to join LPK because it is worker-friendly, women-friendly and youth-friendly. The commercialisation of politics is a threat to women's participation. Voters demand inducements from women politicians who do not have many resources. In LPK, we do not give money to our candidates to go and bribe the voters.

Question: Do you have political education to reach your members to discuss the importance of giving women candidates in your party financial support?

Response: Yes. When we have identified our candidates, we invite them to come to our headquarters and meet other candidates from other parts of the country. We teach them about our policies, and we hold a platform where we talk about challenges and how to go about these challenges. We offer necessary advice on reaching the NGO funds. We encourage them to work with their families and friends to strengthen their campaigns.

Question: Prof, briefly tell us about your role in the constitution-making process.

Response: The constitution debate started with us and will continue because it is a dynamic document that will keep changing and being amended for generations to come. We are praying that our country values the constitution so that it can continue guiding us. Other countries have thrown their constitutions and suffered anarchy. We started with East African conferences, then the Kenya we want. The spirit of the Kenya we want is the urge in us to seek perfection. Perfection is impossible to achieve, but it is a good thing to aim at. It sets a goal and helps to achieve standards. Of course, in the 1980s, the multi-party struggle demanded that we move from a one party system to a multi-party system. Although it involved the shedding of blood, it helped move from the first liberation to the second liberation.

As we moved to the second liberation, the women also felt that we had been left behind for decades. Women groups and women's movements came together. It ensured that there was one-third representation at the conference from the district levels. The women who came to Bomas were able to bond and were very vocal. Women had opportunities to reflect on what has happened in the past and what will happen in future. They reflected on what happens around families and in the community, and the society that surrounds them. So, we made a lot of contributions to that chapter.

But there are times when it became challenging, like when we came from the Bomas conference. Things stalled. In the women's movement, Prof. Kabira included, Ngilu and other women had to 'jump-start' the men. We looked around and asked ourselves how we were going to jump start it. We cannot come all the way only to let it die at this point. We had to look for spiritual leaders to help jumpstart the process. We went to the late Archbishop Gitari, Muslim leaders, and Archbishop Ndingi Mwana Nzeki and asked them to support us. We were also able to lobby the NCCK Chair Mutava Musyimi who was attending a conference at Limuru. That was a critical role that women played to end the stalemate in the constitution review process.

The two-thirds gender rule is not a Kenyan talk because it had been mooted in the UN Women's conference as the global ratio. In Kenya, we see it as big numbers, but this was the bare minimum, and other nations have adhered to it. Our neighbours have learnt from us, and they have reached up to 50%. Tanzania and Uganda have been in our class. We have taught them the two-thirds rule, and they are now ahead of us. In Kenya, we have not reached 30% but other nations are over and above.

We started the Affirmative Action talk during my time as an MP but the Affirmative discussion has taken different perspectives. The Affirmative Action ensured that two-thirds representation is adhered to while hiring women into armed forces, legal institutions, teaching, universities, management, business, among others.

The government is picking up different areas of development. It is only in the political life and political parties where we find it hard to implement Affirmative Action. When we were in Parliament, Phoebe brought this motion to Parliament. I was with the women at every stage of the debate; formulating the document, I gave input on any discussion. I was always with these women and gave them every support that they required.

We are still working on policies because nothing will work unless it is written in black and white. There is a need to continue putting more policies. Our women in Parliament must use their time to look into loopholes and develop policies that can bridge these gaps. I want to speak about the nominated women in the senate and also parliamentarians because they are many. I would have liked to hear more about these women sitting together on legislative issues. They should spend their time looking at problems legislative because the elected ones are busy with development issues. They have no time for amending laws, and it is regrettable if the 68 continue to sit in Parliament for five years. We continue having weak laws because probably they went there to follow on CDF funds.

"I want to challenge the next crop of women legislators to take legislative matters seriously. They must tackle laws and policies that hinder women from achieving their potential in economic programmes". I hear about the CDF funds where only one person, a member of Parliament, is engaged in distribution and allocation. There should be a policy addressing this anomaly by promoting transparency and accountability in the CDF. I want to say that the next set of women who are nominated in the County Assemblies should show more leadership boldness in participating in these issues. I don't know whether they are part of the forum supposed to participate in these issues.

Question: Prof, what gives you the motivation to continue with the struggle?

Response: You know when you have set goals in life like I have made a decision to participate in the development when I go out of my house, and I face life challenges, like now we are doing something together, when you go out you will find me with my Kenya National Nutrition and dieticians association or when I am not with The Labour Party of Kenya. I am with the national fund for the disabled and I find so many challenges there, and they too want equipment, they want recognition, support and to be nominated.

In Labour Party, it is election time now, and you find numerous challenges. What keeps me going and has inspired me is that inbuilt urge to look for solutions where I can. I cannot sit back and leave others to work when I can use my brains to complement their struggle. Like when I was in elections, and you know I have also been rigged in elections, I go to Busia with my people. They count what you can only see, and the papers are not there, the lights have gone off, the table has been turned down, and you get so frustrated when you see all these acrobatics. You ask yourself what is happening, and you are told the other person has won, and you ask yourself, when did it happen? It is challenging because the voters can even kill you. After all, you are going back to Nairobi, and for them, they will remain in Busia. I have found that there is a challenge in everything because life is dynamic. Therefore there is a need to improve on the environment that makes us look for solutions.

Today, the society has categorised us into analogue and digital people. Initially, I believed only digital people can use a phone, and I never thought I would use even a computer or a digital phone. When you are seated, and things are going on well, you want to relax. If I have seen our country through the 60 years of independence, we can see a lot of development, motivating me.

Question: What is your assessment of the women's movement currently?

Response: The women's movement is not as strong as before despite its contribution to women participation in leadership. The women are suffering different challenges. They are involved in various roles and responsibilities through their career advancement, unlike before. Bringing them together has become difficult due to lack of resources, distance, the Kenyan political setup, and ideologies. There is also political party jealousies since women belong to different political parties, unlike before when there was only one political party. Finding convergence among women is impossible due to political party structures and divisions. Women don't want to be seen working with their opponents.

We had one policy in our time, and there was only one party, and we knew the consequences would come to us equally.

Question: There was a time when the women's movement wanted to bring women together through developing a women manifesto. I know one was designed by women caucuses and a recent one created by the women's league. Why has it become complicated to bring women together in Kenya?

Response: One, ethnicity is very firm, and women have allowed themselves to be divided along tribal lines. Women have also allowed themselves to be divided among political lines. We developed a manifesto that a woman, everywhere you are, supports another woman during our time. In voting, vote for a woman as long as you have identified her as a candidate. I did not see it happening with Martha Karua. Women were the first to say, "I cannot vote a woman," previously with Ngilu and Wangari Maathai. I also had the same experience as a vice presidential candidate and a political party leader; women had not come. So, we must start fighting women leadership stigmatisation among women themselves. When I was at the ministry and women's bureau, I ensured inclusivity. No woman was identified as a Luhya, a Kalenjin, a Luo, Kamba or Kikuyu. We were all one with a common goal. Therefore, there is a need to cultivate acceptable women leadership in this country; women must be identified by themselves and not handpicked. When women are having elections, you find men are always behind whispering, "This one and not that one". Region-wise, the women should also elect their leader so that this woman will go and present their voice and articulate their interests as women.

Question: Do you think having women organisations that combine women in different arenas, C.S.O.s, N.G.O.s, Politics, and Universities will bring women together?

Response: We need to cultivate a need to include each other as I was in the government. I believed I could not work without women from all regions in Kenya, women at the University, women in N.G.Os, women in women's movements. We used to bring women together; I did not find it difficult. Today, how do we do it? We are still faced with the challenge of identifying one woman, having a woman president, and I think this is our focus. When we have gotten a woman president, we believe we have now achieved, and this is our focal point. A woman who would build strength to lead and the power to bring others together and support. May be is what we are looking for.

Question: Okay, Prof, I realise that you have done so much towards the nation-building, and all through, I have kept wondering how you managed it because in most cases, women who have wanted to join political leadership have at some point pulled back by lack of family support and I have not heard you mention your family. How have you managed to strike a balance between family, government service and political life?

Response: My family has been at the core. I grew up in a very close-knit family of Rev. Okello and Mama Teresa. We were eight, and all of us went to school and got professions. Some of us have died, and some are still living, and we are all independent.

What I recall in my case is when I started my own life, when I left the University and went to teach at Butere Girls, after two years I got married. We left Kenya and went to live in Makerere. My husband was then a registrar at Makerere University. We came back, and I got my firstborn child. When my baby was six months old, I got the UNICEF /FAO scholarship to London. Somehow for us, God has been on our side. When I got my Scholarship, my husband also got his Commonwealth fellowship to go to England. He was a brilliant scholar, and he commuted every weekend to come to London and live with us. At that time the blacks were not allowed in London. There were very few graduates. We lived there for three years, came back to Kenya, and started working at the University of Nairobi.

When I went to Parliament, our families were very supportive; my family and his family. My father-in-law could not allow me to go to any rally alone. He was listening to every word that was said to us and translated it into our lives. My husband was my technical advisor and my financial advisor. My husband was there 24 hours to support me. The last moment in 1974 when my opponent realised that he was losing, he hacked my husband with an axe, and he got a massive cut on the head and was left to die. The opponent was looking for me to kill me because he knew he would win if I died. Until he died, my husband was always with me and walked the journey with me. My children, when they grew up, they ran for their Identity Cards to support mum. They look after my property, look after mum and look after my food. But that does not mean we hold the same ideologies. My daughter, an ambassador and I, belongs to different political parties, but we live in the same house. She goes out to do her campaign, comes back and ensures that her mum has eaten. When I go out for my campaigns, she fuels her mum's car. When casting votes, we also don't throw them the same way, but we vote according to our interests. That is democracy. I have allowed them to express themselves.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Prof, for sharing your eventful life in service of women's empowerment in Kenya.

CHAPTER SIX

A Conversation with Ida Odinga



“If we nominated a woman, we expect them to properly use the opportunity by showing themselves to the community and showing their expertise to increase women leaders”.

~ Ida Odinga

Biography

The wife of the former Prime Minister, Raila Odinga. She is a business woman, activist and educationist who has been very instrumental in championing the gender agenda in the country. She is the founder and chair of the League of Kenyan Women Voters (1991), which aimed at promoting opportunities for women in the political field and a patron of the Ribbon for Women Alliance, which aims at ensuring safe motherhood. Idah is a passionate teacher and mentor to young girls in schools, colleges and universities through the Idah Odinga Foundations.

Interviewed by Dr Mary Goretty Akinyi and Agnes Mugane

Question: Kindly share with us what you remember about your struggle for women's movement, especially in political leadership.

Response: It doesn't happen at once that you just wake up one day and decide to do it. Mine started from childhood. I grew up like any other girl in Kenya. I have stayed in many places because my parents were civil servants serving in various stations. I was born in Kabarnet in Baringo District, where my parents worked at the District Hospital, now Baringo Level 5. I was born into a family of six children. I am the fourth born in a family of two boys and four girls. My dad was a Luo, whereas my mother was a Luhya, so I am a product of inter-ethnic marriage. My mother was a nurse while my dad was a doctor in the same hospital. When I was born, we lived in our paternal home. After I was born, my mother was asked by the family members to stop working to take care of her children. She complied. My dad continued to work in different hospitals, Kisumu and Kisii hospitals, in the early 1950s. As I grew up, my mother became the most prominent pillar in my life. After the death of my father, she refused to get remarried as required by culture. She was a very staunch 'born-again' Christian. She worked as a farmer and made sure we all went to school. I can say that my mother was my first role model. My mother was also the first African woman nurse in our community. She opened her first bank account in 1937 and was the 25th person to open a bank account in Kakamega. You can see that I was brought up by a woman with a rock-solid foundation.

Question: Tell us something about your school life and leadership profile.

Response: Yes, I played leadership roles through my primary school to high school. I was a prefect in primary, and in high school, I was a library prefect. I went to Ogande Girls High school for four years. Our school headmistress was called

Madam Churchill, and she was the former headmistress for my elder sister.

Hence, when she saw me, she made me the library prefect. I made sure that I read any new book before anybody else.

Question: You know that for one to be a school leader, one needed a great personality. Did you inherit this personality from your mother?

Response: I did well in secondary school and proceeded to Form Five and Six before

joining the University of Nairobi, where I did a Bachelor of Arts in Education. I did Geography in 3-1-1, which was a specialisation. It meant that I did three subjects in the first year and then specialised in Geography for the remaining two years. I did Geography and Education because I wanted to teach.

Question: Tell me about your life as a teacher.

Response: I am a trained teacher. I taught at Highway School and later on at Kenya High School, both in Nairobi. I started teaching at Highway from May 1974 to December 1975. I transferred to Kenya High in January 1976. During those days, graduates never tarmacked. We got jobs before graduating from university. Employment letters would be handed over to us before we left campus.

Question: So, tell us about your university life compared to today.

Response: I may not want to annoy them, but I find the university students now young and immature. Maybe it is because they join the university while very young. I also think that the two extra years in Forms five and six also prepared us for university life. Apart from the exams, there is nothing that now prepares young people for life out there. In primary, they are under the parents and teachers' protection and in high school, they are controlled by strict rules. When they join a university where there are no rules, they get lost in their freedom.

I may also blame the curriculum for the challenges students face at university. Learning is concentrated on curriculum, and a normal human being is not only shaped by academics. We seem to value academic papers more than the totality of a performance contribution at school. Some students are outstanding in games, drama and other extracurricular activities. Due to the high competition, the teachers concentrate more on academics and less on co-curricular activities, making them not well-rounded as they move on in life.

Question: So, tell us about your family life.

Response: I am married to Hon. Raila Odinga. We met at the University of Nairobi. We became friends when I was in my Third Year. We became friends, dated for a short while then later got married in my third year as I completed my degree programme. As a young married teacher, I had many dreams about many things I wanted to achieve. I also had a lot of ambitions because I now had a man to take care of.

I had a passion for teaching. I taught my students about book knowledge as well as knowledge for life. I taught them that life was not about money and that teaching is a noble job too. At Highway, I was assigned a class as a senior teacher, and the old teacher was known as Mr Senior. When I first went to school, I told them that I am a teacher and a fresh graduate from Nairobi. At that time, there were not many African women teachers. The majority of female teachers at Highway were mainly Asians and many of the teachers were men. We can say that we were pioneers in teaching in secondary schools. I worked there for a year, and it changed people's perspectives that African women could not lead. I was happy to work there, but I wanted to teach in a girls' school to give them what I had earned from a good school. When I moved to Kenya High, I gave the girls my everything. It was my best time in the teaching profession. I taught there until the tragedy befell our family during the attempted coup of 1982. It was during this time that my husband was arrested and charged with treason. The charge of treason was later withdrawn, but he remained detained.

I had three kids at the time. Fidel, Rosemary, and Julia. I did not know for how long he would stay in jail. I had prepared myself psychologically to work hard because the detainees, including the Kapenguria Six, had remained in prison for more than nine years. I looked at those we had studied together with at the university, particularly the men. We all earned the same amount of salary. I told myself that if male teachers in my grade looked after their families with the same pay, then I could do the same for mine. The teachers' salary was meagre. I could not provide for my children's education compared to when their father was around. It embarrassed me that I could not give my children good education despite having a good school full of students from able families. As a teacher, you cannot give more to your students and give less to your children. Discrimination in paying teachers and lecturers has been with us for a long time. It is common to find students who graduate earning higher than their lecturers.

We should not keep the cart before the horse because the horse cannot push the cart, and so we should make the lecturers feel appreciated. We should close the gap between the rich and the poor and not allow anyone to die of hunger or malnutrition in Kenya. Primary Education should be free and compulsory because it is not the parents to decide whether the children should go to school. Health services must be available for everybody. Every child born into this world has a right to live, and it should not be left to anyone's decision. The child must have good health, education and shelter. When the children are taken to daycare in Israel, they are all fed for free not to suffer malnutrition.

A study by UNICEF documented that 49% of the children are malnourished, and they end up stunted. Once they are stunted, it doesn't matter how much you feed them or what kind of school you take them to when they grow up. Such children find learning difficult; they become too slow and forgetful. Imagine having 49% of the population with stunted growth because of malnutrition; what kind of country will we have in 20 years?

Question: You were a wife of a detainee and living the lives of fellow teachers; how was it? How did you cope?

Response: It was difficult; life was challenging but not because of the low income. It was hard because of the government system; the way they were treating me was terrible. I was always followed. They were keen to know; who am I talking to? Who am I going to see? Who is seeing me? They followed me all the time. For example, I remember there was always a police car at the gate. When I am taking my children to school, they always followed us up to the school entrance. Even when I was going to Kenya High, they followed me. In the evening, when I was going to pick my children, they followed me. When I was in the house, they stayed at the gate, and when going to the market, they followed me. It was not for my security. It was harassment. They wanted to see who I am talking to. They thought anybody that I was talking to must be planning something horrible for the government. Those were the dark old days with a lot of harassment coming from the system.

Apart from the government harassment, I coped with my situation and circumstances. I could pay my bills, send my children to school and do my work. There was this senior police officer who was in charge of the detainees. He was always restless about me. You can say he was always looking for fault in me. He would question me over anything I did without any valid reason. He used to pick me up and put me in the cell after asking me a few questions. I slept in the cell quite often.

Worst of all, I remember when I was picked up on a Thursday on the eve of the Easter weekend. I was in the cell on that Thursday night, Good Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Easter Monday. This officer released me on a Tuesday morning without truly caring who was taking care of my children. I kept on asking him: "Why are you keeping me here? What have I done? If I have done something terrible, charge me?" He would tell me, "If I take you to court, it will be bad for you. So, this is your punishment." This policeman was a law unto himself. Ironically, he was the one who determined when I

could see my husband, which was officially once in six months. He threatened to limit my visits to once a year.

I had no privacy. The police officer opened all the letters I wrote to my husband in detention and read them. After reading the letter to my husband, he would command me to edit what he did not like. He would tell me, "You cannot write this" and proceed to cancel that section in my letter. He would ask me why I wrote that. I asked him why he read my letter, which was not addressed to him but my husband? I was only supposed to write to my husband about myself and the children and nothing more.

My mother-in-law died when Raila was in detention. I went to my tormentor and told him I wanted to see my husband to inform him of the demise of his mother. He declined and ordered me to go back and write a letter. So, I went back and told my brother-in-law Oburu to write the letter and do a telegram. Both the letter and the telegram took three months to be delivered. Psychologically, I was also a detainee. When people talk about detention, they only think about the person inside; they hardly fathom what the family is going through, especially the children who incessantly ask, "Where is dad? Why can't he come home? You said you went to see dad, when is he coming?"

In those dark days, Kenyans were very timid. The freedom of expression and association we enjoy now sitting under these trees were not there back then. There could be somebody seated here telling you, don't ask this, why are you asking that. Whenever I asked why I was being harassed, I was told I was sitting with the wrong people. How can your husband be a bad person?

It did not end there. I remember one day I was called from class and given a memo to go and see the headmistress. I noticed something unusual because it is uncommon to be called from class to see the headmistress. When I got to her office, she told me she had my letter which she handed to me. On opening, it was a letter sacking me from the TSC. I reached out to the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT). They did not want to touch my case saying that it had nothing to do with teaching. The union that could have protected me abandoned me. I then went to Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO), the women's lobby, for support as a woman under siege. Little did I know that MYWO had been renamed KANU Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation. They, too, could not touch my case. Abandoned by my union and fellow women leaders, there was no other organisation to defend me. I then realised that I needed to start an organisation to give women a voice in leadership and decision-making. That is how I

mooted the idea of women voters. I was supported strongly by the reformist church leaders of the time: Muge, Njoya and Okullu.

Question: How was it in Kenya High during the time your husband was in jail?

Response: It was mixed feelings. Many teachers feared me, and because there was a main and minor staffroom, I would use the minor staffroom to give them peace. A minority of the teachers actually prayed with me. But the girls loved me as their teacher, and every time they saw me, they would call me Winnie because my husband and Mandela were in detention at the same time.

Question: How was the society towards you during this time?

Response: Some people feared and avoided me. Some came to meet me after they were elected MP (Not quite clear. Who was elected MP?). These are the fair-weather friends who are your friends during good times and bolt out during the bad times. I even remember my daughter Rosemary facing discrimination in her class. During one of her friends' birthdays, her friend's parents told the teacher not to invite Rosemary Odinga. This discrimination has not ended; it is still there, especially in politics. We should change our politics to that of ideology devoid of personality clashes and insults.

Question: So apart from the church and your children, did you receive any help from other people?

Response: Yes, I did. We had formed an alliance of the wives of detainees. We brought our children together to play. The group comprised families of detainees such as Otieno Mc Onyango, Alfred Otieno Osanya, Anne Rubia, John Khaminwa, Wanyiri Kihoro among others. Later on, Edith Matiba, Priscilla Kiraitu Edith Muite, Koigi Wa Wamwere and Kamau Kuria, our lawyer, joined us. Even the former Chief Justice Willy Mutunga and Mirugi Kariuki joined us later on. We were real sisters. We were many and I may have forgotten some.

Question: Did Chelagat Mutai join you later, or was it before?

Response: Yeah, she joined us, but she was arrested earlier. She was with me in school at Highlands and the university. She was a year ahead of me. I was in Form Five, and she was in Form Six. I remember at Highlands, we had academic sisters. One day, she found me reading an essay in the library, and she dropped her writing on my table and

told me to read it and write articles similar to those ones. She didn't last long because something happened in school, and she was punished. I remember she had organised the school's Debating Society to meet the other students in the neighbouring school. I don't know how she convinced the driver to take the girls to that neighbouring school and back. When the headmistress learnt about it, she was so furious. Chelagat told the headmistress that she was the patron of the club and could do what she wanted. A visibly angry Chelagat assaulted the headmistress, which earned her an expulsion from school. She was a brilliant woman. She still passed with A's in her exams. We later reunited at the university. Back then, she was known as Philomena Chelagat. She was above average in her studies and was a no-nonsense woman.

Question: Tell us about the organisation you started for the political empowerment of women and whether it was ever registered.

Response: Our organisation was never registered because no one could dare register us. It remained a loose association.

Question: And how did you meet?

Response: We met in one of our houses using code names to determine how we pass information. On one New Year's eve, we organised a prayer day at St. Paul's Chapel. We called the press, but when we got there, we found no priest, and we all sat down together with our kids and prayed. We were told to stand up and produce the organiser of the meeting. We all said that we had received a call to go and pray and because it was a prayer, we just came in. We met depending on the situation that we were in.

Question: Did the priest avoid you deliberately?

Response: I had told you that the church is the only organisation that helped us, so the priest had opened the church door for us and even kept some background music. When the priest was asked why he accommodated us, he said he did that every day and did not choose his congregation. But we knew that for that particular day, he had done it for us.

Question: So who came up with the association?

Response: Before they were detained, we used to meet with Elizabeth MakAnyango. She could tell me that she knows someone and we would go and meet her. Through a friend of mine, I met Wanjiru Kihoro and one of my neighbours knew Mrs. Willy Mutunga.

Detention is not an easy thing on the dependants of a detainee. You suffer from a lot of psychological problems. You also meet people in the system who tell you how bad your husband is. Many marriages failed because of detention. Fortunately, I was able to resolve it. Some members from our group did not survive the separation. I was motivated by my mother, who raised us after my father's death despite not having higher education. Compared to her, my situation was fairer; I had gone to the university. I also had half the number of the children she had. The difference between us was that her husband was dead. At the same time, for me, he was alive with a possibility of never coming back. In my low moments, I was inspired by Winnie Mandela because Nelson Mandela had been imprisoned for 27 years, and she never gave up for all those years. I had not done even half of the years Winnie had suffered.

Nelson Mandela was released in March 1990 from prison. I remember it very well because I was at the labour ward to deliver my last born daughter, Winnie. As I watched the television, they started showing Robert Ouko then brought Mandela and Winnie. I saw Mandela leave prison for the first time in 27 years, holding Winnie's hand. The clip provoked emotions of hope in me. I said, Waah! If I get a boy, I will call him Mandela, and if I get a girl, I will call her Winnie. A baby girl was born, and I named her Winnie, my Winnie, the detention child.

Question: What was the situation of the other women who were the wives of the detainees?

Response: We were a mixed group. Some wives of the detainees were well-educated, but others were not. Some had jobs while others did not. But we were united by the resilience will to survive. I told you I was a teacher, then I was sacked. I was out of work for two months, before being reinstated. I was not taken back to school as they said I would negatively influence the girls. I was taken to Jogoo House as an education officer, where I worked for two years up to early 1992. That was when the mothers to the detainees came together at freedom corner; they were sitting there day and night, so I brought them some breakfast one day. We sat on the ground with Koigi wa Wamwere's mother next to me. We also had Mirugi's mother and another mother of a detainee I am not able to recall. We talked the four of us when *The Standard*

newspaper's journalists came and took our pictures. *The Standard* newspaper featured our photos the following day with the caption, "Ida Odinga consoling with the mothers of political prisoners." By one O'clock the same day, I got my second sacking letter! I never went back to government employment. I became a young pensioner earning 1,500 per month.

Question: What was your vocation after the sacking from the civil service?

Response: After losing my job with the government, I started the League of Kenya

Women Voters. I devoted all my time to that organisation. When I started the League, it was a requirement that I register it. I looked for women who could join me. We mooted the idea of establishing an organisation that could be turned into a political party. We drafted our objectives and gave the document to (Chief Justice) Martha Koome to translate our ideas into a constitution to facilitate our registration. Martha Koome was my lawyer at the time. She invited Martha Karua and told her that Idah had started something that seems good. We requested Jael Mbogo, Namai, Faith, Terry Kantai, Grace Majiwa and Mary Mbeu to join. Several other women requested to join us, so we opened the membership and drafted the constitution. That was the time Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation became KANU Maendeleo. If you were in opposition, you could not join because it was the part of the KANU government. The League became a well-known organisation locally and even beyond. Most of the women who became MPs came from that organisation. We worked closely with other women's organisations like the National Alliance for Women, FIDA, The Women's Political Caucus.

Question: How did you use the League to facilitate women participation in the political arena?

Response: During those days of constitution-making at Bomas, we used our organisations to identify and train women who could participate in deliberations. We identified the issues that we wanted to be included in the constitution. We sent our representatives to have them included in the constitution-making. The point of Affirmative Action was a good idea as a temporary remedial intervention. We argued that it was not supposed to be permanent, and its aim was to give women a head-start. We compared our political race with a two-legged horse whereas we have one leg, and of course, the two-legged one wins. The women MCAs who joined the County Assembly were beneficiaries of the Affirmative Action through nomination. We expected the nominated women MCAs to save enough money to vie for the seats in

the subsequent election. If they contest those seats and win, we are thrilled because they will have increased the number of women leaders. If they don't win, it is too bad for our strategy. We ask them to go and strengthen themselves and come back in the next elections. Meanwhile, we let fresh women be nominated because you cannot teach a child ABCD this year, and next year, you come and teach them ABCD again and again. If they can't remember the ABCD you taught them previously, let them go and try independently.

We strive to reach as many women as possible because we have limited chances. If we nominate a woman, we expect them to properly use the opportunity by showing themselves to the community and demonstrating their expertise to increase women leaders. I have also noted that many women go for the Woman Rep seats because some think it is the only one preserved (for the female gender). Only a woman can be elected in that position. However, that does not mean we all go for it. We want to see women become governors and even presidents. We had women in the past who contested for the presidency: Karua, Ngilu, and Wangari Maathai. In the coming elections, I don't know of any woman who wants to be president. For the governors I hear of Cecily Mbarire, Waiguru, Laboso and Ngilu want to vie.

We want to see many women candidates, especially young women, go for parliamentary seats. If you look at our Parliament, it has a lot of young men. We want young women to be there as well; otherwise, we risk an imbalance in the future. Political parties should help with this issue. Every political party has women's congress or women's wing. The women's congress and women's wings should influence young women to join active politics and vie for elective positions. Women should come out because nobody can pull you from your kitchen; nobody knows you exist. Women must come out and be counted. They should not wait to be invited to come out.

We must also deconstruct the idea of having women as appendages in political parties. Why should women be relegated to the wings of political parties and not the mainstream? In Orange Democratic Party (ODM), women are no longer in the wings. They are at the centre of the party. Christine (who?) is there as one of the chairs. I don't know what is happening in other parties. In Jubilee, you know we don't have a chair, a man or a woman; they have no structures; they have never had even what we call membership drive. We don't know the chair of Jubilee in Kiambu. We have not been told. They only have the party leader and the deputy party leader. In fact, that seat for deputy should have been given to a woman. That is the only way you will know they are including women.

Question: Apart from The League, have you supported any other organisations to increase women's participation in politics?

Response: The League is the first one. I am the founder and the chair of the Kenya League for Women voters. I have been a patron of the Ribbon for Women Alliance which aims at ensuring safe motherhood. It is closely related to what we call the Beyond Zero campaign. It is the name that differs, but the programme is the same. I have also been a patron of Freedom from Fistula Foundation, which aims to create awareness, prevention, and cure those afflicted by fistula. I have been the Patron of the Kenya Women Medical Association and the Kenya Breast Health Organisation. I have been part of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, where I advocate for good food, particularly for women and young children. I have done the integrated care programme, which aims at integrating different programmes, for instance, HIV and Aids, Malaria, and Diarrhoea. These are done together to avoid visiting beneficiaries for AIDS today, and tomorrow you visit again to talk about malaria. We integrate them because those affected are the same people, same women.

I am the Chair of, Advisory Board of the Kenya Paramedic organisation. Besides this, I have been a member of the council of Maseno University. Now am doing a lot of mentorship of girls in schools, colleges, and universities through Idda Odinga Trust Foundation. The struggle continues. It might take a long, but one day, we will get there.

Question: What are some of the challenges that you faced in the struggle towards empowerment of women?

Response: In December, I talked to the girls in Busia County and realised that girls still face many problems. The problems range from distractions from education such as early marriages, or early pregnancies, which make them drop out of school. I remember these issues were there when my husband was the Prime Minister of Kenya. I got disturbed whenever the KCPE and KCSE results were released because the girls were missing from the top one hundred list. The girls comprised 15% of the best students. I sought to know why girls performed poorly. We realised that girls performed poorly because they did not attend classes throughout the month. They lost five days every month, which translated to fifteen days in a term. Obviously, they could not perform better than boys who stayed in class for all the lessons. The issue here was sanitary pads. I talked to my husband and the Minister of Education. The government took up the matter through the Ministry of Education, and sanitary towels were supplied to girls in schools.

You don't have to be a leader yourself to effect change. You can talk to the leaders. Being the prime minister's wife helped me a lot because I could go to the minister's office and raise social issues. The new government did not supply sanitary towels to schools for girls. When I talked to the girls in Busia last December, they told me they are "selling themselves" to get sanitary towels, lotion, and hair care. This explained early pregnancies, teenage HIV infections and school dropouts. Nobody is talking to girls about these dangers because it is not in the school curriculum. At home, there is also a conspiracy of silence. Traditionally, we had grandmothers who used to do the counselling but nowadays, the grandmothers are like me, who are very busy with no time to talk to the girls. Girls used to sleep in their grandmother's houses. When you were a grandmother, you were not only a grandmother to your grandchildren only but to the whole society. Right now, how many grandmothers have homes or houses to accommodate all the girls in the village?

I feel happy because the new curriculum is going to address the concerns of girls in the syllabus. That is why I tell the *Boda Boda* people to leave our girls alone because they lure them into early sex. You know *Boda Boda* men are everywhere in the country. I am not very happy with *Boda Boda*; first of all, it costs more to be ridden on a *Boda Boda* than a matatu.

In the early days, we had a strong sisterhood. It is no longer there, and everyone is travelling on their own. That is why women are using shortcuts to leadership, and those shortcuts are very dangerous. Shortcuts make many women not be respected. For example, when we talk about nominated MCAs, unanswered questions are: "How were they nominated? Who nominated them? Do they know the purpose for which they were nominated?" Some women do not understand why they were appointed. I have noted with concern that some nominated MCAs are not doing anything in one county. They cannot influence any decision. They have to seek the opinion of those who nominated them before they make any decision. They, therefore, add no value at all.

Question: Finally, what are some of the lessons learnt that can help move the struggle for women's empowerment forward?

Response: I have learnt three things: It is not easy to convince your fellow women that you as a woman candidate can make it. I appeal to women to deliberately work together; it is not inborn. You make a deliberate move to support the women and

forget all the other issues because all we need is women who can deliver and not just women. It is high time women stopped campaigning to be elected as women; let them say I am a woman, I can do ABC, and my qualification is ABC. Once they get elected, they do their work while supporting their fellow women.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Conversation with Prof. Achola Pala



“Personally, I don’t like that view of African women being victims of our men or victims of our situations. It was part of the colonial ideology that Africa was not a developed region and not advancing. We rejected that whole notion and tried to create new ideas.”

~ Prof. Achola Pala

Biography

Prof. Achola is the founder of Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD). As a scholar, she injects an intellectual perspective to women’s empowerment in Africa. Born in Bondo, Prof. Achola Pala has taught in universities, researched extensively about women hence among the pioneer Kenyan women intellectuals. Her background in cultural anthropology with a bias towards gender justice has been invaluable in Kenya’s women empowerment discourse. She brings in an ideology of women’s liberation grounded on African cultural ethos. She subverts the

notion of victimhood of African women and advocates for a contextual understanding of their situation.

Interviewed by Agnes Mugane

Question: Thank you, Prof. I am honoured to meet you today to listen to your reflections on the journey of women empowerment in Kenya. But first of all, please tell me about your early years, if you do not mind.

Response: I was born in a small village in western Kenya in Bondo, but later on moved to Seme. Our place was a small church centre where the men who began to teach sent their girls to school. I am one of the nine children, born to Mr. Hosea Pala and Agnes Polo. Both my father and mother were feminists who knew the world. My father was a teacher and my mother was a proponent of women's advancement from a long time back. They were trained at Jeanes School, Kabete, when the school sent couples for capacity building. My mother and father went to Kabete several times to be trained on community development and the solutions to empowerment like schooling. This explains why my parents were very involved in starting primary schools in our area. My father established over 11 schools and taught in almost all of them. My mother worked with women on food security-related issues. She taught women about new seeds and how to be food self-sufficient at home.

I went to a local school called EMUDIEMO for my first two years. My eldest sister was already a teacher. Together with her husband, they were teaching at Butere. She invited me to go and babysit her children. My mother allowed me to go to Butere because my sister would teach me at home so that when I come back, I can continue with school. My sister is the one who taught me to read and write. I'm the seventh born in our family, so I benefited a lot from my senior siblings. My eldest sister was a Kabete-trained teacher. At the same time, my brother was a librarian who taught at Columbia and McGill Universities. He is the one who established the Kenya National Library Services. He was a man of books and always bought books for me. My other sister was a midwife. She differed from the rest as she studied midwifery and was very keen on health issues. All my other elder siblings were teachers, so I grew to appreciate the importance of education by the time I came of age.

People around us used to say of my mother, "This woman has many girls, why is she sending all of them to school?" When I came along, she almost never sent me to

school. However, I got education because of my elder siblings. They really pushed me hard to excel. Going to school for me was always about excellence and not mediocrity. I worked hard and finished my first step at our local school, then they sent me to a nearby girls' boarding school where one of my sisters was a teacher. After that, I joined Butere Girls Secondary School. Two people who were very influential in my life were Effie Francis and Mary Okello. The latter is now at Makini Schools. They started a debating society and recruited us in our first year. We loved their teaching. They taught us how to debate and how to present ideas, which was very helpful.

When I completed high school, I was selected to attend the A-Levels in Nairobi; Rachel Asike joined Kenya High, and I went to Limuru Girls. Rachel was later on trained as a Veterinarian at Seattle University in Washington, and I went to Harvard and became an anthropologist. The two of us were the first in our class to get to the A levels.

These early years were critical in my development. I think that is when you learn about your environment and your values. I learnt at an early age that women should be free to do what they want. They have a right to be safe, secure and to achieve the highest level of education. Those ideas were already being inculcated in me when I was young.

My mother was keen on teaching women to make money. She was not keen on women just learning how to bake because she stayed in the rural areas; how will you tell rural women to be baking cakes? Who is going to eat them? Where are women going to get the ingredients? She felt that, for you to be a home baker, you must have some independent income. She was keen on training women on doing everything for sale.

When we were growing up, I don't remember growing up with any consciousness of inferiority. Nobody said you can't do this; it was not in the vocabulary. I must say, we used to be moresafe and secure young girls compared to now.

After completing my A-Levels, I went to Dar er Salaam for my undergraduate. Mwalimu Nyerere, then the President of Tanzania, was clear on standing up as an African. He made the students understand that there was a liberation movement going on in the continent. Their political engagement was vital over and above just being students. Political activism started to gain momentum. We read about women who had excelled, like Judith Mohamad, who was very active in the independence movement in Tanzania. She also became involved in '*Umoja wa Wanawake Tanzania*', equivalent to '*Maendeleo ya Wanawake* in Kenya.' I was more into indigenous literature during my studies, and I

opted to research on African oral traditions. We had exciting experiences with the likes of Prof. Ngugi, Taban lo Liyong, and Pio Rimo Zirimu. After finishing my undergraduate in 1970, I applied for a scholarship in the USA. I was selected to do Masters in Education with a focus on child development at Harvard University. My professors encouraged me, and I earned another scholarship for a PhD in the same university.

When I was in my third year, I came back home. I ended up as a Junior Research Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi. During my time at IDS, I received a grant from Rockefeller Foundation to finish my PhD. after completing my PhD program in 1977, I stayed with IDS as a research fellow.

I started agitating about the western pronouncements on the situation of women in Africa after attending different women conferences in the US. This made me think that we needed an association of Africa women researchers to pay more attention to these issues and develop credible data to inform policies in our countries. Such data could also be used to engage the western world about our situation to shape our own scholarship. In 1976, I attended a peace conference in Sweden, where issues of women's participation in peace and politics were discussed. At that time, I was getting a little bit concerned about hearing about African women from other people all the time.

At that conference, I met other African women leaders such as Catherine Munanabwa (from Zambia). We went into a caucus to do a side look on "whether to join these people or do our own things". We agreed to get involved in global women discussions but have a base to speak authentically. That year, I was called back to Harvard, while Catherine returned to Zambia. I requested her to host us, a few African women leaders to think about these issues. We organised one more conference in Europe. Catherine and I arranged to visit an emerging Swedish organisation, the Swedish agency for research corporation, run by an anthropologist I knew. We approached them to fund our first workshop.

Upon going back to Harvard and Catherine to Zambia, we formed a group of women we had met in different conferences in 1975 and 1976. In these conferences, women from developing countries raised questions about their views, assessments and concepts of feminism in African and other regions. From that group, I met Shekadean Osman from Sudan, Maria Diliski Savani from Senegal, Fatima Manisi (late) from Morocco, Sara Longwe (a librarian then), and other women across the African region with different professional experiences and women empowerment areas of interests. Not forgetting

we had women journalists who brought the experience of conducting reliable research and disseminating the findings.

In the fall of 1976, we met in Lusaka, Zambia. We formulated the concept of the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD). We had a broad goal of unifying African women research not blurred by religion, geography or ethnicity. We tried to understand the situation of African women to develop our tools. We strategised to participate in global platforms with our ideas instead of always being told African women are inferior. Even today, the Eurocentric world does not accept that African women have power because they treat us as victims. Personally, I don't like that view of African women being victims of our men or victims of our situations. It was part of the colonial ideology that Africa was not a developed region and not advancing. We rejected that whole notion and tried to create new ideas.

We were very young and committed to the Afrocentric ideology. We believed that whoever among us earned a Doctor of Philosophy in our fields should spearhead an African perspective on women issues. We were very keen to show positions of power that African women have under our own systems such as; families, communities, and churches. The British concept of the woman was much based on the domestic sphere. It popularised the notion that women should be homemakers, which we always were. There was nothing new about that. But women were also more; traders, culturalists, diviners and brain queens. We started work, and Maria Savani was selected to coordinate our movement's activities because she was in Dakar while all other members were in universities abroad.

We had our first general assembly in December 1977. Our main goal and theme were to get up and have an African perspective on women's issues rather than reading what other people were saying about us. After that, I finished my degree, flew back to the country and got involved more with the UN because I had married a diplomat. My first involvement was in the 1980 Copenhagen conference as a liaison officer for the specialist agencies as the African representative to the secretariat. We worked together with women from different African nations. At this stage, I started bringing our concepts and thoughts to the UN. When the delegates came, they started to think about an African agenda for the conference, and not just attending the conference because we had been invited.

By 1980, we were very active. I came here several times on trips. I also went to the Zambia Regional Conference that President Kaunda had graciously agreed to host. We attended the World Conference on Women (WCW) in Copenhagen in 1980 with Prof. Wangari Maathai, who had other issues here in Kenya. We had a problem with women and the environment on the continent. We were able to work with the people from Africa to bring those African environmental ideas into the context. During the Copenhagen conference, a woman participant talked much about FGM but from a western perspective. This brought a collaborative opportunity between the UN and the Association of African Women for Research and Development. However, we had already passed a resolution on FGM during the Zambia conference. Women from different African countries who had an issue with FGM put together a solution to be presented at the Copenhagen conference. Our aim was to protest women being 'cut' and 'mistreated'. We knew that in the Middle East, there existed honour killings. It allowed your brother to kill you if you go home with a man who the family had not approved. In China, women were considered pretty because they had tiny feet. The foot binding, which is an excruciating process, was being done to make them smaller to wear small shoes. We wanted to create global awareness that women had been bound by cultural practices all over the world.

In the mid-1980s, I attended an Australian conference before returning to IDS, University of Nairobi, to continue with my previous research. During the Copenhagen conference, Julia Ojiambo was a minister. I was working with the UN and Rosalyne Kulindi, the Kenyan Mission Representative to the UN. We found ourselves in a position where we could influence how to hold such a conference in Kenya. We pushed for the 1985 WCW to be born in Kenya. We had to talk to President Moi to invite the meeting to be held in Nairobi. In 1982, I visited the Ministry to let them know that I was aware of the telegram sent to Copenhagen. Kenya had committed to hosting the conference. I needed to know who was handling it and the activities, but they had forgotten. So, I went back to continue with my research. We pushed to establish a unit within the Ministry of Social Services that would handle women's issues. We worked with government officers and set the women bureaus, another area I was active in. We focused on research but its implementation needed a policy. To develop the approach, an arm of the government was required. Collaboration with the government became imperative.

We were very keen to have the women's unit, which now became the Gender ministry. Terry Kantai was appointed to head the team. When Terry Kantai left the country to advance her studies, Esther Jonathan Wandeka was selected to lead the unit. So now we are about to have a women conference. Still, there was no structure in the

government, and we did not have an NGO movement working towards this. I went to Esther Jonathan and told her that there must be a telegram somewhere in the government system confirming that it had requested to hold the conference in Kenya. She was working in government all along. She started looking for the telegram.

As I was at the IDS, Esther told me that nobody was working on the issue and requested me to go and help organise and plan for the conference. Prof. Senga, then the head of IDS, seconded me to the ministry. I was to help Esther in trying to get a document which can help us think about the budget, how to organise the event, who will be involved and the activities. However, I had mentioned to her that I did not know how government worked since I had not worked in it.

Esther proposed that we should visit the minister (Mung'iro). We had met with him when he was working with Foreign Affairs. The minister wrote a letter to the Assistant Minister, Mr Ambala. Upon explaining the conference to the Assistant Minister, he was like, "if the conference is about women liberation, then we can't do anything about it." When we let him know that the government had agreed to host the conference, he calmed down. He forwarded the letter to the minister, who later approved the meeting to be held in Kenya. Upon receiving the authorisation letter to host the conference, I mobilised women's organisations, resource mobilisation (development of the budget concept to the cabinet), and negotiation processes because we were the host.

Back in the days when I was a student in Dar es Salaam, Nyerere had a mobilising tool called "mwenge." It was the "independence torch." He took it from Dar es Salaam to Arusha, where the Arusha declaration was made. I thought it was a very innovative concept to take a torch and walk between all the people and tell them that we want Tanzania to become one nation. I told my people that I would like us to take a peace torch using the same concept. In Africa, we had lots of turmoil. Many countries such as Congo, Mozambique, and Somalia were in treat turmoil at the time. Due to peace issues in Africa, we developed this concept and called it a peace torch. It was accepted by UNIFEM and the UNIFEM director presented it in Beijing in 1995 to symbolise women's commitment to peace. Because Africa was in so much turmoil, we were the women who brought the torch to the arena.

From that project (women refugee project in Nairobi), I persuaded UNIFEM to set up an office in East Africa office in Nairobi, Kenya. We were able to broaden the office from a refugee program to a Regional Office. I was successful in getting African women to head all Africa related programs funded by UNIFEM. We didn't feel it right for African

Women's programs to be controlled by European women. They could give us the money, but the thinking behind the program and administration was to be left to African women.

I am interested in the African women movement taking charge and putting their ideas on the global map. We should not just be cornered in Africa. We should influence thoughts in the worldwide marketplace. That is why I am proud of the peace-torch because, after Beijing, each country now wanted its own version of the peace-torch. We let it go around Africa to convene and have women participate in peace. After we heard that the AAWORD had been set up in Dakar in 1986, I felt an urge to also have it AAWORD in Kenya. I initiated the AAWORD chapter in Kenya, and that's when we got involved with Prof. Nzomo, Kasiani, Jackeline Oduol, and a few others. A backlash started with many people thinking that women's economic empowerment was against men's economic empowerment. They saw it as a binary opposition and not a complementary arrangement. The thinking that if you talk about women's empowerment, you must not be interested in men's advancement is wrong. When the debate heated up, people said, you know these women are now growing strong; they are talking a lot. Mind you, we were always strong but not organised as we were now. I think the organisation was causing some people to worry. When we got to the gender debate, we got confused between equality among men and women and suppression of men.

This had been coming. The backlash came from the lack of advocacy to show that men are essential in the equality movement. Their support makes both women and men stronger. I have argued in my research that the African gender concept was always one of complementarity. The women were doing very many things, and if you look in every society, there are points of power that women held. These points were eroded by colonialism, now trying to get them back looks threatening to some men. This explains why women and men are working at cross-purposes which denies us the opportunity to collaborate. Women do not seek to be men. They just want to realise their full potential, like men. Some women are also to blame for that toxic thinking because I hear lots of women in politics saying: "Well you know, I got this on my own and I didn't need women to push me." That is not the issue because they know well that they wouldn't be there if there was no women's movement.

Suppose you ask people like Phoebe Asiyu, Julia Ojiambo, Eddah Gachukia, and Mary Okello? In that case, they will tell you it wasn't that easy to achieve their level of success in those days. I also think that having women against men is unfortunate and that's where the backlash comes from. I think the women's movement has slowed

down. I must say it should work towards getting back the thinking against the stage of doubt. This problem has cropped up again because the younger women rode on the successes of the women pioneers who established the movement.

We understood that women pioneers had done so much to give the movement the impetus it needed. We stood on the shoulders of those women and used our education to build the campaign based on research and science. A look at the numbers in school enrolment tells a great story. There was a time when enrolment in primary school was highly imbalanced between boys and girls. So, you could ask yourself why more girls are dropping out of school than boys. This is just a straightforward equality question, are there underlining facts? If we want many girls to go to college, should we drop their grades to college than usual because something stops them from entering?

Women have many issues along the way: to be a mother, a wife of an ambassador, a scientist and being a feminist and doing all these things, you get exhausted with these multiple roles. But we were able to manage. We were able to still push women's agenda because we felt it was imperative. The young women have often not understood the struggles that we went through. They want to be entrepreneurs, to do things their own way. Younger women don't want to be in the movement, yet they have no clue they are visible because we were there to fight for the benefits they are now enjoying. That thinking is lost within the women's movement, and I think it contributes to the backlash. The women have now to reconnect the dots again to understand the link between the success of today's women and the struggles of yesterday's women. We must appreciate men like my father, who said I'm gonna send my daughter to school, and I don't care what people say. He could have decided, well, I have six girls, and I can get ten cows from each, and I don't need to send them to school.

For equality to be realised, there is a long history. It has to be held up. The movement requires a social action for continuity. If it does not sustain the momentum, you get a backlash. I think we are getting a backlash because the women's movement has been undermined by selfishness. Some women believe that now I have a backup, now am a lawyer, now am somebody, and I don't need the women's movement.

Apart from the backlash, I think that the women's movement in Kenya has also been compromised by negative ethnicity. Women have been balkanised along ethnic lines. Ethnicity has played a significant role in preventing women from working together.

The politicisation of ethnicity has regrettably affected the women's movement. We must get our act back together.

The Law Society of Kenya keeps steering things in a safe direction. Our biggest challenge in this country is that many people have now chosen to feel that they are from one ethnic group or another. That is disappointing because the independence of this country was not won by one or two ethnic communities. It was a collective sacrifice of all Kenyans of goodwill. It was the movement of Africans for independence, and that same movement gave us our constitutions. We have a national constitution, but we also have an ethnic identity. How are we going to implement the constitution?

We need to see the younger women take leadership and move with their ideas. I would be happy to see more young men and women rethinking this issue and staying away from ethnicity. Women need national unity more than any other group. To advance equally, we need national unity, which cannot be fought by one group. Social movements have backlashes, but it depends on the leadership to resuscitate the campaign and build it up. AAWORD has been a big journey, but every time it was about to fall, I could run off to Dakar and say, "we cannot let this organisation fall. We have to get it back, make peace, see where we are going wrong and move on."

You must have peacemakers within the group, people who are willing to say, we disagree here, but we can again agree and move on. Otherwise, even a country can fall. Governments have fallen due to ethnic rivalry as the political class keeps lighting fire dividing the country more. If you go to the UN, Kenya is a country people look up to because our representatives who go there have a presence. They are learned and they do not just go there and sit. They influence global ideas, and here we are just breaking up what we have built. The backlash is caused by this notion that men and women are in conflict because women are getting up there. When a group has been down, and it starts to go up, to be visible, people will think, now they are going up! But the fact is that the bar needs to be balanced a bit for the good of our country.

There are fascinating climate change issues and how women contribute to them, mainly because my focus has tended to be rural areas. I am still interested in how rural women are helping to propagate indigenous trees that can withstand climate change. I am not doing any project but am planning to conserve indigenous trees in our area, South Nyanza. People cut down trees that take a long time to grow, and we do not have or even know their seeds. We must go back and take a look and see the trees that

adapt to the ecology and see how we can get local people to use their knowledge to enhance the environment.

Lately, I have also started to sing. I am recording some songs. As a Luo, I have felt that many of these songs are fast disappearing. I hear young people listen to many different genres of music. The Luo valued listening to music, including funeral music and other occasions. We knew them when we were younger. I am collecting them as a researcher and recording them. Yesterday, I did a voice test to see if I could go on.

After finishing work at the UN in 1985, I joined ICIPE. I wanted to understand how scientists work to get them more interested in going to the villages and showing people the science rather than talking about it at conferences. I spent about five years working at ICIPE, getting them to set up social science programs within their scientific agenda. When they talk about the insect Biography diversity in a particular community, they can also understand the community has knowledge about those insects.

I plan to work with universities and botanists to see if they can bring students to see the indigenous trees and learn about them. I am also interested in working with young people to get them to be more self-driven. I hear this debate about “we have been left behind” and that “nobody is talking to us”. Young people always bring to the fore this complaint. When I was a youngster, we used to knock on doors saying “here we are” and we could organise conferences. The youth need to be more forward-looking to progress. Instead of throwing stones, they should get involved in community work. When developing society, too many people think about entitlement. Young people need to design a future through the formation of a youth movement for change. I used to have a director who used to say, ‘good luck is the residue of design’.

Question: What do you think the problem is? What do you think should be done?

Response: Well, this is a known problem. Take Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, with the highest number of women in parliament. Two essential things helped women move forward. Childbearing was not treated as a problem but as an asset. There was always support for a woman to do something because a significant issue for women is how to combine motherhood and work. If you don't have the support on the home front, the chances are high that you will be involved in a conflict with your husband. People think you can empower women by just sending them to school and giving them access to land. Still, they now remember inside the house, a woman has a ‘hundred’

jobs. For instance, I breastfed my three kids; the firstborn for 10 months, second-born for 11 and the last born for 22 months. During that period you are breastfeeding, you have to be closer home. You can't even go out the entire day and not come back or not have an opportunity to return at midday to breastfeed. If you don't have the support to do that, you are done.

You may want to go to politics, but how will you go without that support? I think addressing women's modelling roles and getting help to go out and do other stuff is a challenge here in Kenya. People have not thought about it. There are very few women in my category who are visible and have to compete with men because of this fundamental imbalance. If you have a policy that would give women more time to work later in life than earlier, they would use the time to bring up the kids and then go back to the workforce. This is what all these countries have done. They give women seven years in between, and you are supported to get the kids to school, get training that you will not just stay in the house raising children; then waking up to find the time is gone. It is a very tricky and very salient issue that women don't often talk about. Men talk about it often, but breastfeeding alone takes almost an hour. This is something people are not thinking about and its connection to the political ladder.

When you go home, we don't have the ideology that says the man could stay at home while the woman goes to work. If your husband is not a free man as you are, you are in trouble because you will get many downsides in Africa. Such things are unheard of in Scandinavia, and that is why they are so far ahead in terms of development. Then you have the official leave of nine months that the husband can take or share between husband and wife, or the wife can take when the baby has been born, but they pay and don't drop out of payroll. We fall out of payroll when people see you pregnant, they say, I don't think I can hire this one. The image people have is that if we hire too many women, they are going to take too much maternity leaves and then lose work. Still, there is no evidence that you will lose anything by women taking maternity leave.

If you can imagine a relay race in which some people fall back. Then you get nine, five who finish on top of the race, they have gone to the top, and because they have succeeded, people think, "Why didn't these others succeed?" They should work harder, but it's not like that because you have other obstacles in between to overcome. It is something that younger people have to take up. Still, I think the whole thing like pension, for example, women should have more years of work up to retirement age to accumulate more money. There is an attitude aspect because many women campaign

for a man, and they wouldn't campaign for women. This has to do with the idea that I need only myself because I didn't need women to succeed in politics. I will do it independently. If you look closely, a strong woman gets support from her husband, brother or family member. They give her a backup, but which is lacking in many cases. If you want to run for office, you need the proper backup to take care of the other side of the invisible world. To me, I think that is a very critical issue that needs to be looked at.

I did some workshops with women in Scandinavia. You could see their leave is almost a year, and their husbands could take part in it. At the same time, you get to familiarise yourself and don't lose your place on payroll, meaning you can go back. If you were due for a promotion, you would be promoted; that's where we haven't got in our country. Rwanda has done something with Affirmative Action, but as I have always said, these countries like Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique did it for a while. These other countries have just come out of war, and they need hands on the deck. My strong suspicion is that this balance may fall if they don't anchor it in the law. People will start being confident and say now, we are not insecure. We are not involved, therefore, we should just go back and do what they used to do. Then, you will see smaller numbers of women coming up. Uganda started very well, but when Museveni was settled, the whole thing came back. All the women who went in through Affirmative Action decided to run for open seats. Nobody else was taking Affirmative Action seats, and they did not ask why nobody is taking Affirmative Action seats. We need to do more; in fact, it's always interesting because people look for answers in the political arena. It is not in Affirmative Action; it is in the domestic realm. If we untie that first, we will see those seats taken. If you are not really a self-starter, you might get discouraged and say, "oh, I am just a housewife."

Question: But I also think that there is a role of ideological inferiority by women.

Response: That is discrimination. I have seen how racists worked in America and South Africa. I have equally seen how gender discrimination has worked. It is very unfair when you have a group of people discriminated against for many years because their survival has been uncertain. If they raise their heads, they are killed. You have seen it with Black Americans. Any leader who came up was either shot or jailed. Discrimination as a practice of keeping categories of people aside or keeping them lower than others is dangerous.

We need another programme for the decolonisation of the African mind. South Africa is still suffering from that. They have political power, but the bedrock of discrimination against people has not been addressed. South Africa is a motor cocktail awaiting to explode because they have not addressed the issues of discrimination. African Americans have worked hard for many years to end racial discrimination. Now Trump has come and started a ruffle. In any struggle, every time you make significant gains, the people with authority feel threatened. They strike you until you fall back. That is why I say the women's movement cannot afford to have a puzzlement. This generation must take up the next one and keep pushing. I feel that at my age, I am ready to run because all my stuff is handled. I am now prepared. I might run for something big. I feel as if I am 40 because all my other issues are sorted out, but society will start saying that she is too old.

We know opportunities exist. Looking at my personal life, I have achieved a lot because someone supported me: my mother, father, sisters, and everyone gave a positive message – do not give up. Listening to and internalising negativity can stop you from doing things you are very much able to accomplish. The other thing is that we have to be more strategic as women. I think that considerable debate has yet to occur on how we free women up from domestic roles for them to have the freedom to think. For instance, when I got married, my husband was a diplomat. I was already a Senior Fellow at the university. Because I raised many children, I couldn't just let him go alone or with the children. Either he would go alone, or I would remain with the children. I asked myself, what's the value of these children growing up with their father and me, being a diplomat in New York. When I left my job here and the university clamped on me, I had to find a new track.

I think that as women, we need a movement. You can't do it by bureaucracy. Though we have the constitution, which we have all worked for and has set the trend towards equality, we need to look and ask, "what's holding us up?" When you are now looking at the bureaucracy, where people work, most families will need somebody to help in the house to get out – that is money. Sometimes, the woman pays the domestic worker. If she does not do that, who will do it; if she decides I wanna take my second degree and not help them pay this person, you see the whole house going to be in crisis. The old model of saying the man is the breadwinner and the woman is the homemaker is gone. We really have to create a new model for women to move out. The model should also sensitise a husband to see that, if she goes out, the family is still protected.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your time and thought-provoking ideas.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Conversation with Prof. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira



“The power of numbers, the intellectual capacity of women, and the lobbying capacity that women possess will help them enter those spaces and get what they want. We cannot relax before we reach our destination. We must rise again and march forward”.

~ Prof Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira

Biography

Prof Wanjiku Kabira is a renowned scholar of Literature and African Women Studies, currently serving at the University of Nairobi as an Emeritus Professor and Director, African Women Studies Research Centre. She is a writer, a literary critic a gender and policy analyst. She has published widely in the field of literature as well as gender and women studies with over 100 publications in form of books, chapters, journal articles and creative writing. Prof Kabira served as a commissioner and a vice-chair of the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission and has documented the role of women and their gains in her book *Time for Harvest: Women and Constitution Making in Kenya-1992-2010*. She has led and worked with various organisations in Africa. She has been awarded the national honour of Chief of the Burning Spear and Elder of the

Burning Spear. She also served as the vice – chair and a Commissioner in the Kenyan Constitution Review Process (CKRC).

Interviewed in Nairobi by Prof. Elishiba Kimani, Prof. Philomena Mwaura, Wambui Kanyi and Kennedy Mwangi

Question: Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, thank you for creating time for this interview on your contribution to gender equality and women empowerment agenda today. We request to know what motivated you, the challenges you faced, and your recommendations on how the gender equality agenda should be moved forward. Maybe, you can start by telling us about yourself and what motivated you to join the struggle.

Response: Let me start by giving credit to Dr. Eddah Gachukia. In 1983, she drew my attention to the preparations for the Nairobi women conference, which was to take place in 1985. We wrote a proposal with Dr. Wambui Njau for donor funding. Our responsibility was to carry out research on women’s economic empowerment in Kiambu. I remember talking to women at Lari in a place called Nyambari. They told us about the problems they were facing concerning property, especially land, and how they were responsible for everything going on. These were women with tiny pieces of land.

We told the women that we would go to the shopping centre and talk to the men once we finished discussing the issues with them. I remember one woman telling us, “you must be having a lot of time, why do you want to talk to men? They know nothing about women’s economic empowerment.” Nevertheless, when we were done with the women, we went to talk to men. They had similar experiences. One man told us, “Okay, you are talking to women, the women know nothing about us and they actually don’t know the problems we go through. If you have half an acre of land, how many hours will you spend on that half an acre; even one day is too long to spend on that half an acre. When you have nothing to give to your family, you cannot sit there to hear them asking you for food. The best thing is to leave the home and go to the shopping centre as if you are going to work because when you are here you may know about the world.” I asked him, “When you know about the world, what do you do with the information?” They said, “You may not do anything with it, but it keeps you alive.” I thought that was a fascinating conversation comparing the perspectives of both men and women on economic empowerment. It was also exciting to listen to the perception of women on economic empowerment and gender-based oppression. They were very open. They even told us that some men kept black books. They would write each and every sin

you commit and ask you to keep the book so that he can refer to all the sins you have committed within the year.

There were four of us in the initial meeting; myself and three other women. At the end of the day, I found the experience very interesting. I felt that we often talk about women, and yet we don't know what their lives are or what they think about oppression. The best thing was to understand from the research how Kenyan women perceive the issues of oppression. Having come from a university where words like feminism were supposed to be Western, I ground my foundation on this research. In 1984, we did another research with Patricia Ngurukie, a Kenyan writer and the experience was the same. I remember talking to one woman at Githirioni, a former detainee called Wabice. When I told her that I wanted to hear her story, she asked me, "Why do you want to hear these stories? They are so sad and nobody wants to think about them." She talked about the pains of rape, harassment by fellow Mau Mau fighters at night and by home guards during the day. She remembered the forced labour they did with other women during the Mau Mau uprising. They dug trenches to keep the rebels out. It was a sobering experience talking to these Mau Mau women. In 1981, we transversed the country with Wanjiku Matejwa, Prof Micere Mugo, and Wanjiru Kihoro, interviewing women involved in the struggle; some in Kiambu, Nyeri, Murang'a, Nakuru and Laikipia. This was another eye-opening experience.

Participation in these research activities gave me a mental commitment to document women's experiences and roles in society. In 1984, I had an opportunity to go to Kirinyaga with my students. We were doing oral literature fieldwork at the time. When you are doing oral literature, you start with misconceptions that the elderly persons have the story. I remember where we were taken, the woman had a hearing problem or did not understand what we wanted. One woman we were taken to could not hear, and we took a lot of time explaining to her what we wanted. At the same time, another one interpreted folk stories to mean her own story. I remember in desperation asking school children whether they knew anyone there who could tell us stories. They told us, "You see that woman seated by the roadside, she can tell you stories". We went there, and I remember telling her, she was called Warukenya; you can tell us stories. She told us to sit there by the roadside with my students and started giving us traditional narratives. I told her, "I can see a kiosk there, we can buy you tea and then you tell us stories". It was in the morning around 10.30 a.m, and this woman told us stories until 2.00 a.m in the night. People came and filled the kiosk listening to these stories. She had a reservoir of traditional stories.

I later continued visiting Warukenyabecause she was an excellent storyteller.

I wrote about her and we co-authored with Njogu Waita, who is also from Kirinyaga. The book was published by the University of Nairobi Press. I think I had shown you this cover, 'reclaiming my dreams'. If you read these stories and her own interpretations and comments, you will realise how women have been oppressed. These experiences laid the foundation for my work on women's research.

When you listen to women, they talk about women's struggles that did not start in 1985. When I was talking to Wabice, a former freedom fighter from Kiambu, she told me, "You know us. The Nyakinyua women's group has accumulated money. They have built the independent churches in Lari by collecting one shilling from every woman on Sundays. They put the money in a *mkebe* (tin) and one woman keeps the *mkebe*." They collected the money until they built the independent churches in Lari. She also talked about the Nyakinyua women group, which I thought was very interesting. The way they had bought land in the Rift Valley, each woman from the group, had purchased more than 10 acres of land in Rift Valley.

She praised the former Provincial Commissioner Yusuf Haji for encouraging them to buy this land. Haji also protected them from exploitation as they purchased the land and supported them through his office. "His office was open for us always. That is my land, the 10acres at Maai Mahiu," and she told me, "You don't have an idea of what these 10acres mean to me. It means that I can sleep on it, 'nondigaragarie'." (I can just role on it) I can admire it, and I can donate three to four acres to my sister because the land is mine. Even my husband cannot tell me to go because he knows I can never look back. After all, I have a home where I can go to and he was there. Before, women were being sent away because they had nowhere to go. When they go back to their fathers, they will find their brothers have already inherited the land rendering them foreigners in that place.

I have been doing research based on initial works rooted in women's experiences in the freedom struggle and other women. That is where I am coming from.

Question: How did you get directly involved in the struggle?

Response: I helped Eddah Gachukia to prepare for the 1985 women's conference. By the way, most of the work was done from this office where you are seated. It was Eddah Gachukia's office. She invited me to share the office with her. I used to be on

the third floor, and she was the immediate chair of the Department of Literature. During the conference, I shared my research findings. I participated in the general preparations of the meeting, including taking care of the Chair of the 1985 NGO Forum, the person in charge of the conference. Eddah coordinated the conference. I met so many women leaders at the conference. I remember an Egyptian woman lawyer who gave a compelling presentation on women's struggle for independence. She had been jailed and then released. She came to share her thoughts at the conference.

Once you talk with the women and they tell you their stories, you begin to see things anew. You understand that their struggles and their history of marginalisation and oppression are what you do not know. Talking to these women in 1981, 1983, 1984, and 1985 gave me a lot of inspiration to join the women's movement. Talking to women like Warukenya is fantastic because you realise that it doesn't matter whether you went to school or not; you begin speaking the same language. I remember one time in the 1990s, we were very frustrated at this University. We were talking about feminism at a public lecture and then there were accusations about western feminism. At one time, I was called by one of the DVCs and asked, "Is what I have heard true? That you are proposing that promotions at the University should be based on the number of children one has given birth to?" This was Prof. Florida Karani. I told her, "Professor, I don't remember saying so, but on second thought, I don't think it is a bad idea. Giving birth to many children and taking care of them, you know is a big job; it is a heavy job."

At this time, women members of staff were not getting house allowance. We fought against this discriminatory policy with Maria Nzomo and Kavetsa Adagala. The institutions were generally very hostile to gender issues. Let me go back to what I told Wabice. "We are accused of being influenced by Western women and do you know what she told me?" "Why did we send you to school? We sent you to school to learn and even if you are influenced by the West, there is no problem; nothing is wrong with you being influenced by them if you have learnt something new from them." So I got my answer from what Wabice told me and I will never forget it.

In 1985, I visited my aunt living in Kariobangi and I have recorded her story. My aunt, may God bless her; she has since passed on. She participated in the struggle for independence as the treasurer for Mau Mau, a very liberated woman. One day, the home guards and the askari came to get the money she had kept for the Mau Mau. My aunt denied having any money. She was pregnant. She was beaten badly by the British soldiers and home guards, my aunt removed her clothes. She pointed at the white man, saying, "I want you to cut me through the stomach so that my baby does

not come to this world where you people are.” The guards thought that she was a mad woman but still descended on her with another round of flogging.

Her husband, fearing she might die, told her, “Why don’t you give them?” She said to the husband, “*Ngoma ino! Ndukimanengere wee ui kuria iri!*”(You devil, give it to them if you know where it is). The guards dug the house, looking for the money in vain. My aunt had taken it to another woman. She ended her marriage that day and moved to Kariobangi, in Nairobi.

Allow me to tell you another educative story about my aunt. It involved her daughter who was married and lived in Buruburu. Nairobi. One morning, her daughter visited and fell at door because she had been beaten badly by her husband. My aunt started screaming until the neighbours came. My aunt used to have a whip. You know how you protect yourself in Eastlands because you don’t know who will open the door. She went to Buru Buru, entered straight into the bedroom. The man was comfortably sleeping. She pulled the blankets off and whipped him furiously until he screamed for help from the neighbours. She then moved to the chief’s office and asked for a divorce for her daughter. The chief told her, you see, you cannot get a divorce on behalf of somebody else. The petitioner has to come and request for the divorce herself. Then she told the chief, okay, you can keep your divorce papers, and I keep my daughter. She then went back to Kariobangi to look after her daughter. Whenever I talk about women, I often think about them: women who have struggled and women who have been working towards liberating themselves.

Question: Now, coming back to the question, after the Nairobi conference, what else did you do?

Response: I was part of the women’s movement which was led by people like Eddah Gachukia. There were so many things that they were doing about education and Agriculture, especially girls’ education. The next book I read was Acholla Pala’s on Education and Agriculture. So many activities started taking place, including the formation of wome’s movements and the AWARD Kenya Chapter after 1985. AWARD was formed in 1976 while the Kenya chapter was formed the same year. AWARD was created by Acholla Pala, Maria Angelic from Nigeria, and Rakech from Ethiopia. The African women researchers had very radical ideas on African feminism. They talked passionately about African women’s double oppression: colonialists’ oppression and cultural oppression. I was very impressed by AWARD’s philosophy. Having been engaged with the women during the research that I had carried out, I was impressed

with the education, agricultural, and health sectors.

I also attended several conferences, and I prepared papers on women. I conducted another research with Dr. Eddah Gachukia and Dr. Wambui Njau again on women's economic empowerment. It was fascinating talking to women and having a male research assistant who could misconstrue the questions. I would ask the women, "Who owns the cattle in this household?" And the research assistant would tell me, "The man," even before asking the woman. I would then tell him, "Can you ask the woman and then tell me what she says?" The woman would say that they own the manure. They don't even own the milk, but they own the manure.

The Maasai women understood the concept of ownership. You realise that they have not told their stories in that text, but someone else speaks on their behalf, listening to the women's voices from their own perspectives.

For too long, women's stories have been told by other people on their behalf. Women's voices have been mainly silenced or ignored. When you are telling women's stories, you must have a backup from them. We don't know what they are going through since we don't live at the same level. I did not know what some of the Mau Mau women were talking about because I did not experience what they went through. I did not know that you can be having half an acre of land, and you depend on it for everything. You can have a man who has no job and continues being the breadwinner without the bread. That is why when you ask for something from men, they put their hands in the jacket pocket and remove the one hundred as if there is something else that has remained in the side pocket. I asked some men in Lari why they were doing that as if there is something they were hiding. They told me that a woman will leave you if they think you don't have money. So it is a cover-up.

That is why they do it in a manner suggesting there is something left.

Question: Can you tell us something about the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD)?

Response: I still associate CCGD with Dr. Eddah Gachukia. In 1988, when I was doing my PhD. My thesis was on 'Gender Perspectives on Kikuyu Oral Narratives'. I didn't have a clear theoretical perspective. Although I knew what the stories were saying (about men and women, boys and girls), I didn't know how I would analyse them and I kept the information. In 1989, Dr. Gachukia told me that there was a workshop in Nyeri and

that she had given my name for the invitation. The workshop was on gender training. It was conducted by some experts from Canada. I hoped to attend the workshop to get a framework for analysing the narratives I had collected for my PhD research. Unfortunately, my name was not on the list of participants. Dr. Gachukia intervened at the last minute and I attended it.

The workshop was facilitated by two Canadian scholars; a lady and a gentleman. It was an eye-opener for me. I cannot forget some of the cases that we studied. One of them was an introduction to the Harvard Model. It was exciting using it to disaggregate information such as culture and politics, culture and legislative framework. We also applied the tools to case studies which was very interesting. We used the cases to differentiate what men and women do. We did basic things in that particular workshop. A situational analysis was not covered, but we used cases to look at gender issues objectively. I did very well. I think I was the most active student at that particular time. The others were from the development committee and the Ministry of Planning, like Mr Peter Ondiek. The team chose fifteen of us to attend the training of trainers workshop for 15 days at Lake Bogoria. These two pieces of training were very useful to me because I could now analyse my PhD data. We actually started a gender training programme with the same team at FEMNET.

Later, we started CCGD from FEMNET to enable us to implement programmes on gender and development. We had nothing except our skills. We were with Sarah Wanjohi, Mashetti Masinjila, Peter Ondiek, Okwach Abagi, Eddah Gachukia, Rose Chege, Rosemary Gitachu, Leah Wanjama, and Miriam Gachago, among others. We applied to register our NGO. As you may know, at that time, registration of NGOs was not that easy.

Question: Gitachu...

Response: We put together some things. We rented some houses along Ngong Road, and brought tables, chairs and cups from our homes. We had to justify why we wanted a new organisation to be registered. We identified a noncontroversial individual among us to be interviewed for our registration. We agreed that Okwach Abagi would be the best person because, first, nobody would think a man would have radical thinking about gender. Eddah was an educationist, so we forwarded those two names. We started the CCGD to promote gender equality and influence policy through gender training. Also, it was important to have a consultancy wing because, without money, the tendency was to close down for lack of resources to meet the overhead costs.

For a long time, CCGD was sustained by individuals since its establishment in 1996. When we moved from Ngong Road to South B, I was the Director. I was an executive without a salary. I was still at the University of Nairobi. After three years, the board approved 20,000 shillings for my transport. We had an excellent board comprising Philomena Mwaura, Elishiba Kimani, Okwach Abagi, Peter Ondiek and Eddah Gachukia. It was a fantastic board, and that is what I have always told other organisations. Their commitment was excellent. That is how we bought the house at South B. I will say this because I have seen organisations come and go, it is started, and it lasts for two years, when the project is ended, they wind up.

When I went to the USA on a scholarship with USAID in 1996, I visited several black women's organisations. One had an office just like the one CCGD had. It has been there for more than 100 years, and you could see the work of these black women. They displayed photos of all the directors who have been there from the first director. This was great. Even though it was a small office and had very few people working there, it kept the history of the organisation and its work going. At the CCGD, we argued that low levels of women's participation in political leadership is not caused by their ignorance but by the institutional structures. The CCGD board decided to focus on policies and institutions to address this gap. That is why we were very different from other organisations that focused on civic education. It is good to inform the women, but you cannot achieve much if you don't address the institutions and policy issues.

We decided to focus on the policies, legislations, and legal frameworks. The CCGD established its training team and we started with gender training programmes. We negotiated with the Ministry of Finance and started gender-budget analysis regularly. That is how we questioned why we kept on taxing women on things related to their Biography logical make-up like breastfeeding and sanitary towels. We were the first ones to look at things that were actually taken for granted. The CCGD worked on legislative and policy matters. It was the first one to organise the first women meeting to discuss the constitution. In 1998, we invited Maina Wachira, a constitutional lawyer, and Okoth Ogendo to respond to the questions about the constitution, such as "What is constitution-making?"

Now, on our role in the constitutional review process, the CCGD in 1997 organised to support 'Phoebe Asiyo's motion'. Phoebe Asiyo and I had to lobby several cabinet ministers. We organised lobbying materials in our small office on Ngong Road. We were able to bring in Atsango Chesoni to work with Phoebe and give her all the information. CCGD also wrote the response to Phoebe Asiyo's motion that was actually by Kiraitu.

We started working with political parties because the political parties were the vehicles through which women would participate in the political leadership and elections. CCGD worked closely with Heinrich Boll Foundation. Wanjiku Mbugua and Jecinta Makhoha were working at Heinrich Boll at that time. Other organisations that we collaborated with included the Fredrick Ebert Foundation. They were very interested in working with political parties. It was an exciting period breaking ground towards gender equality. CCGD was also the first to visit eighty constituencies with support from DANIDA to sensitise women about the constitution-making and the constitution review process. The CCGD was the first organisation to form the Affirmative Action technical Committee. We got (Lady Justice) Njoki Ndungu-now a Judge of the Supreme Court of Kenya- to write the first draft of the Affirmative Action Bill. Kagwiria Mbogori continued with the work after Njoki. People like Wambui Kanyi, Ayoo Odicho and others played an important role in this work.

The Board of Directors protected The Centre from fights with the government because of its programme activities. We were audited four times, including by KRA which gave a very clean bill of health. Other organisations also audited CCGD, claiming that the organisation must be getting money from elsewhere.

CCGD became the Centre to talk to when you wanted to talk about gender. We were so lucky as a centre in collaboration with other women's organisations and women leaders, because it also gave birth to a Women's Political Caucus. I was the Director when the caucus was born. When Phoebe Asiyo's motion was defeated, I was made the convener of the network. You know you start a network, and then you have nowhere to meet. So the CCGD actually housed Women Political Caucus. We opened an account for the caucus. Eddah, who was the chair of CCGD, became the mandatory signatory to the account. The Centre housed the Caucus for some time until it could get finances to stand on its own at the Railways offices. CCGD also supported the Women Political Alliance.

The board members of the Caucus were Hon. Asiyo as the chair, and myself as a convener. The members were Charity Ngilu, Martha Karua, Abida Ali Aroni and Martha Koome. We started the constitution's negotiations together with the Political Caucus until the review process stalled in 1999. We started mobilising for civic education and went around the whole country to mobilise women to come together. We actually went with Phoebe Asiyo and with a proposal to bring women together. That was again another first because women did not have funds to carry out the work on constitutional reforms until we wrote that proposal. The Centre wrote the proposal with Women

Political Caucus for about Ksh. 240,000,000 to bring the women organisations together during the constitution review process. Later, Hon. Karua, Martha Koomenow the Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya, Hon. Ngilu, Abida Ali Aroni who has since been appointed a High Court Judge, Justice Njoki and myself, formed the Women Political Alliance.

Hon. Asiyo was left at the Caucus with Jane Ogot as the coordinator and Dr. Jacqueline Oduol continued working in the caucus secretariat. We now had two organisations. I will continue with Women Political Alliance because, like CCGD, Alliance focused on policy change and legislation issues and working with political parties. The good thing about the Caucus and Alliance is that they were both political bodies; in contrast, the CCGD was registered by the NGOs Council while the Alliance and Caucus were registered as trusts. Women's issues are political. This talk about women being non-political is a misconception. When we talk about patriarchy, how institutions are managed, institutional ideologies, and politics, we discuss power struggles.

The Alliance and the Caucus identified accessibility as one of the main challenges women face in influencing policy. It is not just about women being educated to contest in the elections as their constitutional rights. We are talking about male-controlled political parties with institutional structures based on male ideologies. Such political parties exhibit male-dominated cultures and ideologies. We are talking about legislation where women's perspectives are taken as part of it, and nobody thinks they should be part of it. We are talking about democratic institutions where they say the government of the people by the people, and they mean the government of men by men. If you can understand this, you will know the status of women is not Biographical; and of course, we all know it is not physical. It is power related. It has to do with power-sharing. It has to do with cultural ideologies that are male-dominated. It has to do with social myths that are created to mean that power positions belong to men. That is why, despite being two organisations, the agenda remained the same at that time. That is why we could organise meetings through the caucus, and Alliance could do the same.

Between 1998 and 2000, the negotiations for the constitution review stalled. The Women Political Caucus and Alliance organised meetings for different women's organisations to revive the process. At Safari Park, where many negotiations for the review process took place, women ensured that people like Hon. Karua, Hon. Ngilu,

Hon.Asiyo, Hon.Zipporah Kitony and Jane Kiano were present. I think we had outstanding lobbying strategies and this explains why we had active participation in this process.

At one point, I was nearly stopped from making my presentation because the paper had not been vetted by the government. It was supposed to be checked by (Justice Aaron) Ringera then from the office of AG and later served as a judge. I negotiated with him, and I was allowed to present it without censorship. Women could meet very early in the morning. Jael Mbogo and Hon.Asiyo, in particular, were very active. If Phoebe was not there, Jael Mbogo would take over the meeting. We could meet before the meeting and agree on the issues and who would speak on our behalf.

Whenever we were asked to recommend members to any committee, we already had the names when other groups sought to consult. We made sure that women constituted at least one-third of all the committees. Out of 12 members of the Sulumeti committee, - the committee negotiating the review law- five were women, which was more than the one-third threshold. The women committee members were Phoebe, myself, Hon Karua, Abida Ali, and Hon. Kitony. Nancy Baraza was an alternate to Abida, while Justice Koome was an alternate to Hon Karua.

Interestingly, when we were having these meetings to negotiate the bill, the civil society was represented by Prof. Kivutha Kibwana and Wamugo. We used to have good discussions with KANU, represented by cabinet ministers Julius Sunkuli, Joseph Kamotho, and Dr Bonaya Godana. Bishop Phillip Sulumeti was the chair.

Question: If I may ask you about the Sulumeti Committee, you talked of five women out of twelve. Why was this important to women and how was committee significant to the women's struggle?

Response: This relates to what we talked about the political Alliance, the Caucus, and the CCGD. If you are not present when a policy is being made, you know you can only be a beggar. If you are outside the legal framework, you have no claim for your participation at that particular level. Suppose you have no allocation for commissioners, people at the grassroots and the national level. In that case, you can only have people talking on your behalf. That is why we needed to be represented in the Sulumeti committee.

It was our understanding that this was a policy document. Women needed a critical mass, capable of making a difference at all levels of the constitution review process

and other negotiations. We managed to have thirty per cent of women representation from the district level. We agreed it was going to be one woman and two men from the district levels. We managed to get one-third at 3Cs, which is the constituency constitutional committees. Still, we did not manage to get one-third at the National constitutional conference.

I think we ended up being around twenty-five per cent at that level. We had mighty women in there. We managed to get seven women out of 27 commissioners. They were Hon. Katvesa Adagala, myself, Nancy Baraza, Alice Yano, Abida Ali, and Salome Muigai. Women had become such important negotiators even to KANU. I remember at Safari Park, Kamotho calling Phoebe and I to discuss how we can delay the process. We asked him: "What are we going to gain, if we delay it ourselves?" KANU wanted to pause and ultimately scuttle the process. We refused to aid them in that process. At the end of 1998, KANU decided to stop the process.

When the process stalled because KANU refused to participate in the negotiations, nothing happened with regard to the law review for several months. Other parties and part of the parliament took over the process. They wanted the process renegotiated and started the parliamentary review commission. That is when the Ufungamano started parallel negotiations. Those from the civil society and women organisations who wanted to work with Ufungamano joined them. We were appointed commissioners. We had already nominated women through the Women Political Caucus at that time. These included Phoebe, Abida, Salome, Baraza, and I. Four of us chose to go with Ufungamano, and Phoebe decided to go with the parliamentary review commission. We were supported by Dr. Oki Ooko Ombaka, who was elected the head of the Ufungamano initiative. We also had other people from political parties and civil societies such as Adelina Mwau. Grace Umbima represented civil society. We had Fatuma from Wajir representing Democratic Party.

For several months, we collected views from people with very little resources. We were given a messenger by Baraza because she had an office. We started looking for space at Ufungamano. We also got support from the religious people; just getting the basics. They gave us the venue and tea with *mandazis*. They used to make very good *mandazis*. When you are hungry, the *mandazis* taste very sweet. Sometimes we had lunch, and they gave us a bit of support to collect views, but the people managed the venues themselves. I remember going to Embu and the Bishop of Embu, Bishop Njue, allowed us to talk to the people, did recordings and collected memoranda. It was exciting, but at times, threatening. I remember, in Kisumu, we had just started receiving the views when a home-made bomb was discovered under Dr Oki Ombaka's

chair. Another one was close to where we were seated. It was James Orengo's bodyguard, a very huge man, who came and lifted Ombaka from his chair before the bomb exploded. People were hurt in the stampede. You should see the scars on Nancy Baraza. That was the end of the public hearing, but we had gone to almost all parts of the country.

Parliament had started its process and had invited Prof. Ghai, but people had not agreed to a merger. The people rejected the parliamentary process, insisting they wanted a people-driven one. I think they were 15. Okoth Ogendo was the vice-chair and there were other commissioners. Parliament invited Prof. Ghai. We met him on the second day because they wanted us to discuss how we could work together. We told them that we had no problem working together. It was a good merger and was revised to make it an open and people-driven process. We participated in those negotiations, that is, Abida Ali, Dr. Baraza, and I from Ufungamano. I remember meeting people like the current Deputy President, Dr William Ruto. Eventually, we had what we call shadow diplomacy negotiations. I remember we had 11 seats. Ufungamano had nine, and Moi appointed two; one from the Rift valley and the other from North-Eastern; 'they were ours,' but he appointed them. Then we had the four women from the civil societies; they were nominated by Ufungamano to go to the merged process. And that was it. The review started.

Question: I think you have covered almost all the areas and this gets us to the constitution. What are the achievements that you made during the negotiations until you got the document?

Response: The most important thing that happened at the commission is that we started with Dr Ombaka because Prof. Ghai had not exhausted his time at the university where he was. We started putting down structures using the new law, which had already been revised. We did a lot of civic education. As the chair of the mobilisation team, we brought women together. We always made sure that we put strong women capable of defending the woman's interests, whenever committees were formed. The women organisations built their own capacity through the Women Political Alliance, Women Political Caucus, Coalition on Violence Against Women and the League of Women Voters, among others. All these organisations did a lot of civic education on the constitution. They were able to access the funding kitty from the commission. We ensured that the women organisations were given the funding like anybody else to carry out civic education. What was important was that the national women's organisations working with those the grassroots could sensitise these women about the constitution. When we went to the ground, women were talking

about Affirmative Action like a cup of tea. Of course, they spoke about other social, economic rights: “We don’t have water, we need education, we need food,” and so on, but Affirmative Action was always on their agenda. We carried out an analysis of the proposals and the gender commission was always on the agenda proposed at the grassroots level by women leaders and organisations. This was due to civic education carried out by women’s organisations.

We are yet to operationalise the two-thirds gender rule in the National Assembly despite its explicit provision in the constitution. It is unfortunate. That is why I like Prof. Okoth Ogendo. He always said that anything that we proposed should have a mechanism for implementation. By the time the committee of experts met, the tool to implement the two-thirds gender rule had not been developed. Margaret Thatcher once said, “you may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.” I think this is what is happening with this two-thirds, it has taken almost 10 years, but like Margaret, this is not a war to lose; it is our constitutional right. We have to go back to strategies we used before, because women have been outside the discussion.

Question: Please tell us your honest opinion on women solidarity in the second liberation? What are the available options?

Response: I think I have already said the battle is more extensive than the women Members of Parliament think. They have not appreciated the level of lobbying, and the struggle women underwent even to get the current gains. I am saying this because, when the Duale Bill was being defeated, I sent a message to Hon Aden Duale himself. I know many of you sent messages to Members of Parliament. Women parliamentarians told us to leave the matter to them to handle. They claimed to know the male MPs enough to convince them to pass the bill. Women parliamentarians have not understood the complexity of power dynamics, ideologies, patriarchy, and the power struggle. They also use strategies that we did not use before, like inviting the male parliamentarians to a dinner dance and talking to them. We used a different design; the power of the women at the grassroots; the energy I am using to speak now. The power I have enables me to talk the way I do about women. It is the power I get from the women at the grassroots. We are increasingly becoming redundant. We may be speaking English, but when we begin talking about gender-based oppression, we start talking in the same language. It is as if you are at the same level. You need to have that conviction for having proper changes in the legal systems in the society. Seemingly, nothing much has changed: the institutions have not changed, parliament has not changed, political parties have not changed, the culture has not changed, and ideologies have also not changed. We have entered the master’s house, but we have

not changed ideologies, culture, systems, or how these men conduct themselves. I have told you, these last five years, the women were not part of it. I told you that I got shocked when I got an alert that the gender bill is being tabled. People knew very well that they were going nowhere if they decided to go it alone. The men would not have done anything if they were not seeing the power of women behind them. They had ignored the power of women behind them: The power of numbers: the intellectual capacity of the women, and the lobbying capacity that women possess that help them break the ground in those spaces and get what they want. After promulgating the constitution, donors got an opportunity within the government to render support in different ways. The donors even denied women the resources for their programme activities. The donor support dwindled with the new constitution, and some of the donors became like the implementing agencies.

The other thing is fatigue. Even for me by now, I feel as if I have not rested since the referendum. Women invested a lot of physical and emotional energy to reach the goals they set for themselves. By the time the constitution was being promulgated in 2010, they were already fatigued. Women organisations should come up again and say, "We can't relax before we reach our destination." We must rise again and march forward. We also need MPs in that parliament who can stand up for women without being intimidated by the power of women's organisations. One of the most powerful experiences that I have seen in this process is the power within me: that I might not want to please anyone. It is profound and may not sound well. It is the power that will not want to please anyone even by the way I dress, I don't even have to take them for a dance, but it is my right and the right of all the women I represent. I know we have been told severally in this struggle; "Don't antagonise, don't send them text messages." When they see these messages, they think it is FIDA, and that FIDA is pushing them. But you know they need to be pushed because they are not doing it. We have 'bembelazad' (coaxed) them and they did not do it. Five years are over, and we still have an unconstitutional parliament, and they are not worried about the next one. In fact, I was at a meeting where we were discussing this, and we asked Duale, "Does the parliament feel anxious that it can be declared unconstitutional?" They don't see it as a threat. Actually, there is no threat as far as they are concerned.

Question: Looking at what happened yesterday, that bill can only be reintroduced after six months. I understand the women were not there, and there was the launch of National Super Alliance (NASA)(a political coalition) at The Geevanjee Gardens. We are asking, bearing in mind the current environment and the election in August, "Do you think there is any hope?"

Response: They have to wait for six months. It has to be the next parliament because there will be no parliament six months from now. People argue that it is a small group of radical women that will actually bring change. Women will have to form a small group of women who will redefine the agenda for women for the next five years. The way we defined Affirmative Action and having influenced the constitution so much is a clear indication that it is possible. For me, that is not the audacity of hope like Barack Obama would put it. It is hope based on that short history that we can do it. An argument that has been doing rounds is that we call it the 'women bill' when it should be a 'gender bill'. It is a women's bill because we are talking about women representation.

They are the ones who are not there, and we can call it a gender bill once we get the minimum. The constitution has already given us the minimum. We need to have a small group of women. I am saying this because sometimes I give credit to AWARD for organising this workshop where Maria Nzomo presented a paper on thirty per cent representation. She argued that thirty per cent forms the critical mass, based on critical mass theory. She talked about influencing: we need visible women who can represent others in that parliament. You can even control without talking by having many women seated in that parliament. It tells a girl outside that it is possible to get there. That, in itself, is influence, but it means that your voice can also be heard. When you are alone, it becomes your voice, but it means the voice of the many women you are representing when you are many.

We need a few women parliamentarians and a few women from the women organisation who will set the agenda and say this is our agenda and re-strategize without pleasing anybody. When you endeavour to please them, they will laugh at you. If you take them for a dance or a dinner dance, who will talk to you when they drink? Stop those domestic negotiations; why go through the wife? You mobilise enough power to go and speak to Uhuru or the president as we did; Moi was challenging, but we could talk to Saitoti and Mwai Kibaki. We could also talk to Raila, and we could ask Ida, "Where is Raila? Do you know where he is?" and she could tell us, "He is here? Talk to him" if he is in the house. We could then talk to him and book an appointment. We have to change these domestic negotiations. It is both our right and Kenyans must accept that culture must change, the focus will change, budgeting must change. It has been happening, and literature has shown that there have been many changes worldwide.

Question: You have given us the strategies that can be employed in moving the agenda forward. Kindly provide us with your parting shot in terms of this struggle.

Response: I want to say that this has been an exciting journey, enjoyable but tiring. However, it makes you happy to see change happening. We don't want to be equal with men in an oppressive environment. Numbers do not tell it all. MPs can be 50:50 in parliament (fifty per cent women and fifty per cent men). This balance means nothing if people are going to bed hungry. That is not the environment that we want. We need an environment of social transformation, so I said we need to change the institutions. We need to change legislation to have both men and women are living like human beings. Who would want to hear that somebody died because of a lack of food? No woman would want to see a child dying because of hunger, irrespective of where they come from. We need a society to say we are happy, and my visit to these Western countries makes me learn a lot. When you see no street children, you will know that they must have shelter somewhere.

We have to move the gender agenda and the agenda of social transformation together to be able to transform our own countries. We are a prosperous but highly unequal country. A few people have salaries worth millions of shillings yet others are dying of hunger; I think women are supposed to push this agenda of social transformation. I know we have been saying that if we make so many agendas simultaneously, we might end up losing all of them. Affirmative Action has been the main focus. The women parliamentarians should know they have entered the parliament with male ideologies. They cannot destroy the master's house with their tools but must have their own devices to break the master's house to be more receptive. They must ask themselves why they are earning such a huge salary when Kenyans are going to bed hungry? Why are we having this kind of salary when we have 7.1 million people who cannot afford two meals a day? We must push forward the gender agenda with social transformation as our ultimate goal.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Prof.

CHAPTER NINE

A Conversation with Hon. Dr Nancy Baraza



“We ensured that women’s issues lacking in the old Constitution were taken on board in advocating for reforms. As the Chair of FIDA, I was deeply involved in the reforms struggle in the 1990s. I was part of the Ufungamano process and the peoples’ commission formed in 1998 to counter the government’s move to form a coalition that would undertake constitutional reforms”.

~ Hon. Dr. Nancy Baraza

Biography

A law scholar based at the University of Nairobi, Dr. Nancy Baraza has been a champion of gender justice and the director of FIDA Kenya. She was one of the commissioners during the constitution review process. Dr Baraza is a former judge and the First Deputy Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya, the first vice president of the Supreme Court of Kenya under the Constitution of Kenya 2010. She also served as the vice chairperson of the Kenya Law Reform Commission, a

position she effectively used to influence the drafting of Kenya's current Marriage Act, Matrimonial Property Act and Protection from Domestic Violence Act, among other. Dr. Baraza is a founder member and past chairperson of the Kenya Chapter of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA-Kenya). She represented Kenya as a legal expert in presenting Country Reports on the status of women in Kenya to the CEDAW Committee of the United Nations in 2007, 2011, and 2017 in New York and Geneva respectively. She was awarded the Order of Grand Warrior (OGW) by the State.

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Interviewed by Kennedy Mwangi

Question: FIDA has been very influential in legal and constitutional reforms focusing on women's empowerment in Kenya. Women-friendly legislation recently enacted, like the Marriage Act, Domestic Violence Act, and Matrimonial Property Act, are all results of women lawyers and FIDA initiatives. When we participated in the Constitution review process, we were confronted with these issues and addressed them through legislation. There was significant agitation for change due to the government's undemocratic policies in the 1990s. You know that several amendments to the independence constitution had been done to centralise power in the presidency by this time. Absolute power made the presidency very despotic. Human rights abuses were rife, necessitating the struggle for democratisation by women and civil society organisations.

We ensured that women's issues lacking in the old constitution were taken on board in advocating for reforms. As the Chair of FIDA, I was deeply involved in the reforms struggle in the 1990s. I was part of the Ufungamano process and the peoples' commission formed in 1998 to counter the government's move to form a coalition that would undertake constitutional reforms. People did not trust an oppressive government to deliver a people-centred constitution. That is why the opposition parties and civil society organisations opposed the unilateral move by the government to oversee constitution making through a parliamentary committee.

The parliamentary committee was chaired by the Hon. Raila Odinga, whose Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) had joined the government. The civil society, women's

movement, opposition parties and the religious community formed the Ufungamano initiative to run a parallel constitution-making process. It was named the Peoples' Commission, it was chaired by the late Dr. Oki Ooko Ombaka. Moi's constitution-making initiative and the Ufungamano initiative ran parallel to each other. The former enjoyed legality while the latter had legitimacy.

People trusted the Ufungamano initiative because they couldn't trust the government. We were in it with leaders such as Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, Abida Ali Aroni, and Salome Muigai. The movement got President Moi scared. We faced threats and intimidation as we traversed the country, collecting people's views on the proposed constitution. In Kisumu, our meeting was disrupted using a petrol bomb. We had to scamper to safety. I still carry a scar on my leg. We were harassed because we were opposed to the government's approach to constitution review.

Eventually, in 2001, sanity prevailed. The government yielded. The two parallel processes merged through Prof. Yash Ghai, the Chairman of the Constitution Review Commission of Kenya (CKRC). Ghai advised that running two similar Constitution-making processes was endangering the country. He engaged the Ufungamano initiative, religious people, the opposition parties, the civil society culminating in a merger between the people's commission and parliamentary commission to form the Constitution Review Commission of Kenya (CKRC). I became a commissioner in the expanded CKRC that produced the draft constitution in 2002. The document was debated at the national constitutional conference and became the Bomas Draft. The political class made further amendments to the Bomas Draft to produce the contentious Wako Draft. The Wako Draft was an intervention by politicians to water down the Bomas Draft. The Wako Draft was taken to the Referendum in 2005 and was rejected by Kenyans. The people thought their views had been altered in the Wako Draft. The Bomas Draft was a product of a national consensus.

Question: What happened after the Wako Draft was rejected at the Referendum?

Response: Between 2005 and 2007, there was a lull in the movement. This followed the defeat of the Wako Draft at the Referendum. Then we had the infamous 2007 General Election and the horrible aftermath that pushed the country to the precipice of a civil war. Reviving the stalled constitution-making process became one of the measures of bringing back a divided nation together. In 2008, the Constitution of Kenya Review Act was amended, and the Committee of Experts (CoE) was appointed. Their

duty was to look at the contentious issues at Bomas and not the entire document. The controversial issues included the position of the Kadhis Court, devolution and the system of government (parliamentary system or presidential system). The CoE resolved the contentious issues by harmonising the Bomas and Wako Drafts to produce the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

Question: And after that, you subsequently became the Deputy Chief Justice. Kindly, tell us your experience?

Response: As we went around seeking views of the people in the constitution-making process, one of the most vexing institutions in the country was the Judiciary. The people were very disillusioned about the institution. They did not trust it because of the little it had done to protect their rights. They blamed corruption and incompetence within the Judiciary on the appointment of judges through nepotism and tribalism. When we were drafting the constitution, we created a chapter on the Judiciary. Interestingly, the Judiciary never wanted to be part of the reform. We struggled to include proposed changes the people wanted for Judiciary; clean Judiciary, noncorrupt, effective, independently appointed, and financially independent.

I had issues with the appointment of judges as we made the constitution. When they advertised for the newly created judges of the Supreme Court, I applied. It was an extremely competitive process, but I emerged top of the list. When I went for the parliamentary approval, all the marks from the Judicial Commission were tabled. I understand I scored the highest among the candidates for Chief Justice and Deputy Chief Justice positions. Had I applied for the Chief Justice position, I would have become the first female Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya. I also became the first-woman Deputy Chief Justice and the Vice-President of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Kenya. I served until 2012, when I resigned because of the unintended incident between a security guard and I, at Village Market in Nairobi. My departure from the Supreme Court was partly political. I think people were too harsh on me. That incident does not obliterate that I served as the first Deputy Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya. It was an incredible experience. Although I didn't stay there for long, I participated in the first Advisory Opinion of the Supreme Court. My appointment at the DCJ confirmed that we had a constitution that recognised women of Kenya. I encourage women to take the opportunity of various openings created by the constitution to participate in the leadership and decision-making of the country.

Question: And what is your opinion on the two-thirds gender rule?

Response: This matter came to the Supreme Court for an Advisory Opinion after my departure. Actually, I teach it at the university. I have also done extensive research on the matter. Unfortunately, the women's efforts to fully realise Affirmative Action gains in the new Constitution have not been met. Article 27 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 is clear on Affirmative Action.

Similarly, Article 81, which talks about representation, clarifies what the state should do to ensure that women attain at least 30% representation in legislative and decision-making organs. Whereas Article 177 clearly achieves one-third representation for women in County Assembly and the Senate, the same does not apply to women's representation in National Assembly. This creates a problem. The Attorney general, in 2012, approached the Supreme Court seeking an advisory opinion No. 2 of 2012. He requested the Apex Court to provide direction on realising a minimum of one-third representation for the women in the National Assembly and the Senate. The Supreme Court, by majority decision, advised that the realisation of Article 27 should be progressive and not immediate.

Chief Justice Dr Mutunga gave a dissenting opinion. He indicated that implementing the two-thirds gender rule as provided for under Article 27 should be immediate. If I was there, I could have concurred with him. By that time, I had unfortunately left. I consider it unfortunate because I have read the advisory opinion and with respect, find it not convincing. The philosophy of Affirmative Action, especially the two-thirds gender rule in decision-making organs, has since been embraced by the UN. Implementing the two-thirds gender rule cannot be progressive. Women representation for transformative decision-making in legislative organs requires action now and not in the future. I do not see how that should be progressive. In my humble view, Supreme Court missed out on the philosophy that underpins the one-third gender representation. The Supreme Court advisory opinion took away fire from the momentum we had built towards realising the two-thirds gender rule. Nothing has moved from the pronouncement of the advisory opinion. We continue to have unconstitutional parliaments due to the failure to adhere to the two-thirds gender rule.

Question: Two-thirds gender rule has really not been contentious, but implementation remains a challenge. In your opinion, what is the problem?

Response: There have been mixed signals from the National Assembly. Like the Duale Bill, there have been bills that proposed lifting Articles 177 to 190, 290, 97 and 98. This demonstrates seriousness in addressing the problem. We also have others like the Chepkonga Bill, which supports the progressive position by the Supreme Court and has the claw-back effect on women's efforts.

Question: Now that you have served in the apex court of the Judiciary, are there changes you think should be made to further enforce women's rights?

Response: I think there have been fundamental changes in the court because now we have more independently appointed judges. The Judiciary enjoys financial autonomy, which has enabled it to conduct a lot of outreach in every county. In some cases, there are delays in releasing money to the Judiciary from the exchequer. Slowly, we are rolling back the gains in the Judiciary. Judgments now take two years and beyond, yet we have so many judges.

Whether or not women are being served, I think there have been very progressive judgements from the High Court with Justice Isaac Lenaola and Justice Mumbi Ngugi. They have led in verdicts favouring women, such as upholding women's rights, matrimonial property decisions, and access to land on children. To some extent, there have been progressive judgements. Still, the Supreme Court has not served the course of women adequately. The Advisory Opinion No. 2 of 2012 clawed back women's gains in the constitution. There was a challenge in the Supreme Court filed by FIDA to challenge the composition of the Supreme Court where one-third gender rule was not met. The court has perpetuated the unconstitutionality of state institutions, so we should say there has not been good progress within the Supreme Court. However, I can say that some judges have done pretty well.

Question: It is argued that the women's movement has lost its lustre. Further, that it has been derailed in the recent past. What is your response to this concern?

Response: To an extent, I agree with those who say that the women's movement has lost its momentum and focus. It is weaker than it used to be. Nothing confirms this more than the many disjointed or competing efforts by different individuals and groups in addressing the two-thirds gender rule. If the women's movement was united and focused like before, we could have done things differently. To create space for women in the new constitution, we fought so hard for greater democracy and women's

rights. It sometimes became violent, but we persevered. We risked our lives and careers until, eventually, we got the constitution. I think some of us felt that, 'we had arrived'. We assumed the State would fulfil its mandate by putting in place legislation for the realisation of the constitution. When you look at the debate about the two-thirds gender rule, the argument is whether it is necessary, yet that is a constitutional requirement. They jokingly argue: "Oh, women want free things, oh women are joyriders, go back and struggle like men do, completely misunderstanding the reason for Affirmative Action". The two thirds gender rule is a corrective intervention to ensure a critical mass of women in the decision-making. It is necessitated by so many factors, such as patriarchy and the historical disempowerment of women. It exists in the constitution because women cannot compete with men on equal footing. Therefore, Affirmative Action is a quarter system to increase women in leadership, government, and other public offices.

It is saddening to hear other people argue that women do not need Affirmative Action: "Since when did they stop needing it" and "where are you coming from to know now it's a constitutional requirement?" This is why I think we celebrated our victory as women too soon. We thought we had fought so hard and won the battle. We have now realised that our struggle is far from over. I believe there is a need for revamping the women's movement because it's a bit disjointed and weak.

Question: Now that you have ventured into academia, what are you doing currently? I believe that for the women's movement and women rights to be continued, everyone must do something wherever they are.

Response: As an academician, I teach, research and supervise students at the School of Law, University of Nairobi. I teach the ideals of the constitution, which includes Affirmative Action, women empowerment, the history of the women's movement in the country, the need for realisation of women empowerment as required by the constitution. My students, both women and men, are pretty vibrant. I am happy to state that men will shortly have different attitudes towards women. When you explain the need for women empowerment, they understand quickly and appreciate it. I teach them Feminist Theory, the Social Foundation of Law, and women's role in development.

In that way, I am infusing a new value system in both young men and women. They must strive to change the narrative on women empowerment. These are young people

who will be parliamentarians, judges, prosecutors all over the place. I think if we do our job well, we shall deliver. We try to infuse a new value system in our teaching, and that is very powerful.

Question: Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts on the constitution-making process in Kenya and women's empowerment. Kindly share with us your parting shot.

Response: I think women parliamentarians should carry the battle forward. I would encourage as many women to run for elective posts because they are now empowered to run. When they get into parliament, they should form lobbies outside parliament and reconnect with women at the grassroots, civil society, and in academia for a more robust, vibrant, and focused women's movement.

Question: Thank you very much, Nancy.

CHAPTER TEN

A Conversation with Kamla Sikand



“You see, we were always short of funds, and I had a home and a very central place in Westlands with a big compound. I told myself, why can’t I offer my home for women’s meetings since we could not afford commercial venues like hotels. It became a place where we held so many women’s conferences”.

~ Kamla Sikand

Biography

A Kenyan of Indian descent who devoted her life to women empowerment in the country. She was an active member of various women NGOs in Kenya. Kamla brought the diversity and universality of women’s issues. Her humble abode was a sanctuary where women would converge and strategise on protecting the gains made in the draft constitution during the constitution review process. Kamla died on 26 August 2019. With this publication, we honour her selfless sacrifice for the women of Kenya.

Interviewed Wambui Kanyi

Question: Madam Kamla, we thank you for allowing us to document women's contributions to the struggle for gender equality and women empowerment in Kenya. We appreciate the work you have done for Kenyan women to bring the battle thus far. Being one of the women who have struggled, maybe you can tell us about yourself and what motivated you to push for the women's movement in Kenya.

Response: Well, I was always interested in the development of the girl child. I really wanted to see girls at the forefront in accessing education. The best way to do it was to join other women and work together. Through the National Council for Women, we brought women together to work on all aspects of the development of the woman. Then we formed the Women Political Alliance to promote the participation of women in the political development of the country. At the National Council for Women, I collaborated with women leaders like Wangari Maathai. There is nobody who doesn't know Wangari Maathai. It is under Wangari's leadership that we started the Green Belt Movement. We made the issue of environmental sustainability a top priority. Wangari took ecological matters very seriously, and we did our best for the Kenyan environment. I remember very well how Wangari used to treasure Karura forest. I imagine if she was there to see what is happening at Karura today, she would be shocked. She was passionate about preserving the environment, preserving nature, preserving the trees, and we worked very closely with her.

Question: What was your area of specialisation as a young person because it may have contributed to your interest in the girl child?

Response: I am a Kenyan. I was born here. My grandfather, a doctor, came here when the Kenya Railway was being built. He was employed as a doctor. So, my father naturally was from Kenya and we were all born here. My mother was also a Kenyan. So, I am a Kenyan as far as I am concerned. When I grew up, I went to London, and I studied Nursery school work. I was married then. I came back from London in 1963 when we were getting independence. When I came back, I saw an advert in the newspaper in which they were looking for a headmistress for a nursery school. This nursery school was for *mzungu* and no Asians or Africans were allowed there. This is a fascinating history. I had the guts to apply, so I used it, but it was for *mzungu* only. I knew no Asian or African was allowed to get in there. There was a vacancy for a matron, and I applied. Believe me or not, I was called for an interview, and I got the job.

When I got the job, the staff were shocked because there were no Asians or Africans in that nursery. All the staff were white, and they wondered why there was now an Asian matron. The following day, Dr. McAllen, a doctor at the city hall and whose children studied in the nursery complained when he came to pick his daughter. He complained to the assistant matron, Mrs Brogan. I had started my work on the 15th day of the month. Every parent who had not paid fees by the 15th day was supposed to be reminded to pay up. I told Mrs Brogan to talk to the parent. When Dr. Mc Allen came, she went to his car outside and complained to him. She said, "I was supposed to be off by four o'clock, but I can't go because this Muhindi woman has told me to talk to the parents who have not paid fees for their children. Dr. Mc Allen came to my office and asked me, "Mrs Sikand," he was a very good man; "Mrs Brogan is complaining that she was supposed to be off, but you have asked her to talk to the parents?" I told him, "Dr Mc Allen, I wish I started my job yesterday. I also hope she came to me instead of complaining to you; I will organise it." He apologised to me because he realised that the woman should have talked to me. He left. She was a *mzungu*, and when I went there (nursery), all were *mzungu*: the teachers, the children, support staff, and everybody else was a *Mzungu*; no Muhindi or African was allowed in there.

Later, I tell you, we became very popular. We had people like Dr. Gachukia, Dr Kiano, and many UN people bringing their children there. All the top leadership with their children there; the whites, Asians and Africans. We became the best nursery school in the country. That is where our relationship with these great women, Eddah Gachukia and Kiano, came from. I made it, but before, it was a long struggle. All *mzungu*, no Asian or African, was allowed in. Still, I had the guts to apply, but we were successful. All UN people, all the top leadership in Kenya, and you can ask people like Gachukia, they will tell you. In fact, our friendship has persisted since. Working in this nursery school was something special, and that is why I cannot forget it.

Question: So your struggle for justice started earlier?.

Response: Absolutely. I was married then and I went to London and joined the school of education and did that course. So when I came and saw it, I said, let me try even if it is all **mzungu**. Although Dr. McAllen was white, he was a decent man. He was so good. We used to talk a lot with him when he was staying in Nairobi. No. When Whites saw it was working for the better, they didn't remove their children. It was not like this other woman saying that Muhindi woman. No, their children remained. That was the first struggle I had; I am sure you didn't know it; it is historical, and I can't forget it. All we need is a peaceful country and God's blessings to remain united and friendly as

a nation. No. When the whites saw it was working for the better, they didn't remove their children. It was not like this other woman saying that *Muhindi* woman. No, their children remained. That was the first struggle I had; I am sure you didn't know it; it is historical, and I can't forget it. All we need is a peaceful country and God's blessings to remain united and calm as a nation.

Question: In this struggle for women's empowerment and development of the girl child, I know there was a struggle in pushing for women agenda in the constitution. What role did you play in driving the women's agenda in the constitution?

Response: To begin with, you know about the Bomas of Kenya. Luckily, I was the only Asian woman who was a delegate at the Bomas of Kenya. I was part of the women's movement. At Bomas, there was a powerful presence of women groups. A big group of great women had been nominated from various parts of the country, and they did excellent work. The Bomas experience was a great experience. Prof. Ghai did a great job. Whenever there was an issue, we coalesced to forge a common position. It was a pleasure working with fellow women. There were many contentious issues, but we always came together as women, discussed and reached a consensus. One time, the subject of the President came up, and somebody proposed that the President of Kenya should come from one of the ethnic groups in Kenya and must be Kenyan born. I shot up and said, No! Raila Odinga came and asked me, "Kamla so you also want to be the President of Kenya?" I told him, "Why not? If I am given an opportunity why won't I take it." Bomas of Kenya was very interesting. Kenyans got a great constitution. If you had time to look at it and study each chapter, you would realise that it is an excellent constitution, especially for women.

Question: I still wanted to bring out this; when we were chatting earlier, you mentioned your home is a place for women's meetings. That was a significant contribution to women's struggle because you ensured they always had a place to meet. Tells more about this considerable support to the movement.

Response: You see, we were always short of funds, and I had a home and a very central place at Westlands with a big compound. I asked myself, why could not offer my home for women's meetings since we could not afford commercial venues like hotels. It became a place where we held so many women's conferences. In fact, I remember my husband making fun of me telling me; I will give this place to women. I also remember this South African President who is retiring. His wife came to Kenya; what was her name? I have forgotten her name; we had invited her when we had gone

to South Africa for women's day. When she came here, we wanted to entertain her in a particular way, but we did not have money. I said, okay, let me offer my garden, and we host her there. She came, and we had a great time with other women. Women often held meetings there whenever they wanted. Wangari Maathai also held an appointment here. My husband was very cooperative. When parliament debated Affirmative Action, we were all in my house until midnight because the debate went on late until midnight.

Question: Affirmative Action in the constitution?

Response: Yes. And parliament wanted to remove it from the constitution. We stayed at my house. We discussed the issue and at midnight, a decision was made. They did not remove it. Some women slept in my house. I spread mattresses in my sitting room and they slept there. My husband was very cooperative. He got a drink from the fridge and said, "I wanna give this to you women because you have won it!" I think Prof. Wanjiku has written about it.

Question: *In Time for Harvest?*

Response: We were delighted because the MPs debated it and they wanted to remove it from the constitution. We did not wish the Affirmative Action removed. At midnight, a decision was reached! We said, wow! We have won it!

Question: When these women came, were they lobbying for their issues and strategising on the way forward?

Response: You know, there were two issues here; we couldn't afford to hire hotels and secondly, my home was very central. In fact, from my house to town, it was seven minutes drive; it would take me seven minutes to drive from town to my place. My husband was very cooperative; he used to tell me, "I think I will donate this house to the women".

Question: When they came, you also served them food?

Response: You know, in our culture, when somebody comes to your house, you don't just have meetings with them. You should also feed them. So that is how I took it.

Question: In this struggle, especially in trying to bring the women issues into the constitution, were there any challenges you experienced?

Response: You know, at Bomas, there were always issues. Whenever issues came up, we came together, chose our leader, and prepared our position. There was this woman who was spearheading this group. I forget her name. She always brought women together. We discussed it together and made sure that the issue was passed at the plenary. We were very united. I must say women were united, which was a great thing. It helped us accomplish our mission.

Question: Do you remember any challenges in this process?

Response: My dear, the women's agenda or any other issue in the country has always had challenges. Even today, when I read the newspaper, there are challenges, there is an issue, and I am not very happy. Even with my government, challenges are there. These challenges are political. What I want is that the country is united but not that I become a leader as Kamla. My dream is to see that the government is moving forward. The country is more important than any of us. I am not happy with what I see today. I don't want to see at any time that the country is destroyed. We should remain united no matter the challenges or interests we pursue. We should be all united regardless of who we are; whether a *mzungu*, Asian, African or whatever, we are all Kenyans. If something happened to our country today, we all suffer; you suffer, I suffer, and our children suffer. That is why to me, what is important is unity in our country.

Question: Now, in terms of women empowerment, having been one of those who have fought to bring the struggle where we are, what would you recommend in terms of pushing the agenda forward?

Response: My first and foremost point is, let us stand united because the future does not belong to me, it does not belong to her, and it does not belong to you. The future belongs to all women. Let's stand united because the country belongs to all of us. You see, when you suffer, I suffer, and when I suffer, you also suffer. Even at home, when the father goes his way, the mother her own way, the children will also go their way, and it becomes challenging for that home to move forward. We should have a motive of bettering our country, not because of ourselves but for the good of our children. We all want a peaceful country and a good country for our children, so let us all have that motive to better our country.

Question: I think these were the central questions we had regarding the women's struggle for empowerment.

Response: Thank you too. My contributions are minor compared to my faith and hope in my country, Kenya. We should give back to our motherland the little that we can offer; that is important. Suppose every individual in this country decided to give whatever little they can provide to this country. In that case, we can make a very great country. It is very possible if we remain united.

Question: We are grateful for giving us your time and for being in the struggle and bringing it where it is today because today's women are taking over from there.

Response: Today's women also need to be given an opportunity because they have the energy and the education required. This education is giving them courage. They also have many options, don't you think so? They are more courageous and not like me when I was going to apply at *mzungu*.

Question: When you say they have better opportunities, what are some of these opportunities that are there for them?

Response: First of all, they have better education than us, therefore more opportunities. It is an independent country and the possibilities are open for them. They still need to work hard because even if something is available for you and you are not doing anything to get it, it cannot benefit you, so they have to push for it.

Interviewer: We are very grateful, Kamla. Thank you very much.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A Conversation with Ms. Alice Yano



“What disempowers women a lot is the lack of resources, both financial and material. Lack of economic empowerment limits women’s ability to make independent political choices. Suppose I talk about women’s experiences at the community level? You will find that if a woman decides to support a candidate of her choice, the husband will deny her money for food, forcing her to vote for someone else. Due to a lack of financial autonomy, a woman becomes easy prey to manipulation”. ~ Ms Alice Yano

Biography

Born in Marakwet in the Rift Valley, Alice Yano is one of the brilliant lawyers in Kenya. She has been consistently vocal on the need to genuinely empower women in rural areas. Her academic prowess has made her record many firsts in a male-dominated community. Alice served effectively as a commissioner in the defunct CKRC. She works with several NGOs to lift women at the community level economically and politically.

Interviewed by Agnes Mugane

Question: Thank you for creating time to be with us and taking part in this interview. We are writing profiles of women leaders who have championed the struggle for equality and women's rights in Kenya. Your contribution has brought us to where we are as a country. As a champion in women's empowerment, please tell us about yourself and what motivated you to join in the struggle.

Response: Thank you very much for inviting me for this interview. I have come from Maasaini, where I reside and do business. I practice advocacy there. Thank you also for inviting me back to the university that I graduated from 25 years ago. I'm proud to be here today. I'm pleased that the university made me what I am today. Upon graduation, I went to practice law in Eldoret. I joined FIDA. At that time, FIDA was offering free legal services to women.

Many people learnt about me through FIDA. Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO), which was very strong with the countrywide network in those days, came looking for me. The MYWO requested me to offer them legal services on women's issues. That is when I started representing women. I soon realised my vocation was to assist fellow women. Though it was in 1996, I have not given up. I am still active in women's empowerment efforts.

In 1999, I successfully applied to join the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC). The North Rift Branch of Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation strongly recommended my application. We had an influential woman leader called Prof. Margaret Kamar. She supported my appointment as a commissioner. When I was interviewed for the commission job, she told me, "Yes, Alice, you can stand with and work with us." At the time, gender issues were not generally accepted in society. A woman applying to join a commission as a commissioner to do constitution work was almost unheard of. The first things that I had were issues touching on gender and it became personal when I was personally told off. I was told, "you woman, you cannot represent Rift Valley to do a constitution". Politicians stood up against me.

I did not relent. I said, "Since I've known what women go through in my legal practice, let me try my very best." After I had done a very successful interview presided over by the Prof. Yash Pal Ghai group, one day, some of our politicians from Rift Valley went to Mzee Moi, *wakasema (they said): "Eh Mzee hii ni nini umetuletea?"* Mzee akasema "Ni nini?" "kwani Rift Valley tutarepresentiwa na mwanamke?" (Mzee, what is this thing you have

brought us? Are you serious that in Rift Valley, we shall be represented by a woman? The President asked: "What?", You mean in Rift Valley we shall be represented by a woman?" But that gentleman stood his ground. He said, "Kama alifanya interview mimi sitaki kujua, amepita?" (If she did the interview and passed, then let her be). Akaambiwa (He was told): "She was number one in the interview. "Amos Wako confirmed that I was the best in the discussion. So I was taken in and that's where we now struggled. We started by going to the ground.

We were 15 in number. But before that, the issues came up of course, another group, the civil society, was left out. After some negotiations, Dr. Oki Ooko Ombaka, the Civil Society organisations' (CSOs) representative, was nominated as the deputy vice chairperson. Other women commissioners included Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, Dr. Nancy Baraza, Salome Muigai, and Justice Abida Ali Aroni. We bonded very well as women. The commission had 27 members when it started collecting views. We prepared well because we knew the people's opinions on the new Constitution were primary. We then proceeded to the communities to document the people's voices on the proposed Constitution.

My happiest moments came when listening to Kenyans articulating issues around the Constitution. It was amazing. A woman would tell us: "*Hata walikuja juzi, wakachukua kuku yangu, wamechukua mbuzi yangu, ati wanataka tuanze kuchanga mchango ya wapi,*" (they even came the other day, took away my chicken and my goat as a compulsory contribution to a project I do not know). This was a constitutional issue. We analysed it and understood the excesses of the provincial administration. Mama lamented: "Juzi shamba yangu imeuzwa. Nimefukuzwa na niko na watoto. Nitapeleka wapi watoto?" (Recently, they grabbed and sold my piece of land. I was evicted from my home with children. Where do I take these children?). You can appreciate the seriousness of land issues.

In some public hearings, participants told us: "This river used to flow throughout the year, today it has no water". This concern demonstrated a high level of environmental consciousness among local people, developing laws to protect mother earth. After collecting the raw data, we synthesised it into a document that could make legal sense. At the end of the public hearings, we collated the information and moved to the Bomas of Kenya. That is where all the issues were put into perspective, discussed and given legal validity. The political leaders suddenly realised that the new constitution could make them lose power. Unfortunately, Bomas threatened the birth of a new constitution due to our usual political intrigues based on vested interests.

Women commissioners and delegates came together to articulate women's concerns and to protect the gains made. But because of our usual intrigues- political intrigues and all that I'm happy, you were also part of it, you saw it. It was sad, but as women were gathered again, we said, "Yes", we must not lose sight of what we want to have in the Constitution. At this time, gender issues were prominent in public discourse. These issues were so much ingrained in our minds. Even today, as I sleep and wake up, gender issues remain dear to me. We made sure that gender issues found their way into the Constitution. I believe you have read our Constitution. It provides for gender inclusivity. We ensured that gender concerns were addressed in elections to the National Assembly, the Senate and County Assemblies. The Constitution provides for a one-third gender rule at all levels.

After promulgating the Constitution in 2010, the 2013 elections was our litmus test. And we saw what happened. Of course, you cannot force an electorate to elect someone they do not want. The National Assembly now has 47 Woman Representatives. The Senate was given a leeway by political parties to appoint Representatives as it happens in the County Assemblies. The Constitution provides a threshold for the inclusion of women and persons with disabilities. Today, I am a sad woman because not everything we agreed on for women has been implemented for the 47 Counties in County Assemblies, Senate and the National Assembly. The new Constitution's impact, I can tell you as a person on the ground, is yet to be fully felt in *mashinani* (Rural areas). We need to be more assertive going forward to realise these gains. Despite having the Kenya Human Rights Commission and the Gender Commission, with all due respect, their impact is yet to be felt by women at the village level.

I wish we could go back to vibrant women's groups and active human rights organisations that articulated women's issues with authority and commitment. Why do I say so? I am a woman practising law in Kajiado. I interact with local women in their daily struggles, and it depresses me a lot. I can tell elite women that what we discuss in towns does not resonate with the women on the ground. Let me use a typical Maasai woman to illustrate my point. She has a husband who decides to sell family land without her knowledge. This happens regularly despite the law providing for spousal consent in the disposal of family property. Men have devised ways of circumventing the law by getting any woman dressed like a Maasai woman and presenting her to endorse the land transfer documents. The property then changes hands without the bonafide wife knowing. Alternatively, a polygamous man uses the favourite wife to sign the land transfer leaving the other wives ignorant about the disposal of the family property.

This is why I firmly believe that local women groups can play a vital role through civic education to create awareness among women. I say so because I frequently encounter several local women groups collapsing for lack of project funds. Why can't the women-focused agencies created by the Constitution like the gender commission, the human rights commission and the ombudsman support women's programmes at the local level as we did before, during the Constitution-making process and shortly after that? When this happens, women will feel their liberation. A woman is the epitome of society. I wish to emphasise that Kenya needs strong women's organisations. It requires vibrant gender and youth-based organisations. Such organisations can eloquently articulate the issues of the woman on the ground. It must be clear to policymakers that women and men are affected differently by various interventions. Let me use famine to illustrate this point. When we talk of hunger ravaging the country, we need to be clear about who between women and men are most at risk. When food scarcity looms, men migrate to the towns or move elsewhere with their livestock leaving women and the children and a few goats or cows to fend for themselves. It is emotional to imagine the suffering such women endure.

Question: Thank you very much, Alice, for your eloquent reflection. Can you explain further opportunities that exist to win the battle for gender equality and women empowerment?

Response: We still have what it takes to realise our quest. One of them is advocacy around women's issues using caucuses. In the national assembly, the women's lobby has been quite active because of their strong caucus. Yet, it is undeniable that not all women in parliament have been active in protecting gains for women in the Constitution. Disappointingly, some women Members of Parliament hardly speak in the August House. This fact dramatises the need for continuous civic education for awareness creation that improves women's lives.

Question: That sounds interesting. Reflecting on your struggle for women's empowerment, share with us the significant challenges you encountered, how you addressed them, and the lessons you have learnt?

Response: When you talk of challenges, I immediately remember my struggle to be a Commissioner with the CKRC. It was an uphill task. I thank the former President Moi for putting his foot down and saying, "*kama amefuzu, apatiwe*" (If she is qualified, let

her be given). Another challenge has been cultural practices that still keep women down. I am an educated Marakwet woman. The man remains the head of the house. At the same time, the woman is considered a child regardless of her contribution. It is a standard practice for the husband to ask where the children are when he comes home in the evening. When a man calls out “*nyagu you itika*” (calls out a child), the woman is expected to answer back because she belongs to the children’s category. Fortunately, the landscape is changing. That is why I can talk to you today. I thank God I had a very informed husband, the late Dr. Yano. Though a typical Marakwet man, he stood by me and supported me because he had been exposed to the world. Those are the challenges we go through.

Question: As we come to the end of this exciting conversation let me take you back briefly. At the CKRC, you represented the North Rift region that is still profoundly male-dominated. They openly challenged your selection. How did you deal with the challenge of acceptance in your work?

Response: I wish Linah Jebii Kilimo was here to explain to you what it means to grow up as a girl among the Marakwet. Growing up was an uphill task for girls in our time. The usual chores were fetching water from the stream, cooking and collecting firewood. Then, there was the initiation period, after which the girl had to get married. You were married off, whether you were 13, 14, 15, or 16 years old. You were lucky to get a man at sixteen. At 17 years, a Marakwet girl was considered too old for marriage. Initiation of girls followed by early marriages messed up a majority of the girls. They never got an opportunity to go to school and get an education.

I studied in the old system of 7-4-2-3: Seven years of primary education, four years of secondary education, two years of advanced level, and three years of university education. Among the Marakwet, girls were married off after standard seven. Girls who joined secondary school were lucky. They discovered that marriage was not the only thing in life. At Form Four, girls like me were now enlightened enough. We started appreciating the importance of education. We admired our headmistress who was driving a car. She told us education for girls was very important. Luckily enough, the higher a girl climbed the education ladder, the less she became attractive for marriage in the village. By the time a girl reached Form Five and Six, she was beyond the tribal threshold. As you can see, the challenges were serious.

Question: That is what I was looking for, Alice. What advice do you give girls who find themselves in situations similar to what you have described?

Response: My childhood was that of a typical Marakwet girl at that time. I went through the rites and was able to make it. As much as we had those problems, we also had a chief in our place and a councillor called Lasoiya. The duo valued the education of girls. They traversed the village to ensure bright children, including the girls, went to school. I was among the most promising girls. I scored 36 out of 36 points in the Certificate for Primary Education that allowed me to transit to secondary school. I was admitted to the Alliance Girls High School. Due to my poor background, I could not report to the school in time because of lack of school fees. By the time President Moi intervened, my slot at Alliance had been taken by someone else. I got a second admission to Kipsigis Girls High School. I performed very well and transitioned to Forms Five and Six.

As you can see, one of the significant challenges is leadership that promotes women's empowerment. We need leadership in touch with local networks of women at the community level. If our Governors, Chiefs, MCAs down to the village headman were committed to women's empowerment, the results would be excellent. These offices can reach women and girls at their point of need without much financial expenditure. Both levels of government must work together to complement the efforts of Community-Based Organisations to make the dream of gender equity come true.

Question: You have enumerated the challenges you encountered as a Marakwet girl. Do you remember any other challenges you have faced in your work in empowering women?

Response: What disempowers women a lot is the lack of resources, both financial and material. Lack of economic empowerment limits women's ability to make independent political choices. Suppose I talk about women's experiences at the community level. You will find if a woman decides to support a candidate of her choice, the husband will deny her money for food, forcing her to vote for someone else. Due to a lack of financial autonomy, a woman becomes easy prey to manipulation. Apart from being prey to manipulation, we have serious issues with culture; we don't want to run away from that fact. Culture, especially in pastoralist communities, is still a limiting factor to women's empowerment. It is rare to find a woman acting independently without seeking authority from her husband. In addition, women have been disenfranchised for so long. Even though they know the law exists to protect them, their minds are clogged. This denies them protection accorded by the law. We must go out and talk to the women. We have to make them understand the current affairs, especially the changes in society. Such knowledge can make them determine what can be done to better their lives.

Question: Thank you very much for such an insightful conversation. Now I invite you to kindly give us your parting shot on the women’s empowerment movement.

Response: The Constitution has given us all the powers; we can’t run away from that. Our Constitution has outstanding provisions on women’s empowerment. We should not only be proud of it but equally take advantage of its reasonable provisions. The bottom line is that we need to sustain civic education for our women. We need to talk to them about the importance of participating meaningfully in elections. Women should not be swayed by attractive political party manifestos. They should scrutinise them to know whether their promises are deliverable. I am impressed that there is massive voter registration going on. But having a voter’s card is not enough. It must be put to good use to benefit the community. That is my desire and hope.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. We appreciate your contribution to women’s empowerment in the country.

Alice Yano: Thank you so much. I am also grateful.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Conversation with Hon. Salome Muigai



“We realised that if your issues are not covered by the policy and legal frameworks of the country, they are left to the mercy of politicians. We decided to ensure the inclusion of women’s issues in the Constitution during the review process. We organised as women immediately after the operation was launched”.

~ Salome Muigai

Biography

A teacher by profession, Salome is credited for ensuring issues of women and persons with disabilities are included in the Constitution of Kenya 2010. She also served as a commissioner with the CKRC and has been a consultant gender trainer and researcher with many years of experience.

Interviewed by Agnes Mugane

Hon. Salome: My life has been a struggle since I was born with an unequal genetic setup. I realised the unbalanced power relationship between women and men through my parents early in life. My parents did dairy and agricultural farming. My mother and workers did most of the work, yet my father controlled the money from farm produce. It was customary for my mother to work on the farm while my father owned the benefits. I went to a mixed primary school and was made a prefect in class Two. Most prefects from other classes were boys. In Standard Six, going to class Seven, the class master removed me from being a prefect, arguing that just because I was clever should not make me prefect. He replaced me with three boys. Leaders are born. I became the first head girl of the primary school, which shocked everyone.

Question: When did you realise that the norm is oppressive to women and should be challenged?

Response: It was never a norm to me. Other than being a girl, I also had a disability. I got polio when I was young. I suffered double jeopardy of being a girl and disabled. Things started to normalise when I went to secondary school. The principal was a lady, and the deputy was a man. I started my career as a teacher in a Boys' Approved Secondary School. People could not believe that as a young woman and disabled, I could competently manage the highest department in the school. Eventually, I became the Kabete Approved Secondary School Manager and the first female head of the school. I am happy that several boys who passed through my hands at the approved school changed for the better.

Question: Tell us about your involvement in the women's empowerment movement.

Response: When I first went to Kabete Approved School, I realised that the children admitted to the institution could be better persons. The majority of the children were from single parents. Only mothers visited their children. Even those with both parents, the fathers never came to the approved school. When you deal with the mother, you empower all her children, and sometimes even the husband. After a stint in teaching, I registered for a Masters programme in Social Policy and Planning. I focused on educational planning because I was a teacher and consultant in gender development.

Question: When did you start getting directly involved in gender equality?

Response: I started working in 1978, and in 1980 I moved to Kabete

Approved School in Nairobi. In 1985, I joined the team planning for the Nairobi UN meeting. My participation in the Education committee opened my eyes. The committee realised that the challenges we faced were much more severe than we had thought. I realised that if you are not in policymaking, a lot of your issues are left out. My breakthrough happened in Nairobi in 1985 during the global women's conference. I met the broader world of women and was amazed at how powerful women can be. Then, Kenneth Matiba referred to us as "we women" because the power was so much. He decided if you can't beat them, you better join them. So he would be talking about "we women". At the end of the conference, I was fully empowered.

The world loves football. If you are a good team, you can't be dealing with half the team. In this case, if you can, divide the group of 11 to 5 and 6. The women happen to be the 6. If you leave the 6 members of your team untrained, with less education, you'll never win with less training. So it's an important issue; it's a win-win issue when women are empowered. I started thinking it's suitable for the children, now I know it's good for the world. On graduating with my postgraduate degree, I specialised in gender analysis, undertaking a gender and development course from the London School of Economics. I became a professional gender trainer when we did not have many trainers in this field. I worked with organisations like FEMNET and OXFAM, which did an excellent job in those nascent years. I met Dr. Edda Gachukia, Hon. Phoebe Asiyo and Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, the veterans who had started the struggle for women's empowerment early.

The next milestone was when Kenya was struggling to review the independence constitution. We realised that if your issues are not covered by the policy and legal frameworks of the country, they are left to the mercy of politicians. We decided to ensure the inclusion of women's issues in the constitution during the review process. We organised as women immediately after the operation was launched. When Attorney General Amos Wako invited people to Bomas, we got a slot for one woman. Although I did not go to Bomas to meet the AG, I prepared the women who went to the meeting. Eventually, women got 10 slots. As the delegation of women negotiated for inclusion in the committee, I organised women to demonstrate outside the venue demanding for increased representation in the review process. I could not participate in the street

demonstrations due to my physical condition, but I designed the messaging strategy. I was nominated by women and Persons with Disabilities to attend the Safari Park meeting as a technical advisor.

Question: So that was your primary role. What were some of the strategies you and the other women applied to ensure your objectives were achieved?

Response: We formed the women's political caucus as our lobbying vehicle. Previously we operated on the principle that we were apolitical. This time we asserted that we were a political caucus for women's interests. We worked through a weekend when the Women's Political Caucus was threatened with removal from that constitution review process. We wrote letters to every Member of Parliament, commending their track record on creating democratic space. Eventually, we were brought back.

Question: How were you brought back?

Response: The matter went to the floor of the House for debate. The motion was to kick out or retain the Women's Political Caucus in the review process. We had lobbied enough MPs to vote to maintain the Caucus or abstain from voting against us. Eventually, the motion to kick out the women's political Caucus was lost. I am happy to recall these events because there is a lot of information on women that has not been documented.

Question: Do you remember the year? When was it?

Response: I have that information somewhere. I may not remember it off-head, but I can check it. Our participation in the Safari Park meetings ensured that women were included in the committees drafting the Constitution Review Act. We were represented by our brilliant legal minds like Justice Abida Ali Aroni, Hon. Martha Karua and Dr. Nancy Baraza, who were lawyers. The Constitution Review Commission Act created the commission that was mandated to review the Constitution. The Act ensured gender inclusion by providing that women had to take not less than one-third of the slots. Women conducted interviews and selected five commissioners. They were Hon. Phoebe Asiyo, Prof. Kabira, Dr. Baraza, Justice Ali Aroni, and myself.

Then, I think somebody decided that 'these women were too fast for us,' and decided they didn't want anything to do with us. They used Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO) to sue us in court. They alleged that the five women commissioners were not

women leaders but busybodies. Then Maendeleo Ya Wanawake had an alternative list of eight commissioners, one from each region. Surprisingly enough, my name was also in it. We went through a court process and the court decided in our favour. I played multiple roles in the process: At one point, I was a technical advisor, the other time, a commissioner, the additional time, I was planning how to lobby MP's. And the other time, I was a defendant in court.

Question: Okay, in this struggle for women's empowerment, what would you say have been some of the key achievements?

Response: We have a lot of things to celebrate. Whenever the MPs discussed women's issues, they said they did not need women's input because they lived with women in their houses as their wives. And people would laugh; we would be laughed out of the Parliament. Now, if you talk about women's issues in Parliament, nobody laughs, and when they laugh, they laugh under the chair. It has become a serious issue. Recently when there was a dispute on meeting the two-thirds gender rule, the AG petitioned the Supreme Court for an Advisory Opinion. Women's issues have moved from a laughing matter to the highest court. Look at every program in this country. Whether it is the development plans, the manifestos of political parties, or banks' work plans, you will find they address gender issues. Gender issues have been mainstreamed. They are no longer a side issue. I can say that we are not where we'd like to be, but this train has left the station, and it has moved. It's not just leaving the station; it is picking the speed.

Question: Yeah, I'm asking this because you mentioned the political parties, manifestos and Affirmative Action. Share with us your experience in mainstreaming gender in political parties.

Response: I did not actually participate in mainstreaming gender in the political parties. I ensured that gender is mainstreamed in the Constitution to create space for women in all spheres of life, including political parties. We have a good Constitution. The major challenge we remain with is a faithful implementation of its provisions.

Question: What have been some of the challenges?

Response: The challenges have been many. Culturally, a man who articulates issues and pushes the right things is seen as a leader. At the same time, a woman with similar attributes is called many names. She is branded bitter because she is single, divorced, a widow, or probably killed her husband. If a woman is rich, everybody asks where she

got her money from Which man gave her the money? Yet, money is earned through work, which both men and women can do. When a woman wants to be a leader, people ask, “*atawachia nani watoto wake?*” (Who will look after her children?). But they never ask men such questions. If a woman wants to be a leader, she’s asked whose wife she is. Nobody asks whose husband the men are.

Majority of people talk about gender issues without mentioning their families. Yet that’s where it starts. If I’m not changing it from my own home, it doesn’t matter what I do at the public level. It has to be at home. It has to be in the community. It has to be in the church, it has to be at the political arena, it has to be at the economic arena. Increasingly, companies and other corporates have a gender policy. Some even allow a mother to bring the baby with her to the workplace. Despite these commendable developments, the challenges still abound.

Question: You have said that many gains have been recorded, but the challenges remain. Why is this the case?

Response: Yes, we have made progress. We started the struggle for women’s empowerment by training people in technical skills. We have many young women who are well-versed and well-educated, but we are not teaching them. We have to continue doing gender training to enhance gender analysis skills in young women and men. I love the young women we have now. They are very passionate with cheerful disposition and character. We have to equip them with the skills and knowledge to change the prevailing attitude working against us. A lot of young women do not have that.

We have to adopt the family set up in the women’s empowerment continuum. The ones we say are blessed; there’s a grandmother, probably a great grandmother and great grandfather, a grandfather, a mother, and the children. So even in the women’s movement, we need to build on these groups and make sure that we are not reinventing the wheel. Another good example is the way the Asian community lives in this country. The father builds on what he found his father doing, and the son comes and builds on it. So they make more significant economic progress than we do because my father bought a plot that was 1/8. I work for another 40yrs to buy my 1/8. If I had worked on what he had, I would move faster. That is the same thing with the women’s movement. We need to build on what was there and realise that there’s enough work for all of us. We are a family, and the role of the grandmother, the great grandmother, the mother, the aunty, the grandchild is what we need to build. It becomes a pyramid.

The generations help us learn, use the lessons learnt, and be able to recommend new issues. We must bring the youth, women and persons with disabilities together. Young women and men have the energy the women's empowerment needs, while women have invaluable experience and passion.

The other thing we need to do is hold people accountable. For example, suppose a political party's manifesto said this is what they would do for women. In that case, we should hold them accountable before the next election. I have listened to many debates. I haven't heard the discussion about women and what they said they were going to do. In 2022, the next General Election, gender issues should be a big election issue. And women can do this. We have the numbers, we have the votes, and we are the ones that give birth on the election queues waiting to vote. They should be accountable to us.

Women came together and strategised successfully to be included in the constitution review process to have a gender-responsive fundamental law. You still want some more. We refused to be discouraged. We sought solidarity with the church leaders like Rev. David Gitari and Cardinal Otunga. We started creating a parallel constitution review process because the KANU government's Commission was not keen on genuinely inviting women into the constitution-making process. This explained how the Ufungamano commission was created. We called it the People's Commission under Dr. Ooki Ombaka and Prof. Kabira.

Question: Tell us something about the Ufungamano forum. Did it have two groups?

Response: There were no two Ufungamano groups. KANU used Zipporah Kittony of Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation to sue the five women commissioners nominated to represent women at the merged Constitution Review of Kenya. Lawyer Steve Mwenesi represented MYWO in the petition. Rival Ufungamano groups did not go to court. KANU tried to get rid of the five women commissioners because they wanted a Kalenjin among the five.. It was during Moi's time. Among them I was representing the Rift Valley because I come from Eldoret. Moi would not have a woman, a Kikuyu, a disabled woman, representing the greater Rift Valley. He thought he was being treated with *matharau* (contempt).

Whereas women and religious groups were ready to work together under Ufungamano, it was almost impossible to bring the political parties on board due to their adverse interests. Women worked behind the scenes through religious leaders. Political

parties joined the Ufungamano initiative because they were hosted by religious leaders and not women. Little did they know that we had lobbied effectively and the religious leaders were championing the women's agenda. The Ufungamano initiative ensured that gender issues were brought up. *Mtoto akinawa wacha akule na wazee. Tulikuwa tumesha nawa* (If a child washes his/her hands, she/he is free to dine with the elderly. We had already washed our hands).

Question: Thank you very much, Mheshimiwa. I have learnt a lot about the history of women's empowerment. You know, actually, sometimes her story remains with the people?

Response: Her story? Yes, her story remains with the people and the women, so it has not been brought together.

Question: And when brought together, we can have the complete, her story.

Response: This story should be called 'her story'. You are not writing a history book. His story has been written for a long time. We have to be bold enough and write her story now. You know you need the madness to cause change. For too long, women have been too sane to their detriment. They need a bit of madness to bring the change. If you remain friendly to a system that oppresses you, it's like being nice to someone stepping on your toe. For example, one day, I was going to do gender training at Silver Springs Hotel. I had talked to them about access for PWDs for many years. I had just come from the salon, looking presentable, my makeup well done. I also had my best dress on, only to be stranded at the entrance because I could not climb the stairs. I reminded the security officer that I had spoken about the lack of access for so long. He offered to carry me into the hotel: *wacha nije nikushike, nikusaidie* (let me come over and help you). I declined the offer firmly and demanded that the manager come and address me. My employer, the one I was training for, reprimanded me for creating a scene at the hotel. I insisted on being handled by the senior-most person in the hotel on why it was impossible to develop access to PWDs. Eventually, they brought the Finance Officer. He was an elderly Kikuyu man. I stopped speaking English and addressed him in Gikuyu. "Imagine I was your daughter, you have educated me, I have driven myself to conduct a serious training, I have come in a Jeep, Grand Cherokee. Then you make my situation miserable by allowing a watchman to handle me into the hotel. Would you do it to your daughter?"

The *Mzee* said, “*Mama*, I’ve heard you. I think, *tumekukosea* (we are wrong), you were right. If it was my daughter I won’t have her hand held by the watchmen to come into the hotel. We’ll do it.” Eventually, I lost the contract because I had created a scene. But do you know the same person who had given me the contract called me one day and said Salome, come, Silver Springs has got a ramp.

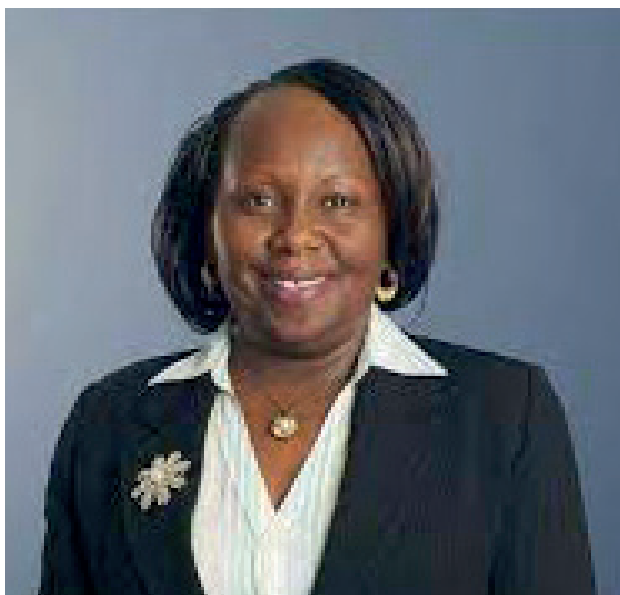
Question: Please share with us your parting shot.

Response: Hah! I’m very excited about the situation that we are in now, especially since we seem to be making four steps ahead and somebody tries to take us backwards. We should not allow ourselves to go backwards. Let us stop wherever we are and say backwards never. Let’s mark time but never go back. The two-thirds gender rule must be implemented. That’s the Constitution, and we are not going to sit back and have them change it.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time, thoughts and unreserved comments. This will enrich the information that we need. It is a project that we want to record the feelings of the women who have been in the struggle, and you have shared your feelings. We thank you so much. Thank you very much Mheshimiwa.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A Conversation with Prof. Patricia Kameri-Mbote



“What I remember is that we came together and agreed that if a woman is supporting proper women-friendly position and they call out for help, you, as a woman, must actually go and support them.”

~ Prof. Kameri-Mbote

Biography

Ranking among Kenya’s most dedicated legal minds in property and environmental law, Prof. Kameri-Mbote, demonstrates how women scholars can support women empowerment efforts through research and strategic thinking. She was instrumental in giving strategic guidance to women consortia during the constitution review process. Her ability to simplify otherwise complicated legal doctrines assisted women delegates to conduct focused lobbying and advocacy using practical examples of injustices against women in society. Prof. Kameri-Mbote explains that with research backed up by unity, passion, and commitment, women of Kenya can achieve gender equality and women empowerment.

Interviewed by Wambui Kanyi

Question: Prof, welcome to the interview. You can start by telling us about yourself as a scholar.

Response: My name is Patricia Kameri-Mbote. I currently serve as a Professor of Law at the School of Law, University of Nairobi. I am also a wife and mother of two grown-up children. I was born in Mugoiri, in Murang'a County. I began my early education in Murang'a but moved to Kirinyaga, specifically Kerugoya, for upper Primary School. I then moved to Loreto Limuru in Kiambu District. I was in Loreto Limuru for six years, from 1977 to 1982, after which I went to the National Youth Service after my A-Levels. We were among the first pre-university recruits who had to serve in the National Youth Service before joining the university. I joined the Faculty of Law at the University of Nairobi in 1984. I graduated in 1987, after which I enrolled for the Advocates Training Programme (ATP) at the Kenya School of Law (KSL). I was admitted to the roll as an advocate of the High Court on completing my training. Shortly after leaving KSL, I went to the University of Warwick for my Masters of Laws which I completed and returned to the country. I started teaching at the University of Nairobi in January 1990, before joining Stanford University for my PhD in Laws. Before starting my PhD, I had studied Women's Law at the University of Zimbabwe between 1994-1995. I joined Stanford in late 1995 and graduated in 1999 with a specialisation in Property and Environmental Law.

Question: Prof, you have such a sterling academic resume. Please share with us your role in the constitution-making process in Kenya.

Response: It is challenging to say when one became involved in the constitution review process. As soon as I started teaching law, I realised that the laws I had been taught and I was now teaching were very much against women. Actually, I realised the gendered nature of our laws when I became employed and had to deal with whether I was entitled to a house allowance and whether I was entitled to annual leave after I had maternity leave. In such a situation, you naturally begin to question the laws. In examining the laws, I realised that the constitution was ambivalent on the whole question of gender discrimination. The constitution allowed discrimination on personal law matters: marriage, succession, and devolution of property upon death. I began writing about the gendered nature of the law very early because there were not many women teaching law. We were only two or three of us.

Questioning of law invariably leads you to questioning the Constitution. When discussions about constitution review came, we were really ready to get into it and support it with all we had. When the commission was formed, I was involved in helping commissioners through research. I also deployed my expertise to assist in reviewing the drafts as they were generated. Further, I was also engaged in reconciling different groups of women when there were threats to divide the women's movement. I remember vividly at Bomas when the whole question of women under Muslims almost split the women's movement. I actually went (together with other people) and talked to the women to make them see that we had come so far. Before that, there were many arguments about whether gender issues should be protected in the constitution. That was like an examination for me because, with Prof. Maria Nzomo and Prof. Jackline Oduol, we were called by the commissioners to make a case for gender in the constitution. At the commission, we were really confronted with a very hostile group. But thankfully, there were people like the late Prof. Okoth Ogendo, who decided that there was a need for a conference at Safari Park to just make a case for women in the constitution. I was tasked to make a case for including women in the constitution from a legal point of view, Prof. Nzomo from the political point of view and Prof. Oduol from the social and cultural point of view. We were called upon to explain why gender should be in the constitution. Honestly, we were called upon to justify why women should be in the constitution. When you say gender, it masks the differences between Men and Women. When you say women, it is essential to be alive that there had been no women when the independence constitution was made. We were renegotiating our social contract. This time around, women secured space at the constitution-making table through our women commissioners.

Question: You have mentioned some of the women you were involved with. Kindly elaborate on your engagement with women's organisations in the constitution review process.

Response: The organisation that really raised my consciousness beyond law was the African Women on Research and Development (AAWARD). When I joined the UON, I found a very vibrant group of women researchers, included Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, Prof. Maria Nzomo and Prof. Shanyisa Khasiani. These scholars met regularly to discuss how to keep this group together. I accidentally got involved when I was asked to do a constitution for AAWARD. We spent long periods just debating the architecture of that constitution. I believe it is in those engagements that the sisterhood with older women

was forged, enabling me to have friends among older women in the struggle. I was soon enlisted into the battle. AAWARD published quite a lot of research output on women. Examples include a book edited by Shanyisa Hasiani on the women's movement in Kenya. I co-authored a paper in that book with Wambui Kiai, now Professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. There was another book on African women as environmental managers edited by Shanyisa Khasiani. Again, I had an article in it.

Apart from AAWARD, I also worked with the National Council of Women of Kenya, which was housed near the university, just behind the Central Police Station. Of course, when you walked into that compound with Prof. Wangari Maathai and people like Mwatha, the office was littered with seedlings all over the floor. But there was actually a powerful woman-focused political narrative beyond those tree seedlings. In 1992 I remembered vividly at KICC, the rallying call of women was, "Why can't we have Wangari Maathai as our presidential candidate?" NCWK, AAWARD, and FIDA amplified the call to have a woman, as a presidential candidate. I had joined FIDA as a law student. It was also providential that I was a first-year law student going to the second year when the Nairobi Women's Conference was held on this campus. And you know there is something about being exposed to things, so you begin to hear these are the things women are talking about. When FIDA was formed, leaders like Lillian Mwaura in her office in AGIP House, Haile Selassie Avenue, called us and sensitised us on what we needed to do as women. These are some of the women organisations I engaged with on law and women empowerment.

Question: When you look back at the strategies that women used, which do you think worked best to enable women to realise their gains in the Constitution of Kenya 2010?

Response: I will say something which may be controversial. When people set out to strategise too much, they risk losing the passion for completing the task. Because for me, the passion that women had beats any strategy. That passion brought together women who were concerned that many Kenyan women should improve. They saw the law as one of the areas that needed change. But of course, the law impacts other spheres like political, social and economic spheres. So, I'm not even sure we were sitting and strategising. What I remember is that we came together and agreed that if a woman is supporting a proper women-friendly position and they call out for help, you, as a woman, must actually go and support them. In the constitution-making process, it was reassuring to have women at the table who were confident that if they needed

any back-up at any time, there were women outside ready to avail it. We did not care who was credited with coming up with a position as long as the women position found its place at the table when the Draft was concluded.

Interviewer: That is really inspiring. In your view, what were some of the challenges that women encountered during the constitution-making process?

Response: One of the challenges was for women to be considered human beings with equal rights. People now take it for granted that having women at the table is normal. That was not always the case. There was the vexing question about, "What value does having women bring?" The main challenge, therefore, was just not valuing women's contribution to the constitution-making process. The other intriguing problem was the infiltration of women groups by people who wanted to divide the movement. Such moles created schisms between women by exploiting party lines, ideology, tribe and even religion. This was exemplified in statements like, "You as women of a particular religion, why are you supporting this position when it is not really supported by our religion?" The fact that women find themselves belonging to different republics and because women are not the heads of those republics, at least not formally, they could actually be called and rallied by men who felt that they had deviated from the expected position of what their republic had.

Question: Please elaborate on this threat posed by infiltrators within the women's movement?

Response: An excellent example of infiltration was evidenced in an umbrella women's organisation becoming part of a political party that was very patriarchal. How could an organisation establish to propagate and push women's position accept to be co-opted by a conservative political party in power? The story of Maendeleo ya Wanawake is not a secret. When Maendeleo became a wing of the ruling party KANU, then the question was, how could they go against the ruling party, which was the only party at that point anyway? So, in terms of survival for that group, they needed to be within the mainstream. Being in the mainstream meant that the women's agenda had been relegated to the back banner.

Question: Based on your assessment, how does the new constitution give impetus to women's economic empowerment in Kenya?

Response: When we looked at the draft constitution, you remember the first Draft, the Wako draft; there were things in it like the Christian courts, which we had never heard about. We feared they could turn out to be like our traditional courts. We were so scared, as women, that sometimes a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush. In fact, with Dr. Nkatha Kabira, we have a paper on separating the baby from the birth-water. Our article was actually informed by the discussions that took place 2005. The Draft was subjected to the 2005 referendum and was tossed out.

I was privileged to be appointed to the committee of eminent persons by President Kibaki to advise the government on the way forward with the constitution review process. When I look back now, our proposals were taken because we had given a raft of recommendations such as a multi-sectoral forum. A committee of experts was one of the approaches we mooted. That committee of experts is what was ultimately tasked to complete the process. I followed the Draft because, again, I am a person who looks at the constitution, not just giving people rights. I am susceptible to providing people with empty rights if such rights are not backed up by other support structures. I am particularly interested in land rights. I remember vividly a group of parliamentarians going to Naivasha and mutilating the Draft generated by the committee of experts and removing the National Land Commission that I was working towards through the National Lands Policy.

When the Draft eventually came for a referendum in 2010, it was not 100% perfect. Still, we got a lot from the women's perspective; we felt like you know how you take a child to a store with many sweets. They don't know what to choose because everything, absolutely everything that women had asked for, they got. One significant gain was doing away with discrimination based on gender. The constitution was unequivocal on the equality of men and women, not just by word, but equally in economic, political and social realms. In my view, that enabled women, even where there would be masked or structural systemic discrimination, to actually say, you are going against the bill of rights because that is in article 27 of the Bill of Rights. Then it did not stop there because you know there are women who, over the years, had really got the short end of the stick. Women who, after marriages, broke up were actually left with nothing. In chapter 5, on land, there is obvious protection of women's rights to property and the matrimonial home. And then there were the other women who were disinherited when their spouses died. We have done lots of research and documented heartbreaking stories of women who were disinherited of even household items after the man

died. The relatives of the dead spouse would cart away the beds, the chairs and even beddings. This happened when the constitution was very clear on protecting the rights of widows and even their children. If a woman cannot even have a home, how can you talk about economic empowerment? But beyond that is the protection of social-economic rights which includes the right to food, water, education and health.

When you look at economic empowerment, you have to scrutinise the enabling mechanisms because just saying you have the right to a livelihood does not in itself mean much. You must look at the situation of the woman you are concerned about and examine what it is that she actually needs as a livelihood. For instance, economic empowerment and livelihood for a woman in Kibra, an informal settlement in the city, will not be like the woman in rural Nyakach in Nyanza. This is because the woman in Nyakach probably already has land that she is still on. Granted, she may not have full power to determine what happens on the land; she is on some territory. The woman in Kibra wakes up every morning to decide what she must do to have a meal on the table on that day. But both of these women are linked by the right to dignity. It is important to remember that whatever you do and however you treat women, assuring them of grace is pertinent to the quest for economic empowerment.

Question: When you look back at women mobilisations and negotiations for the Constitution, what are some of the lessons that we can learn and how can we use some of the lessons to promote policies on women's economic empowerment in Kenya?

Response: I think one of the major lessons is solidarity. Even as we are saying that the situations of women may not be the same, enablers are by and large going to be the same. The enablers in the rural areas include ensuring access to fertilisers and secure access to land. In contrast, in urban areas, it is the right to housing. I think it is gratifying to see how the courts have been treating the right to accommodation. Suppose you are in an informal settlement and in danger of being evicted anytime. In that case, even the quest for economic empowerment is a mirage. Today, it is a lot easier because there are many spaces where policies are being made, primarily through stakeholder engagement or public participation, which didn't happen in the past. The point remains that the women's movement is more robust and productive through solidarity, sisterhood and leveraging on networks.

Question: Prof, I have asked you a lot of questions. I am impressed with your responses. I now invite you to comment on any issues we may not have covered on the relationship between the academy and women empowerment in Kenya.

Response: Thank you. I think we have not addressed the centrality of research in championing the cause of women in policy formulation and implementation. When we talk about research at the University of Nairobi, we think about ivory tower research, but that is not what I'm talking about. I mean talking to the Women. As we define what empowerment means, we know what enablers we are talking about. And I think many people keep saying if you want to know about women, ask the women. In the constitutionmaking, asking women enabled those who framed the constitution to capture women's aspirations. So let us not tire of going and asking women because it doesn't matter how many economic empowerment programs or Affirmative Action programs we have. They are not going to meet the needs of the target communities if they are not involved in designing the interventions. So let us ask the women what the interventions should be. Let us not generalise and homogenise women. Metaphorically speaking, women are present in different shapes and sizes, not physical. Still, their experiences matter and those are very critical in defining empowerment interventions.

Question: When you reflect on the continuum of the constitution-making process, in which phase were women most influential?

Response: Women were everywhere in the constitution-making process. Think about putting leaven in the dough when you are cooking, you put it in there, and it affects each part so that it all rises. Women, like the leaven, were influential in every space of constitution-making. Networking, getting different women to talk to each other, overcoming barriers of education, religion, region and political parties made women more influential throughout the journey. Naming women's problems as women named them, and realising that each woman's problem needed to be dealt with equal vigour ensured we remained vigilant throughout.

Question: What is your parting shot Mwalimu?

Response: As I said, when the Constitution of Kenya 2010 was promulgated, women thought we had it all. It was like we had arrived in Jerusalem. Many of us may be discouraged when we see what is happening or not happening around us. Despite the false steps and setbacks, we must remain committed, focused and hopeful. I really like Margaret Ogola, the celebrated author of *The River and the Source*. I have adopted Ogola's vision from Prof. Kabira's book, *A time for Harvest* where she observes that the women's movement is like that legendary river in Ogola's novel: "Sometimes you see it at its strongest really pounding, sometimes it goes under the rocks, and you don't

see it, though it is moving, then it again appears somewhere downstream.” Seen or unseen, the river of women’s movement flows to the ocean. Even though some things may not be working for women as expected, I still have faith that the river will come out from under the rocks where it is flowing. It will still pound and unstopably roar to its destination.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Prof. We appreciate your time and insights, which are very informative regarding gender equality and women empowerment in Kenya.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A Conversation with Ms. Maimuna Mwidau



“Our creed as women was that even if you’re in or out of government, rich or poor, Wanjiku or Maimuna, your problems are the same. I think that is the reason why we stuck together. When men noticed that we were united, many started taking our issues seriously and supporting us.”

~ Ms. Maimuna Mwidau

Biography

One of the illustrious Kenyan women who played critical roles in the constitution-making process. Born in Mombasa, Maimuna studied in Mombasa city before proceeding to Toronto, Canada, for further studies. She first joined the constitution review process as an administrator and then as a stakeholder representing Muslim women through an NGO. Maimuna’s insights reveal behind the scenes strategic maneuvers that women employed to ensure the new constitution accommodate women’s aspirations. The luminary celebrates women’s unity of purpose during the constitution review process as the most potent weapon that women should never ignore in the quest for total gender equality and empowerment.

Interviewed by Dr. Dorothy Njiraini

Question: Thank you, Ms. Maimuna, for hosting me to discuss your experiences in the struggle for gender equality and women empowerment in the constitution-making process. You are one of our women leaders who has significantly contributed to the gains women enjoy. We can start by knowing something about your childhood experiences and education.

Response: Thank you for visiting me. My name is Maimuna Mwidau from Kisauni in Mombasa County. I was born in Mombasa and studied in the island town from primary school up to the A-Levels. You can safely call me a native of Mombasa Island. After high school, I joined the University of Toronto in Canada for the Bachelor of Political Science. I returned to the country in 1996 and found the government had embraced multiparty democracy. When we were under one-party rule, I left the country with Kenya African National Union (KANU) as the only party. I returned to a country in transition. The repeal of Section 2(A) of the Constitution reintroduced multiparty democracy in our political landscape. This significant development created space for a more democratic engagement in the country's governance and its various institutions.

Question: You are mentioned as one of the women who did so much work behind the scenes in the constitution-making process. Please tell us about your role in the process.

Response: I participated in the constitution-making process in two capacities, initially as an administrator at the secretariat and later as a stakeholder representing an NGO. When the Constitution of Kenya review process commenced, I was employed by the commission as a national coordinator in the Department of Outreach and Mobilisation. Our main activity was to coordinate all the field activities by recruiting and organising district coordinators on the ground. We also facilitated engagements with stakeholders at the grassroots and national levels. As a support arm of the commission, we put in all the structures for effective consultations with the public. In such gatherings, we documented the views given by different people for further analysis by the Commission. As you may be aware, the first phase of the constitution review process did not come to fruition. The process stalled after the draft document was rejected at the referendum. When the constitution review process commenced again, I joined it as a stakeholder through the League of Muslim Women. I am a founder-member of the NGO. We registered this organisation because Muslim Women did not

have a platform to mobilise and engage with issues that affected them, especially in the Constitution.

Question: How do you assess the participation of women leaders in the constitution review process?

Response: During the constitution review process, I worked very closely with Prof. Kabira, the chair of the mobilisation committee. I also benefitted a lot from the experience and focus of Mama Phoebe Asiyo. At that time, Phoebe led the Kenya Women political Caucus while Prof. Kabira was in charge of the Kenya Women Political Alliance. Though the two ladies led seemingly competitive caucuses, they worked harmoniously to secure the women's agenda in the constitution-making process. Other women leaders I worked with at the commission included commissioners Alice Yano and Salome Muigai.

Question: Based on your experience, examine the contribution of men, if any, in ensuring a women-friendly constitution was realised.

Response: Honestly, many men supported the women's agenda at the commission and other review organs. I can single out Prof. Githu Muigai, Justice Isaac Lenaola, Keriako Tobiko, Ibrahim Lethome, and Ahmed Isaac, the former chair of Independent, Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). Others were Prof. Abdirizac Nuno, Dr Mohammed Swazuri and Ambassador Ahmed Idha Salim. Most of these men were commissioners who worked specifically in the coastal region to understand women's issues locally.

Question: Thank you very much, Maimuna. When you reflect on the journey of the constitution-making process, in which stages were women most influential?

Response: To the best of my recollection, women engaged actively in the process from the beginning to the end. Initially, women were influential in the mobilisation and forming structures to create a platform where women could meet at the community level. Consequently, committees comprising at least a woman, a person with a disability, religious leader, youth and other marginalised (persons) were formed in all constituencies. The Constituency Consultative Committee was the first platform of engagement. This committee was used to mobilise women to identify, discuss and agree on issues important to them. The forum was very successful because that is where civic education was conducted and relevant materials distributed.

After the constituency consultative committees, the next organ was the Constituent Assembly at the Bomas. This was the highest level of engagement. Delegates were selected to represent each District in the country. At Bomas, we had different caucuses. We had a specific tent dedicated to women from all country regions to discuss gender issues and lobby. Other prominent groups at Bomas were the professionals, legal experts and district delegates. The majority was the district delegates. Professionals understood the law and sensitised women on women-friendly constitutional provisions and voted strategically on the issues. Women effectively lobbied male representatives, especially the District Delegates, to support womenfriendly proposals. As women delegates, we met in a particular hotel every weekend to sharpen our lobbying strategies since we lived in different hotels. For instance, if the Coast women had met and agreed on a specific issue, they would meet the Nyanza or Central Kenya groups. That is how we operated.

The different political parties also engaged their supporters on specific issues. The beauty about the women's strategy was that it brought all women together, irrespective of their religion, region, party affiliations or ethnicity. We all came together and understood that the women's agenda is the same wherever you are. Our creed as women was that even if you're in or out of government, rich or poor, Wanjiku or Maimuna, your problems are the same. I think that is the reason why we stuck together. When men noticed that we were united, many started taking our issues seriously and supporting us.

Question: What do you think accounted for women's unity of purpose?

Response: The old constitution did not favour women. Women treated the constitution review process as a lifetime opportunity to address discrimination and marginalisation they had endured for decades. Women valued the womenfriendly provisions in the draft constitution because they secured rights for women. Even though not all the proposals were adopted, there was hope that there was room for expanding those rights. For example, before those provisions, there were no specific seats for women in terms of leadership. The Bill of Rights was not there. Many of the rights women enjoy were not there: Girls' rights, women's, and children's rights were not clearly spelt out. Provisions for economic empowerment were also missing. The immediate gains enumerated above and the hope for better times ahead enhanced unity among women.

Question: What did women do to secure the gains for women in the constitution?

Response: There were many strategies women employed. What stands out is that women came together; the caucus, the alliance and the various groupings came together and formed a working committee on women's issues. The committee planned multiple activities that crystallised women's issues and gave them relevance, prominence and urgency in consensus building. Women had productive meetings with stakeholders, such as religious groups, SUPKEM, and specific members of Parliament. Each group of women was assigned to approach their local members of Parliament for support. Everybody did that in their own region. The message was one; support women's provisions specifically, and the Katiba in general. The other strategy was meeting with the parliamentary committee on the Constitution. A lot of civil society groups were organised to go and meet with the chair of the committee. The current Deputy President, His Excellency William Ruto, was the chair. He was very supportive of women's proposals. He was deputised by Hon. Ababu Namwamba. Hon. Martha Karua was also in that committee. That is the kind of support we provided. We also worked closely with the Kenya Women Parliamentarians (KEWOPA). As you can see, we used different strategies for different groups depending on our messages and strategic objectives.

Question: How did women religious leaders contribute to the process?

Response: We worked closely with women religious leaders through their respective religious groups. It is fair to admit that some women leaders in religious groups were conservative. They did not accept women-friendly proposals easily and had to be coerced to support the recommendations. It was easier dealing with male religious leaders because they were consistently helpful to the women's agenda.

Question: What was your participation in the process at a personal level?

Response: I was a lobbyist for women-friendly proposals. I participated in local radio talk shows in Mombasa. We discussed issues in Kiswahili to engage community members on women and constitution-making debate over the airwaves. I personally had meetings with various members of Parliament from our region because I was very familiar with them. It may please you to know that at that time, I was also engaged in party politics as a member of KANU. I used my position to lobby the party leadership to support women's gains in the basic law.

Question: How did the women in the grassroots participate in the process?

Response: I visited Kisii to engage with the grassroots, and I was surprised to learn that, according to the culture there, women are not supposed to speak in front of men. Even the sitting arrangement was such that you don't keep men and women together. They behaved more or less like Muslims. Muslims had a similar problem. You would not mix the two. So, we created forums to give women opportunities to speak separately, share their views, and coordinate amongst themselves.

Under challenging circumstances, we used local coordinators to facilitate local meetings and capture women's voices quietly through their own forums without raising suspicion. However, in other places like Lamu, we were lucky that the women had access to the meetings. Their Members of Parliament helped coordinate the local *barazas*. The women of Lamu came fully covered in their *bui bui*. Still, they were able to articulate their views clearly and passionately. They also mobilised one another when it came to the referendum. I was also involved in the great national consultative forum for women in Nairobi, where we brought about a thousand women to the city. We sensitised these women representatives and sent them back to their constituencies to support the referendum because it secured women empowerment. That is why women came out in large numbers to support the constitution.

Question: What role did women politicians play in the process?

Response: Women politicians, especially in Parliament, were not many. I remember Hon. Zipporah Kittony was very active in mobilising women through Maendeleo Ya Wanawake, where she had much influence. There was also Hon. Amina Abdalla, who was a nominated Member of Parliament. Quite a number of these senior women are no longer in active politics.

Question: What strategies worked for the realisation of the gains for women during the constitutional-making process?

Response: I think what worked most was the seamless coordination between women mobilising for support and those in the drafting committee. In the drafting process, key women from the legal fraternity were Justice Njoki Ndung'u and Hon. Martha Karua. They ensured that the drafting did not leave critical issues out. This is because some of the male leaders were against some of the specific provisions. Such

men preferred ambiguous language with many gaps for interpretation, while women preferred explicit provisions.

Question: What challenges did women face during the Constitution making?

Response: I think the challenges were many. The fact that women came out to speak about their rights and wanted to be included in the constitution was a significant change in our society. Some believed that women should not have all the proposed gains. This led to high-level engagement involving very prominent and influential people, which was very difficult. We overcame this challenge because we had the power of large numbers that could not be ignored by anybody, especially politicians. When it came to voting, many people feared women would be stopped from voting for the new constitution because it was a common occurrence at the grassroots. Women surprised naysayers during the referendum. They turned up in large numbers and ensured the document was accepted by the majority. It was now possible for women to rally in the streets demanding their rights. In some rallies, the police beat us up. I remember very well; Ann Njogu was beaten in the streets and put in a police vehicle. The grand march by women targeted Parliament. We were stopped in our tracks at the gates of Parliament. We were denied entry to submit our petition to the speaker. The demonstration was not in vain because Hon. Karua came out, received the petition on behalf of the women and presented it to Parliament. Previously it had not been imaginable for women of all ages to demonstrate openly on the streets chanting *haki yetu* (our rights). It was now possible. The time for women to actively speak for themselves had come.

Question: How did you overcome these challenges?

Response: We overcame these challenges by making sure we mobilised well. I think mobilising as many people to support an agenda and sticking together is the most important thing.

Question: What are the most essential women gains in the constitution?

Response: As a student of political science, I look at the space that has been created for women to take leadership as the most significant gain. If that specific provision had not been provided for, there would not have been a mechanism to get women into leadership. Maybe the numbers would have been there, the percentage would

have been there, but if how it is going to be done is not part of the provision, that would have been difficult to achieve. Devolution is another major plus for women. It has enabled women at the grassroots to engage in leadership, participate in choosing their leaders, and specifically have the government closer to them. The need to bring the government closer to women and men came out very clearly during the hearings. The idea was to take services closer to the people. The Bill of Rights is another gain. We can now enjoy those rights; it is indeed liberating. We were freed from a tightly male-dominated society into one that is open with many possibilities. That is the beauty of our Constitution. The right to economic empowerment and the right for a mother to confer citizenship to her child. The new constitution truly opened the door for women of this generation and future generations.

Question: What are the economic gains for women in the document?

Response: The new Constitution supports women economic empowerment by increasing women's access to funds for business. These funds have been devolved to the constituency level. They include the Women Representatives' Fund, the Women Enterprise Fund, and the Youth Fund. These are all new opportunities that women can take advantage of.

Question: What lessons can we learn from the women mobilisation in the constitution-making process?

Response: I learnt that when people are organised together with an agenda, they can change anything. When women mobilise around a plan, change is inevitable, like in the constitution-making process. Women can influence policies significantly if they stick together, identify issues dear to them, mobilise and effectively lobby responsible organs for endorsement.

Question: How can the lessons learned be applied to promote womenfriendly policy change?

Response: I think it is vital for women to continue to mobilise amongst themselves, especially now that we have women representatives and other leaders who support the women agenda. Through those channels, women can mobilise and petition either their Members of County Assemblies, Womann Reps, their legislators, senators and governors to influence policy towards women economic empowerment.

Question: As we come to a close, are there some issues you may want to share with us?

Response: I think that the one big lesson that I learnt and that worked for the country is purely identifying an agenda for the women and rallying the whole country around it, irrespective of other divides. I created awareness of the women's plan in the Constitution from the grassroots to the national level. That was the most full experience as far as I'm concerned. It is my considered view that after we achieved those gains, we could not sustain the momentum. Our biggest challenge is to ensure continuity. Unfortunately, the networks that rallied us for the struggle disintegrated once the constitution was promulgated. It is incumbent on women leaders, especially those in legislative assemblies at the national and county level, to step up the legislative processes to ensure that the broad gains for women are secured by enabling statutes for effective implementation.

Generally, in politics, you are as powerful as the people who are outside. There is a need to raise that awareness again, precisely because it has been two decades, and the generation has changed. The younger ones who were ten years (old) are now twenty or thirty-year-olds. They did not experience what we went through. There is a need to hand over the baton and create that momentum and let it grow. If we disengage, relax and lose the steam totally, the new generation will start all over again. We may never have another constitutional review process, maybe for another 50 years. That is why I firmly believe that we must regroup, re-energise the movement, give it life and purpose and then hand it over to the new generation as a healthy baby.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Maimuna. We appreciate your time very much.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A Conversation With Ambassador Rukia Subow



“We used the numbers and sometimes when we disagreed, we would use consensus. When consensus failed, voting was used as a last resort”. ~ Rukia Subow

Biography

Hails from the North-Eastern region of Kenya. An expert in security studies, Rukia has done a lot of work in women empowerment through peace efforts and Constitution-making. Following her mother’s footsteps, Rukia joined Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation as a girl and rose through the ranks to be voted vice-chair and subsequently chair of the largest women’s organisation in the region. Rukia was critical in ensuring the concerns of marginalised women are captured in the new Constitution. She has also served as Kenya’s Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Interviewed by Beatrice Kamau

Question: Hi Ambassador Rukia. Thank you for granting us this interview. Kindly start by telling us about yourself, your childhood and your education.

Response: Thank you for coming to my house. We have known each other for a long time. You're welcome again with your colleagues. I am Ambassador Rukia Subow. My husband is Subow. My father is Ali Oloo. Do not be surprised because we also have the name Oloo in our community. I was born in Wajir County but raised in Nyeri and Nanyuki because my father was a soldier in the military. I am an expert in Conflict Management and Gender Issues. I specialise in Small Arms control. I have studied security issues in renowned institutions of higher learning across the world. They include the Institute of Security Studies in South Africa, Birmingham University, where I studied conflict management and MCewett University in Washington, where I explored Gender and Governance. After my studies, I joined the constitution review process in Kenya.

Question: What do you mean by being an expert in Small Arms?

Response: Most of us know what small arms are. We also know that in different ways, they are used to kill. But we don't know who manufactures, who buys and who supplies them. Knowing these players is critical in restoring peace and security in volatile regions. Such knowledge also assists relevant agencies in controlling trafficking in small arms by illegal entities. You can now understand why I specialised in this area. The UN employed me to handle Conflict Management issues in Northern Kenya because of my expertise. I did a pilot study in the Kiunga area on the Kenya-Somali border. I succeeded in influencing young people to voluntarily surrender illegally-held arms to the government. I achieved this goal by offering young men alternative forms of livelihood away from over-dependence on cattle rustling as the only economic activity. Arms are lethal, and they precipitate conflicts everywhere; in homes, pastoral communities, and urban towns. I trained many communities through the UNDP on the dangers of the proliferation of small arms. When I took over the leadership of Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation, I continued with community sensitisation and training on the need to curb trafficking in small arms to address inter-and intra-community conflicts.

Question: And what did you focus on after working with the UNDP?

Response: I was in Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation even when I worked with the UNDP. The organisation was very vibrant during my tenure. We had almost 17 projects, and peace-building had the largest budget. I trained over 4,000 women and men on issues of conflict management in the whole country. The majority of the beneficiaries were women.

Question: Why did you join Maendeleo?

Response: I joined Maendeleo when I was a very young girl because of my mother. She had been a member of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation for many years. As you may recall, I grew up in Central Kenya because my father worked in the military. My mother grew up together with Jane Kiano in Nyeri. Mrs. Kiano, a friend of my mother, was an influential woman leader of Maendeleo at the time. Through her, my mother interacted with other women leaders across the country. Jane Kiano, my mother and other women leaders, initiated the construction of the Maendeleo House. I was a Form Two student when I joined Maendeleo. I think I was the youngest member of the organisation. My mother encouraged me to join Maendeleo at a tender age because she was keen to give me a solid foundation on women issues. When you're young, you don't think such organisations are crucial. In 1984, I became an active member. I was elected the vice-chair of Maendeleo, where I deputized Zipporah Kittony for five years. I became the Chair of Maendeleo after Zipporah. I managed the organisation until I stepped down to join elective politics in 2013.

Question: Please tell us about some of your significant achievements at Maendeleo?

Response: It gives me pleasure to be a member of Maendeleo. It is one of the oldest women's organisations, not only in Kenya but Africa, committed to the welfare and empowerment of women. You may know that Maendeleo predates Kenya's independence. The organisation is older than this country as an independent state. The organisation was started in 1952 by colonial women in Kenya. It was created by a group of wives of colonial administrators in Kabete and Limuru, in the outskirts of Nairobi. The idea was to prevent African women from joining their husbands fighting the Mau Mau war of liberation in the forest. Unbeknown to colonial women, African women, discovered their hidden agenda and devised ways to circumvent it. The colonial women managing Maendeleo never knew that African women with them during the day cooked and supplied food to their husbands in the bush under the cover of darkness. The concept in Maendeleo ya Wanawake, then, was different compared to today. In

those days, the organisation focused on issues of Kitchen Gardens for the women, how to eat with different kinds of utensils and cutleries, how to take care of babies, and breastfeeding. The organisation is dynamic and has changed progressively from that time. Every ten years, Maendeleo has embraced new ideas to remain relevant.

When I look back at the years, I recall that Maendeleo worked with women in small groups. For example, the Mabati Women Group is where it started. Women came together in Chamas (groups), like the ones we have today. The group contributed a small amount of money to support a member roof her house with *mabati* (galvanised iron sheets). They gave support to each member in sequence until all women had *mabati* roofed houses. This effort by women saving little money to do great things is how Maendeleo ya Wanawake expanded. I am humbled that the women of Kenya allowed me to lead Maendeleo. As you are aware, it is a large organisation, and elections for top positions is very competitive. We have had several Chairmen in the organisation, but I am the only Chair from Northern Kenya. When I left Maendeleo, we had four million members all over the country. It was not only the elderly women who joined Maendeleo; we also had university students and even Secondary school girls.

I joined Maendeleo management as a vice-chair. Later, I was elected by the whole country to lead the organisation. Members didn't look at my background as a Muslim, a Somali or my ethnic group. I campaigned and defeated my opponents, Mrs. Mugambi and Mrs. Kamotho. The two were not only influential but also from solid backgrounds. I think you remember them. Due to my experience in marginalised communities, I introduced several women-friendly programs in Maendeleo. Some programmes addressed harmful practices like FGM, early child marriages, wife inheritance in some regions, and insecurity. I believed strongly that women needed to play a crucial role in peace programmes because they are affected more adversely by violence. You remember, we used to have a lot of violence during campaigns, and women go through all that. Still, I wanted to transfer my knowledge to many women on the ground to know early warnings of conflict. In pastoralist communities, women had no voice. Men sat down and decided where to conduct cattle raids. I sensitised women to listen keenly to what their men say or plan to discourage them from stoking conflict. Women would warn their men that if they raided a certain *Manyatta* or village, the victims would come to revenge the following day. In such revenge raids, the enemy would kill women, children, and the elderly. The conflict management programme in Maendeleo ya Wanawake was funded generously by donors such as the UNDP, PATH-FINDER, CBOs and other International NGOs.

Question: Thank you for such an insightful discussion about your role in Maendeleo. You also played a significant part in the constitution-making in the country. Kindly share with us your role in that respect?

Response: I represented the women organisations in the constitution-making process. We had many women organisations that came together to articulate women issues in the constitution review process. We also had women representatives from the districts because, at that time, we didn't have counties. Maendeleo ensured that women from rural parts of the country also participated in the Constitution-making process. In the discussions, women who were not lawyers raised issues that were later crystallised by experts into constitutional provisions. For example, they would say, "I would like my child to go to school and get a good education, but I can't. I am poor and cannot pay school fees." Such a proposal suggested the need to secure free primary education in the country's Constitution.

What is memorable in the constitution-making process and the product that came out is that we made it a poor person's Constitution by engraining women's issues in the document. The Constitution addressed poverty concerns based on the views collected from women in various fora. It was evident that the majority of Kenyans could not afford health care, education and productive farming. A farmer, for instance, needed fertilisers and essential machinery, yet women and men could not afford them. I also realised that every region had its own issues. Nyanza and Western Kenya had widow inheritance matters. The other concern was land distribution. Daughters wanted to share their father's land but were blocked by those communities' cultural beliefs and customs. In the coast region, Muslims had their own issues. They included; divorce, marriages and inheritance, and the Kadhi's court. North Eastern raised issues to do with marginalisation, which was really painful. We had many massacres in North Eastern: the Wagalla Massacre, Mandera Massacre, and Garissa Massacre. Based on the painful past of marginalisation and the insecurity, people from North Eastern felt they did not belong to this country. They thought they were outsiders in the country and wanted the new Constitution to cure past marginalisation. They would ask you, "Where is Kenya? We do not belong there?" They felt that whenever an individual broke the law, the whole community was subjected to collective punishment, which entailed rape of women and girls, public flogging and confiscation of animals. The Central Province had issues of education, agriculture and up to now, those issues are still there. Briefly, these are some of the problems that were distilled from views collected from regions. Many cases came out of public hearings. If I try to tell you all of them, this interview might never end.

Question: Thank you, Ambassador. If you do not mind, please share with us how issues affecting women were analysed?

Response: Many groups were collecting views from ordinary women and men. The major players were the Ufungamano and the CKRC. After some time, the two parallel teams merged and became CKRC. To understand how women's views were collected, I will borrow the analogy of tributaries and the river used by Prof. Kabira in her book. There are ordinarily many streams that converge and form a big river. Though we all started from the periphery, along the way, women congregated at the centre. We considered having many groups a strength because we ultimately agreed on issues central to all women of Kenya. That is how women approached the constitution-making process. We were pretty confident that being the most significant population in the country, we deserved to participate actively in the country's governance and other spheres of life. We succeeded in that regard.

Question: What were the key issues that you were pushing even before the Constitution was promulgated?

Response: Even before enacting the Constitution of Kenya 2010, there were efforts towards women's empowerment. Maendeleo had been working with women for decades. We encouraged women to love each other because women like to bring each other women down. There was also apathy among women that internalised inferior status imposed on them by a male-dominated society.

Question: Did the women's issues find their way to Parliament before the new Constitution?

Response: Yes. Many issues found their way to Parliament, but the outcome was disappointing. Jane Kiano, Hon. Asiyu, and Hon. Karua prepared an Affirmative Action Bill for discussion in Parliament around 1999 or 1997. The first Affirmative Action Bill by Asiyu was put down by men because most parliamentarians were male. You can count with your fingers; women were not there. This time, we mobilised women to go to Parliament during the debate to demonstrate that we are a strong constituency and that the statutes must secure our views and concerns.

Question: In your view, what do you think brought women together to forge a common front in the constitution-making?

Response: We were brought together as women of Kenya by the realisations that the plight of the woman was the same despite regional variations. At Bomas, we were divided into committees because there were different categories of people. Women were sitting in the committees such as the judiciary or the security committee. I was on the security committee because of my interest. Others were in agriculture or land committees. We had a chunk of women on land because that was their primary interest. At Bomas, we came together as women, brought together by our everyday issues and not our organisations. Our problems were critical because they were for everyone, not just women. When you empower a woman, you are not empowering a woman alone; you are creating a better future for the family, the children and other vulnerable members of society. Some women did not know how to express the issues clearly, and we allowed them to speak in their local languages. This allowed their concerns to come out clearly. For example, a woman would say, “my father left a vast land when he died. I am married out there, but when I come back, I will not be given land.” Those were the issues about property rights following the death of the male head of the family.

Re-marriages of widows in which women were forced to marry brothers of their husbands who had HIV was also a significant health and cultural concern.

Women also prioritised the education of the girl child, and equity is sharing out the government jobs. The issue of security was everywhere. It covered every region, especially border areas like Mandera. Mandera is not even half a kilometre to Somalia and Ethiopia; security was a big issue in that area. When something happens along the border, women in Mandera are the ones who go through it first before it reaches Nairobi. So that is what was coming out.

Question: How did you use the numbers to mobilise for the Constitution?

Response: We used the numbers, and sometimes when we disagreed, we would use the consensus. When consensus failed, voting was used as a last resort. Every morning, women delegates met before proceeding to their committees to be briefed on the positions to defend in their committees. For example, in my committee, the very touchy issue was amalgamating the police and administration police together as it is now. Many committee members were not happy about combining the regular Police and the administration police at that time. In some parts of the country, like the Central Province, AP was considered *Askari ya Chief* (the Chief’s Police). They

were not loved by the people because of the colonial baggage they carried. But in places like my home, AP was more respected than the regular Police because they were more armed and more trained than the regular Police. Such were the conflicts within our committee. I had to share these differences with my women colleagues in other committees to forge a common position. The same happened with the land committee.

Question: When you brought these issues together, what did you do with the information?

Response: The information would go to the CKRC then to the commissioners after they were sieved. We didn't want to take 10 or 20 issues. So, we focused on critical issues only.

Question: How was the information submitted?

Response: The Chair of the committee would be the one taking the information. For example, if I was the Chair of Maendeleo, I would share the information with a commissioner in the relevant committee. There was no need to take everything because the issues were more or less the same.

Question: What stages of the constitution-making did women influence in a significant way?

Response: Women influenced all the stages of the constitution review process in a big way because numerically, especially at Bomas, we outnumbered men, and we were also very organised in packaging our issues and lobbying to have them adopted.

Question: Tell us more about how women leaders like you conducted mobilisation to ensure the passing of the Constitution.

Response: From my end, we mobilised women through Maendeleo. When we came back from Bomas, you remember we went there twice because of political party problems. The review process was scattered for the first time. Then later, a few of the political parties and members went to Mombasa to polish the document. They then moved to Naivasha. I was not in Naivasha, but we selected Sofia Abdi to represent us.

Question: What were the efforts that were made by women to ensure that their issues were not left out?

Response: We had very vocal women on women's issues, like Hon. Millie

Odhiambo and Hon. Sofia Abdi. They had served in the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission themselves. We lobbied them to convince their fellow commissioners. Some of the men were not friendly to our agenda. In such cases, we went through other women who had connections to our adversaries. For example, we went to the former prime minister Raila Odinga to talk to the commissioners so that those issues would go well. He really supported Affirmative Action. Hon. Kiraitu Murungi was very good. He really helped the Affirmative Action cause.

Question: How were these women chosen to ensure they articulated women's issues?

Response: Women were elected by grassroots organisations. Even if Maendeleo supported you, even in the background, you had to come through in elections.

Question: What did the group of Eminent Women do?

Response: This group of eminent women included Hon. Asiyo, Mama Kiano, Prof. Maria Nzomo, and many other women. They were our role models and experts in women's issues. Whatever they said, we knew they were strong women ready to sacrifice for the women of Kenya. These eminent women were looking at the points together to ensure that they represented concerns of women from all regions in the country and that they were appropriate for the Constitution. We made sure that our recommendations were written in simple language capable of being transferred to legal language.

Question: How was the information passed to the eminent Women?

Response: These Eminent women were distributed to the various committees. They knew what was happening in those committees too. When we had our routine morning meetings, we were able to convey the information. We had women lawyers who drafted our views using legal language. These Eminent women were getting the data and synthesised the issues through their secretariat before submitting them to the commissioners.

Question: What would you say about the two referenda in 2005 and 2010?

Response: During the two referenda, civic education was vital. Maendeleo ya Wanawake did a lot of education throughout the country. We went up to Tana River and Lamu counties. We explained the draft to the people. Later, political parties took over. They did not consult anybody, especially the women. That's why only a few women voted that time. Women divided themselves along with political parties.

Question: What did you do differently in 2010 that you did not do in 2005?

Response: The 2005 referendum had many political divisions because most people over-concentrated on the idea that, 'Moi should go.' That was the whole issue that the country wanted at the time. Then politicians took over the process. You remember statements like, "If Raila has read the Constitution, I do not need to read it again." The 2010 draft was more inclusive. Many segments of the Kenyan community, including women, had something to celebrate if it was passed. For example, in Northern Kenya, people used to have two ID cards. The National ID and a Pink Card to show you were a Kenyan-Somali. I did not get it, but people in Northern Kenya had it. We raised that matter of discrimination in the Constitution, and the oppressive requirement was removed. This partly explains why the people in Northern Kenya overwhelmingly voted for the new Constitution.

Question: Can you say something about citizenship?

Response: Citizenship was another issue. When a Kenyan man married a foreigner, the foreign woman became a citizen. Still, if a Kenyan woman got a foreign husband, it was tough for her husband to become a Kenyan citizen.

The new Constitution changed these discriminatory practices.

Question: Can you recall some of the women who were in the frontline pushing for the Constitution?

Response: There were many women, not only from the Maendeleo ya Wanawake. We had other organisations. We had Ida Odinga, who was very good because of the Women Political Caucus. We also had Prof. Kabira, who really made our consultations very lively. Other delegates included Prof. Nzomo, who was also at the University, Mrs Kiano, Hon. Ngilu, Hon. Asiyo and Hon. Karua. Martha was really vocal in spearheading

women's agenda. She later started her own political party. But even before that, she was really loud about women's issues. In northern Kenya, there was Sophia Abdi and me. The new Constitution really gave us a lot of hope. We came to know that women could do much more and better. That is why Sophia and I contested elective seats in 1997. We tried to talk to women from the grassroots. They felt the need to have women in positions of decision making, including the Parliament.

Question: Can you share with us the strategies that worked during the constitution process?

response: I think it was selflessness. We were not looking for positions. We wanted a better future for our children and our girls. That is what was driving most of the women. I know many women made it to Parliament because of our fight for Affirmative Action. Many of them would not have seen that Parliament. Only a few women in the current Parliament fought for Affirmative Action in the reform process. Only Hon. Millie Odhiambo, Hon. Alice Wahome and Prof. Margaret Kamar; I think I can count only four or five.

Question: What has been the challenge then?

Response: A lot of issues. Kenya campaigns are costly. Women don't have that money to use during campaigns. That's one issue. The second one is violence against women at the grassroots, family issues and cultural issues. A woman has to go through her family to get permission from her husband, brother or uncles to contest. But for a man, he only needs to put on his coat and shoes and announce that he wants to be in Parliament. Nobody will vet him. But for a woman, she must be vetted by many people, including outsiders. They want to know if you're married or you are divorced. It means that if you're not strong enough, you shy away from elective politics. There is also a lot of fear in election campaigns.

Question: What are some of the challenges you have faced as a woman leader?

Response: I have faced a lot of abuse based on my cultural background. Women are not supposed to be heard. They are only supposed to be seen. Men are good at putting women down, especially when you're contesting against them. We never had women-only seats, so any woman desiring to be in Parliament had to compete against men. In such situations, men would use every possible trick to put a woman candidate down. For example, a male candidate sensing defeat by a woman candidate would

send young men to publicly embarrass the woman so that she is ashamed. Financing remains a significant challenge for women politicians. Men can sell family property such as a family house or land to finance elections campaigns, but women will not do that. A woman candidate will find it better to stay and not contest rather than sell a family property because shelter for children and their education is more important than elections.

Question: If you were asked to mention a few gains for women in the Constitution, what would you say?

Response: I think that we have many gains in the Constitution as women, even though it is not a hundred 100%. In Parliament, we have 22% representation. It was worse before the new Constitution. In the Senate, we have 21 women out of 66, that is 30%. We also have many women appointed in many managerial positions. Another gain is the mindset of women. They do not feel inferior anymore. They can contest; they know they are part of the country and with rights just like men. Women can now demonstrate freely because, according to our Constitution, you can picket anywhere. We can go to the streets and make noise. But those days, you did not find women “making noise because of fear”. Right now, you can do what you really need. Women feel there is more freedom right now.

Question: Can you say the Constitution has empowered women economically?

Response: Yes, but not entirely. Many funds go to the grassroots right now. There is a Cash Transfer for orphans and the elderly. We also have the Women Enterprise Fund, where women groups are given funds to do business. We have observed that even if these funds are on offer, women can still access them. Women are not in the shops; they are still outside in the markets. They are still selling their wares on the outside like before instead of opening shops.

Question: Do you think lessons learnt during the constitution-making can be used to help mobilise women for economic empowerment?

Response: We have many organisations giving out money right now after the constitution-making, but women are very fearful of debts. Women also dread Bank Loans. Ironically, women rarely default on loans; they are the best payer of loans because they fear risks. Whatever you do, you have to pay that loan, including borrowing somewhere else to pay due to fear. I have been in the management of the Women

Enterprise Fund, but there is fear because of collateral. We changed the requirements so that women get loans without collateral. You do not need to give your title deed or your shop or business to stand for you; still, women fear getting the money.

Question: How do you overcome that?

Response: I think the best way is to devolve it. Women Enterprise Fund is only here in Nairobi. It's not in rural areas. Women have to apply through the Ministry of Culture and wait for the request to be processed in the headquarters in Nairobi. There is the need to change the system such that if you place a bid and get the money at the county level, you pay the money at the county level. That will be better because many women access this money.

Question: What lessons can we learn about women mobilisation and negotiations on the constitution-making to empower women economically?

Response: If political parties can mobilise women to vote for them, we can do the same for them to empower women. Maendeleo has the numbers. That is why every political party wanted to have Maendeleo on their side. That's why Maendeleo was mainly with the government. You know MYWO was sometimes called KANU-Maendeleo ya Wanawake before I became the Chair. I was lucky there was no KANU-MYWO when I came in; Kittony had gone with it. So, if we can mobilise for political parties, we can mobilise women organisations to bring economic empowerment for women.

Question: If someone told you we want to empower women economically, what could be your recommendation?

Response: I think regionally, we are different. There are parts where there is no agriculture, like Northern Kenya. There are greenhouses and all, but there is rain scarcity. When you say empowering women economically, I think there are many things women can do. In Central Province, agriculture is the best. Women have been active in agriculture in Central for years. You remember women were in the tea business, coffee business, but their husbands were in Nairobi. At the end of the month, the husband goes and gets the cheque, not the wife. So, in Northern Kenya, they used to do livestock marketing for women up to now. Some women are doing business in livestock marketing. The tree is the same among the Maasai. The Turkana women have basket making, which is the best internationally.

Question: When you were Ambassador in Iran, were you able to connect women in business?

Response: I could not do much because Iran had many problems with the international community. There was a lot of sanctions on the country. We could not do business with Iran without attracting retaliatory sanctions from the USA and other EU countries.

Question: What things need to be done to empower women economically so that they operate big businesses?

Response: I think big business is big money, and women don't have capital. The only thing that we can do is bring them together as *chama* and give them big money. I know that many women are contractors in Kenya. There are very many women doing business. If you go to Eastleigh right now, most of the clothes business, importing furniture, is done by women, not men. Men are left in the hotel business.

Question: Do you have anything else you'd like to share with us?

Response: I think Kenyan women are not as active as we were before. We are not as busy as we were before. We are a bit relaxed because I do not see many women activities right now. After the Constitution, we are laid back. Remember when I was in Maendeleo, we used to talk much on issues of having peace in the country. Women are mistreated, and no one is talking about it right now. Children are also killed senselessly, and we don't talk about it. Who do you think can speak about those issues? It is excruciating when yesterday I heard about these two brothers of Kianjakoma who were killed in Embu. I really felt it. But I don't have a forum to talk about it. I felt the pain. We are not as active as we were. After the Constitution, we relaxed. We said, "now everything is perfect"...but it is not perfect. Even America is not perfect. Let me challenge the younger women in this country. We did all that to give them space to take the mantle from us to higher levels. The baton is passed to them. But they are not interested. I think they should be interested because as they age, the currently young women will come to a stage where they will not do much work. Where are the women's organisations?

Question: Are there strategies that you used successfully?

Response: Many strategies were successful. As I said, mainly the political parties lacked the will to genuinely support women's issues.

Question: Could you name two of the strategies?

Response: We identified influential women who could act as our emissaries and sent such women to lobby critical persons strategic to our agenda. Women remain the largest group of voters in political parties. Yet, women still do not hold key positions in these parties. Women need to change this situation to occupy their rightful places in their political parties and all decision-making structures. We must stop the fear and shape the future consistently. Young women leaders can demonstrate their readiness to play their part in this transformation.

Question: Thank you so much, Ambassador Rukia. We appreciate your contribution to women's empowerment in Kenya.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A Conversation with Hon. Beatrice Elachi



“Martha Karua, Charity Ngilu, and the rest fought so hard to liberate us from blind loyalty. We cannot go back to that dark past. Let us evaluate the contribution of the 47 woman representatives and seal the gaps. These women should have transformed Parliament by asserting that they are women first and then members of political parties, so when it comes to women’s matters, they work together beyond the limitations imposed by their political parties such as ODM, ANC, and Jubilee. That has not worked as we had hoped”. ~ Hon. Beatrice Elachi

Biography

A Kenyan leader who epitomises the strength of diversity in our nation. Elachi developed her career progressively from a gender activist to a gender analyst, trainer and lobbyist. She remembers how the unity of purpose and strategic alliances secured women’s gain at Bomas. She believes that women can do better to transform the lives of Kenyans. Elachi has served as a nominated Senator, Speaker of the Nairobi County Assembly and a Chief Administrative Secretary (CAS), at the Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes, ministry. She believes that women can do better to transform the lives of Kenyans.

Interviewed by Beatrice Kamau

Question: Good Morning, Madam Beatrice and thank you for accepting this interview. To start us off, please tell us about yourself: your childhood, education and work history.

Response: I am Beatrice Elachi. I was born in Kakamega. My mother, Mary Mumbi Kamau Elachi, was from Mukurwe-ini, Nyeri, and Joel Elachi, my father, was a native of Kakamega. I went to school in Western Province. I went to Moi Girls Bukoli for my A-Levels before proceeding to African Nazarene University, where I enrolled for Peace and Security studies. After graduating, I did my Masters in Security and Governance. During my university days, I got interested in gender issues, security and development. I decided to work with civil society organisations to learn more about gender and governance. I started as a gender activist and that is when I met Prof. Wanjiku Kabira.

Question: How did you meet Prof Kabira?

Response: It is fascinating. It was at Ufungamano. You know the way you just meet women. It was during the clamour for a new constitution when people were pushing Moi for change. I also met the late Jane Kiano at the same forum. Jane Kiano was the chair of the National Council of Women of Kenya. After interacting with Jane Kiano, I was employed as a Programs Officer for the National Council of Women of Kenya. Jane and Kabira were good friends and that is how I got to interact with Prof. Kabira more closely. Around this time, Prof. Kabira and other gender experts had started The Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD). The organisation had the best gender trainers in the country. The gender consultants included Masheti Masinjila, Okwach Abagi, Elishiba Kimani, Njoki Ndungu (now a Judge of the Supreme Court), Winnie Guchu (now CAS, Interior). They were excellent trainers. This team of consultants started an organisation called Kangemi Women Empowerment Center, with support from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). Jane Kiano was one of the trustees of Kangemi Women Empowerment Center, so I got involved in the activities of this young organisation through NCWK. At that time, The Centre was training women to understand Gender Issues.

I attended a gender training facilitated by The Centre in Nyeri. Wambui Kanyi was the Chief Executive Officer of CCGD and she took us for a three-week training on Gender. The training was an eye-opener for me: I understood what gender is; and why we

need laws responsive to women's situations. You remember at that time the Women's Conference in Beijing was the talk everywhere. Some men complained loudly that 'this thing gender' was about women taking over to control men. There was a lot of misinformation. Others argued that Beijing was inciting women to refuse to perform their traditional responsibilities at home.

I appreciated that gender is always with us; it refers to our roles as women and men. Gender awareness makes us raise questions such as: "Who owns resources? Who has access to resources? Who benefits from resources?" We also question equity in ownership and benefits. I worked closely with The Centre to find answers to these questions.

When Prof Kabira and Hon. Phoebe Asiyo brought together women organisations on the constitution review process, I was already in the movement. The Kenya Women's Political Alliance and the Kenya Women's Political Caucus led by Prof. Kabira and Hon Asiyo, respectively, came up with the women delegates to go to Bomas. It was around 2003, and President Moi had peacefully handed over power after 2002 elections. The constitution review process started again with a lot of optimism. We formed committees that addressed thematic areas on issues central to women. The committees synthesised problems, built consensus and gave the points a constitutional appeal.

At Bomas, all women delegates and lobbyists worked together despite their religious, regional and political affiliations. The original Bomas draft had a framework for achieving gender parity in elective positions. *"There would be no struggle for the two-thirds gender rule if the draft constitution had been passed because we had agreed on the structure where women were to be elected at the district level. The arrangement favoured women because, at that time, Moi had created many districts, so women would have easily achieved the gender parity rule"*. I was among the Kenyan women sent to Uganda to study their district seat framework. That is where we borrowed the framework for women representation through district seats. We also looked at what the South African system had to enrich our proposal.

Question: Kindly clarify your framework for achieving gender parity in elective positions.

Response: It is sad to acknowledge that the model of women representation we travelled to Uganda to study was initially a Kenyan idea. Uganda borrowed it from us and implemented it immediately. In Kenya, we had suggested that women-only seats be district-based. Only women would be elected through those seats. This would create balance in representation because women could not compete with male politicians at the same level due to historical marginalisation, lack of resources and violence during campaigns. Uganda saw sense in Kenya's proposal and adopted it. We were now learning from Uganda.

Question: How does the South African system work to ensure gender parity?

Response: South Africa addresses gender parity through political parties. When you look at the ruling party of South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), candidates compete knowing very well that if you don't have women in your lineup, the list won't be accepted by the electoral commission. The regulation compels political parties to set aside seats for women to comply with the one-third gender rule.

Question: How do you rate the performance of the women empowerment movement in Kenya?

Response: It is always good to remember our history, where we have come from, especially the different bills that MamaBeth Mugo tabled. Honestly, we have retrogressed a bit. We do not have strong women's organisations that we had during the clamour for constitutional change. Then organisations such as The League of Kenya Women Voters, Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation, The Caucus and The Alliance were powerful vehicles for mobilising women around pertinent issues. We moved around with Prof Kabira, Wambui Kanyi, Abida Aroni, Dr. Nancy Baraza and Beatrice Kamau. Wambui Kanyi ended up being a coordinator of Makadara during the consultations. *"We lost the 2005 referendum because of tribal politics that snowballed into the mess of 2007/2008"*.

After the post-election mayhem, we had the committee of experts where we were represented by Njoki Ndungu and Abida Aroni. Once again, Prof Kabira and all of us teamed up and monitored the committee of experts closely to ensure we did not lose any of our gains. The only loss we suffered was that instead of District Women representatives, we got 47 County Women representatives. District Reps could have been numerically more robust. *"We ensured that Article 100 was included to provide a*

formula for achieving the two-thirds gender representation. Article 100 has not worked well for women because its implementation has been politicised”.

Question: How has the representation of women been since the constitution was promulgated?

Response: In 2013, we elected less than 100 MCAs and in 2017, slightly over 100 MCAs. Since Affirmative Action must be reviewed every 10years, will it be fair to argue that we would have empowered women to compete against men after 10years? The nomination of women is good, but often, it is abused. There is a lot that still needs to be done to empower women to compete equally with men. The constitution that we fought so hard for at Bomas has created devolved funds for women. It also requires that one-third of tenders be reserved for youth, women and people with disabilities.

Regarding the devolved funds, we need to ask ourselves whether the gains work for women as intended. How come not many women are coming out to benefit from AGPO? When you look at the amount of money allocated to women and youth, it is a tidy sum. But when you follow closely, you will be surprised to find that the beneficiaries are neither women nor youth. You will realise that people are poorer than when resources were concentrated at the centre. We should be candid enough to concede that we lost the dreams of devolution somewhere along the way. Resources are devolved to counties; yes, that is a fact. But are the resources reaching the intended beneficiaries? *“We must be truthful and accept that devolution has not worked as envisaged. You remember even when they were proposing the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), had we been brave enough, we would have reduced our counties to 15. We could have transformed the 15 counties into powerful economic blocks to kill the dragon of poverty and tribalism”.* (why is this italicised and quoted?) It worries me that we have become more tribal because our counties are ethnic enclaves. As a country, we must eradicate negative ethnicity for the future of our young people. Today you can't be employed in any county easily because they have set a quota for outsiders who are fellow Kenyans.

Question: You seem to have radical ideas on how to strengthen devolution. What other suggestions do you make?

Response: It is my considered view that the first crop of governors did devolution a disservice. The system lacked accountability that provided a breeding ground for corruption, nepotism, and ethnic nationalism. As we look at the constitution, we need

to evaluate ourselves and be candid to accept that some things are good, but others need a rethink. For example, how come our constitution is the most progressive and women-friendly, yet, the parliament has not been dissolved for failing to implement the two-third gender rule? If it was dissolving parliament on another issue, it could have happened long ago. But because it is about women empowerment, they say this is just a women's issue.

Question: Thank you for your candid assessment of the situation. What then is your proposal?

Response: Our trailblazers have done a commendable job for this country. We need a team of women to take over and face the government without fear. If we are not careful, our politics is slowly going back to the one-party era where you had to submit to your party leader by parroting yes yes yes. Sycophancy demands that you shout approval even if you know things are not right. Hon.Karua, Hon. Charity Ngilu and the rest fought so hard to liberate us from blind loyalty. We cannot go back to that dark past. Let us evaluate the contribution of the 47 woman representatives and seal the gaps. These women should have transformed Parliament by asserting that they are women first and then members of political parties, so when it comes to women's matters, they work together beyond the limitations imposed by their political parties such as ODM, ANC, and Jubilee. That has not worked as we had hoped.

Question: What strategies did you use to bring women from different political parties together, and why is it not happening now?

Response: At that time, we had women who believed in the transformative women's agenda with total commitment. I think women relaxed when it became apparent that there would be 47 woman representatives in parliament no matter what happens. If you add other nominees and elected women, it is possible to get 87 women MPs. I think we became comfortable and relaxed. The other problem women leaders have is fear. They fear doing what is right because someone might replace them. Consequently, they are not able to support other women, mentor them and ensure they come up.

Question: Yes, I remember that you served as a nominated senator. What philosophy guided you?

Response: I remember when I was nominated as a senator, I never feared. We just mentored everyone. I did not find it helpful to go for another nomination. I ventured

into the field of competitive politics to try my luck. I was not alone. Other women who campaigned for elective seats included Hon. Naisula Lesuuda, Hon. Martha Wangari, Hon. Fatuma Dullo, and Hon. Janet Ongera.

Other women like Dr. Agnes Zani decided to support the party and work to be nominated again. It was not our wish to be selected a second time. Prof. Kabira reminded us frequently that if you have been given a position, use it but make sure you mentor someone else to come in when your term ends. The first nomination was credible, but the second nomination left a lot to be desired. That is when you found that someone who had lived and worked abroad for over 15 years was nominated while local women who were active in political parties were bypassed.

Question: Why were the nominations problematic?

Response: If you ask me, I can say the nominations should take place after the elections. Let all women politicians be on the ballot so that everyone demonstrates their capability to serve. This will eliminate the idea of some women just relaxing in the boardroom and waiting to be ushered into Parliament. I fear to accept that some nominated women have a weakness for alcohol and cannot transact any serious business in the August House. If we had serious women in the positions we have, we could change this country. *“I always say our issues as women are not about Kenya; they are continental and global. For example, gender-based violence is violence against women regardless of whether it is committed against women in Kenya, Malawi, or Uganda. Women are borderless. If we want, we can change this country by not playing the politics of men. Women leaders must create time to interact with fellow women, especially young ones, to encourage them and assure them that they can change this country and make it better for posterity. We must also be good at disseminating information, especially opportunities that can benefit young people. If I have come this far, it is because Jane Kiano and Prof. Kabira held my hands. We must do the same to others so that the unity of women flourish like a well-watered plant”*(why is the part in italics and quotes?)

Question: You mentioned that during the constitution review process, women of Kenya were united and focused hence the significant gains registered. What made this possible?

Response: We were brought together by the challenges we had gone through. For example, in Parliament, we only had Hon. Karua, Hon. Ngilu, Hon. Mugo, Hon. Lina

Chebii Kilimo, Hon. Millie Odhiambo, and Hon. Rachel Shebesh. Women representation varied from seven to 15 MPs. Though few, these women leaders in Parliament were very efficient in sharing information. That is how they formed Kenya Women Parliamentarians (KEWOPA) under the leadership of Hon. Kilimo. It is unbelievable that to date, KEWOPA cannot get resources from Parliament. During the constitution review process, there was civic education. All women organisations were doing civic education under URAIA. Unfortunately, once the constitution was promulgated, we retreated into an individualistic competition. We started avoiding fellow women leaders like Daisy Amdany even if they had good ideas simply because it would build their personal profile. We also accepted to be divided along the lines that favour men but weaken women. For example, we started groupings like pastoral women.

Question: How was Bomas different?

Response: At Bomas, we had regional caucuses, and every region had their own formation with their own issues. It is correct that women had region-specific problems, but most difficulties affected all women of Kenya. We did not look at issues as Luo, Luhya, or Maasai; they were all our issues. We need to appreciate that issues of women are universal. Women from Kariobangi face similar challenges as women from Mathare. The same happens to women in Mali or Tigray in Ethiopia. The other day Britain went back and started talking about domestic violence, sexual violence, and rape. That is what helped us at Bomas. We never looked at issues as regional, but national. We were united in promoting the participation of all women in decision-making, especially in political, economic, and social life. We knew in Bomas if you empower a woman economically, her social status and life are transformed. She can see her children go to school and live without stress.

Question: You are very passionate about the economic empowerment of women. How is this addressed in our *constitution*?

Response: It is correct that I am passionate about the economic empowerment of women. That is why we included Article 43 in the Bill of Rights. *We ringfenced the Bill of Rights ensured that it could only be amended through a referendum and not by Parliament. Article 27 guarantees equality of all persons, including women, while article 10 secures principles and values of leadership. When you look at constitutional safeguards on health and other fundamental rights, they demonstrate that we wanted shelter, health, food for women and families. With food, Prof. Kabira focused on article 43 to ensure parliament passed a bill that addresses food security.* (why italics?)The Bill

is yet to be passed because people think that if you empower women by securing their access to food, they cannot be easily manipulated by politicians.

Question: There is a growing perception that people are now poorer than before the new constitution. When did the rain start beating us?

Response: The rain started beating us when we began clapping for governors even when they were wrong. Whenever governors were summoned to answer questions on accountability, their supporters formed big rowdy groups to accompany them, complaining that the governor was being harassed and that such actions were destabilising the county. We have either become detached or complicit in the ills affecting our counties. Sadly, Kenyans have become keyboard warriors on the internet. Still, the problem remains because we have refused to face the facts and do the right thing. Counties have received so much money, but when you look at service delivery, it is appalling. You ask yourself, what happened? Why have people become poorer? In the first 10 years of this constitution, we needed to have registered significant improvement in the lives of Kenyans but what we have seen is that the lives of a few individuals have improved astronomically. A few people are doing exceptionally very well in counties while the populace still wallows in dehumanizing poverty. This constitution was meant to devolve resources and activities from the centre. Still, now we have come back to the presidency. It has become more lucrative to become the president now than ever before. It leaves me wondering about the purpose of the constitution. We thought we had moved power from the centre to the county. Still, again, we are fighting viciously for the presidency.

Question: Are there some lessons we can learn from mobilisation and negotiations at Bomas that we can use now?

Response: Yes. When mobilising for the constitution, we used key women who understood our issues. We also had women willing to learn. We had our seniors like Prof Kabira, who gave us ideas to work on. We had a willingness to learn and a unity of purpose. If we had that unity, the former Chief Justice advice that the parliament be dissolved could not have gone unheeded. But you see, we are selfish that we don't put the country first. We need to come back to that selflessness that women pioneers like Prof Kabira had. They never thought about personal benefits. *"To change the country for the better, we must be willing to sacrifice individually and collectively. We must be ready to implement Chapter Six of the constitution. We do not need EACC. We need stringent lifestyle audits so that people account for the sudden wealth they have*

amassed since the constitutional order came into effect". (the quote and italics?) That is why we need a president who is not desperate to go for a second term but ready to straighten Kenya and leave it to move to the next level. Kenyans can give them that second term if they see what they have done. We do not need to antagonise people or engage in corruption to be voted back to the office. As some leaders make generous donations, they should also tell Kenyans how they have suddenly become wealthy.

Question: As we face the 2022 elections, what is your advice to women contenders?

Response: From where I sit, we must be very strategic going to 2022. We must convince Kenyans that women are leaders who can transform society. Even without money, Kenyans must come to appreciate our effort and ability to change society for the better. If we want to change this country, we must not focus on cash only. We should not allow our campaigns to be expensive by encouraging the electorate to vote only after monetary inducements. We must be strategic and think of where women want to be in 30 years to come and not just 2022.

Question: I thought that we have policies that control voter bribery during elections?

Response: Well, I can give you an example; you saw me in Kiambaa during the recent by-elections. Honestly, it was hell. For the first time in Central Kenya, I was shocked to see that people received packets of maize flour as inducements. It means something is not correct. The people have become poor until they will need *unga*. I was saddened to meet many young girls below the age of 16, all with children one year or two years old. It means the COVID-19 pandemic affected many lives. I am telling Kenyans to please give many women positions to help the country recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Let us allow women to do what I usually call radical surgery to bring back dignity to all Kenyans by slaying the devil of greed.

Question: Are you suggesting that women can turn the country around?

Response: Yes, of course, men have become too greedy. They plan on how much to loot from public coffers in the five years they are in office. The majority of men get elective offices just to enrich themselves. Women leaders must learn and be ready for criticism. They should be like Hon. Ngilu. They should learn to serve people, go to the community, listen to them, empathise with them and help them deal with their local challenges. Women politicians must also be available and accessible. Do not just prefer meeting people in bars over alcohol. Also, meet the electorate in restaurants

or better in their local communities where they live. It is also critical that we get resources to manage the logistics of electioneering.

Question: Any advice on how to reinvigorate the women's movement?

Response: *"I think we should stop unhealthy competition among ourselves as women in our movement and organisations."* (italics and quotation ?) We need to go back to when we used to have consortia, where we transparently implemented programmes. I am happy that Wafula Chebukati, (the electoral commission chairman), has said that the IEBC will not accept nomination lists from political parties if they do not contain a minimum of one-third of women candidates. This is a good start.

Question: I don't want to close before I thank you for fighting very hard for justice as the Speaker of the Nairobi County Assembly.

Response: Nairobi is a fascinating county. It is a county with many interests and when we were going in, we thought we were just walking in to do our best. We wanted to transform Nairobi and leave a legacy that people can never forget. I soon realised there were very many interests. The problem was businessmen and cartels. They controlled all strategic departments in the county, from garbage collection to Nairobi Water Company. They also had their relatives as employees in the county. In such a situation, even a wellintentioned leader cannot deliver.

Question: Do you have anything else you would like to share with us before we close the interview?

Response: Let me thank you, Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, and her team at the African Women Studies Centre, for the achievements you have recorded. I also thank our mentors Wambui Kanyi and many others who have always been there.

Interviewer: Thank you.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A Conversation with Ms. Mumbi Ngaru



“Our proposals were adopted by the party NDC. Though we had adopted Affirmative Action in the party policy documents, the implementation was a nightmare. There was a strategy to limit the participation of women by locking them out of meetings”.

~ Mumbi Ng'aru

Biography

Born in Samburu, raised in Nyeri and finally a resident of Kiambu. As a former Mayor of Thika and a lobbyist in the constitution review process, Mumbi's reflections explain why the Local Authorities supported the constitution review process and the women's agenda. Mumbi believes that young women are not detached from women's empowerment issues rather all that is needed is appropriate engagement strategies that can bridge the generational gap. She is a founder member and one of the initial directors of the Centre for Multiparty Democracy (CMD). Mumbi is a former Member of Parliament at the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA).

Interviewed by Beatrice Kamau:

Question: Good morning, Mheshimiwa. I am happy that you created time to share with us your experiences as a woman leader. We are documenting the achievements of our women leaders in gender equality and women empowerment in Kenya. You are one of our luminaries. Please start by telling me who Mumbi Ngaru is.

Response: Thank you very much for this invitation. I didn't know that you consider me among those who shaped the women's movement in the country. I'm grateful for it. My name is Mumbi Ngaru, a farmer from Thika. I am the daughter of somebody and a wife to somebody. I am also a mother to three children and a grandmother of many, you know, just like that.

Question: Tell us something about your education and work history.

Response: I am a Kenyan, born in Laikipia, Samburu, to two late parents. I buried my mother about two months ago and my father about 26 years ago. In the early years of independence, I relocated to Central Province, in Kieni, when my parents got a parcel of land in the new settlement scheme. The change was good for me because I relocated from where girls did not go to school. I went to school in Kieni East, Ngambura-ini and Naru Moru Girls Secondary School. I did well in the examinations and joined the Mary Leaky (Girls' School) in Nairobi for A-Levels. In the early 80s, I joined the University of Nairobi, where we are seated now. This university is my *alma mater*. It has been a while; I almost got lost (Laughs) coming for this interview. Prof. Wanjiku Kabira was my lecturer those days. She knew me when I was younger; as a student.

Question: What about your work history?

Response: I am one of the University of Nairobi students who graduated immediately after the 1982 abortive coup. It was not easy. Some of us feared working in the civil service. I worked with the Provincial Administration but resigned after one year. Do not ask me why I left.

Question: In what capacity did you serve?

Response: I was a District Officer, but I left before even one year was over. I went straight into private businesses - our family businesses. I have been managing our family businesses up to now. Later on, I re-joined the public service following

my nomination under the Affirmative Action to the Thika Municipal Council as a Councillor. That nomination ushered me into politics. Long before my nomination, I had been active in community work. I was known in the education sector, where I served on various boards. I served on the board of Thika School for the Blind, School for the Physically Handicapped, Thika High School and Kilimambogo Teachers College. I participated in these activities because I wanted to give back to society. As a beneficiary of when systems worked in Kenya, I felt duty-bound to make life more hopeful for less fortunate community members.

Question: What happened when you became a Councillor?

Response: I was nominated as a councillor under the repealed constitution. I make this distinction because many people think Affirmative Action started with the constitutional-making process. Yet, during the IPPG talks, political parties began implementing Affirmative Action after the Phoebe Asiyó Bill was defeated in Parliament. Several political parties in Parliament started implementing Affirmative Action despite the defeat in Parliament. In Thika, my home District then, most of the Members of Parliament were elected on the Social Democratic Party (SDP) ticket. The party leader then was Hon. Charity Ngilu. The majority of Councillors were on SDP tickets. When the nomination slots were given to majority seats, the SDP had some places to nominate councillors. SDP decided to employ Affirmative Action in the nomination of members to the County Council. It was done in a very professional manner. That explains how I joined politics. The party needed educated persons, who understood how the Council worked, somebody who had done community work and was interested in politics. I had none of the above requirements except being educated and passionate about community service. Anyang' Nyong'ó, the Secretary-General of SDP, was my lecturer at the University of Nairobi in my undergraduate. The party leaders encouraged me a lot to accept the nomination. They told me: "We are looking for people who can change the way things are done. Why do you fear? We will back you up." I then agreed to be nominated into the Thika Municipal Council. I worked as a nominated Councillor for a while before I was approached by Councillors to lead the County Council of Thika. I was hesitant because I was a mother with young children. I had also gone back to the university for further studies. But guess what? When elections came, they unanimously elected me as the Deputy Mayor. I accepted the honour. Little did I know that I was going to hold that position for only six months. Six months later, I became the acting mayor. The following month, I was confirmed as the Mayor of Thika Municipality.

Question: Things seemed to be moving quite fast for you. What happened?

Response: The Mayor was surcharged under Cap-265 of the Laws of Kenya. That is the law that governed the Local Authorities then. It was the procedure that the Deputy Mayor takes over whenever a mayor had a case to answer. That's how I ended up being a Mayor. But the following year, I was elected and confirmed to the end of our term, which was 2002.

Question: Were you the first, or there were other women mayors before you?

Response: Thika became a municipality in 1968. And all that time, they had only men mayors. I became the first woman mayor.

Question: Share with us how you became involved in the constitutionmaking process.

Response: Let me start by clarifying that devolution did not begin with the new constitution. Before devolution, there was what we called decentralization. The government had begun accepting devolution, but it was not pronounced and lacked clear structures. All taxes, except licenses, fees, and other charges were collected by the central government during our time. Once the government collected taxes from local authorities, 1.5% of the total revenue was disbursed under the ministry of Local Government to the 145 Local Authorities in the country. The amount transferred to municipalities was a drop in the ocean. It explains why Local Authorities embraced and passionately supported the constitutional making process to increase this percentage. We agitated for people to be given more power in Local Authorities because there's not much one could do under Cap 65 without the Minister's approval. Those were KANU days, and most of the local authorities from the region I came from were opposition Local Authorities. The hardships we experienced in Local Authorities drove us to the constitution-making process.

Question: Did women in the Local Authorities support the constitutionmaking agenda like you?

Response: Yes, but we were few. During my time, we were about seven women Mayors throughout the country. I remember these women because we all belonged to the Association of Local Government Authorities of Kenya (ALGAK). All the 145 local authorities were members of ALGAK. During that time, we had a technical working

group on 'The Local Government we wanted in the constitution.' I was appointed the Chair of the technical committee. The Chairman of ALGAK was His Worship Josiah Magut, the Mayor of Eldoret Municipality. In working with the chairman, I realised that to convince KANU leadership on change, you needed to use those who spoke the language of the party. His worship, the Mayor of Eldoret, was one of them. As the chairman of the Technical Committee, I worked very well with Mayor Magut. When I could not get something from KANU, I went through him, and he did well. It was like football. You had to know who to pass the ball and it worked perfectly.

Question: Where was your strength in the constitution review process?

Response: I focused on increasing the participation of women in politics. I was keen on increasing the involvement of women in Local Authorities. We were very few then, extremely few. Many local authorities did not have even one woman at the County Council level. And for the few who were there, it was quite a struggle. Nominated women needed to comply with the party position even if it was untenable. A nominated member who defied the party line had her nomination revoked. I was one of the candidates for revocation, but I took my party to court, won the case, and served to the end of my term. Unfortunately, most of my colleagues had their nominations revoked because they didn't follow the party line.

Question: How did you submit the constitutional recommendations from ALGAK for consideration?

Response: We handed over the recommendations to Parliament through our respective political parties. The political party caucuses then pushed our recommendations through their members of Parliament. Our proposals increased allocations of the funds transferred to the counties from 1.5% to 2.5%. It was a big issue for us because it meant increased resources to deliver services to local wards.

Question: Share with us your experience in working with other women in the constitution-making process.

Response: We worked together as women leaders, especially at Bomas, before it was disbanded. At that time, most of the district delegates from Central Kenya were in opposition. I was an observer giving valuable support to the principal representatives. This effort was abruptly halted by an announcement over the media that the government had disbanded the process. We reconvened under the next government.

Question: How did you continue with the constitution review process after the disruption?

Response: We reconvened at Bomas because I was still the Chair of the ALGAK technical committee. We relied on civil society because the government was still holding on to our documents. We handed over our proposals to our political parties, the primary delegates and our commissioners at the secretariat.

Question: Did you join the County Government for the second time through SDP?

Response: No, I didn't go back to the Council. I finished my term and moved on. After I left the County Council, I got into party politics. My experience at the Council taught me that you cannot ignore political parties. I moved from SDP and joined the Liberal Democratic Party in the NARC formation. "People don't talk about the LDP. They talk about NARC, but in NARC, we had two partners; NAK and the LDP." Even though we were together in NARC as one unit, we all knew our mother's house. I belonged to the LDP wing.

Some people had a problem with it. My name indicated that I come from the Central Province while the party was dominant in Western Kenya. After the NARC Coalition formed the government, I became the Executive Director at the secretariat of the Liberal Democratic Party. That's where I started doing professional political work of mobilizing women to understand that they have to operate within political parties to influence policy change. And as I exited from the local authorities politics, I had the opportunity to be one of the trainers, to prepare women to be councillors. I worked with a group of gender experts to develop a toolkit for women councillors. The good thing about that book is that we told women what we had gone through based on practical experiences. When you tell it as it is, it is exciting. Based on our effort, we ended up having about over 400 elected women councillors in the whole country. Together with the nominated women councillors, we ended up having about 700 councillors in 2002. Before our intervention, we had less than 50 women councillors.

Question: Please tell us more about your role as the Executive Director of LDP.

Response: As an Executive Director, I found myself sitting in the NEC of the party as the only woman. "Alone! Truth be told, I was like a tea girl." I was supposed to sit and be seen and not heard, and that was not for me. As the registered Secretary-General of the party, where I was legitimately supposed to sit and take minutes, I refused. I

didn't want to be seen as a secretary, so we made taking minutes rotational. It was not easy, but I lobbied the executive, and they saw the point. I had a powerful team of gender-sensitive men, and that's how we started. So, with them, we first worked on our party document. We revised the constitution of the party and the structures of the party to accommodate Affirmative Action. Our proposals were adopted by the party NDC. Though we had adopted Affirmative Action in the party policy documents, the implementation was a nightmare. There was a strategy to limit the participation of women by locking them out of meetings. We devised a plan whereby the women would make noise until they were allowed in. I used to tell them, "I will hold the door for you, get under my arms and get in" and that's how we managed to implement Affirmative Action in LDP. Women comprised one-third representation in all the structures of the party. Today, we do not have problems having one-third in the party because our party transformed into the Orange Democratic Party (ODM) that we have today.

Question: Did you participate in amending the Political Parties Act?

Response: Yes, I am a founder member and one of the initial directors of the Centre for Multiparty Democracy (CMD), where I represented my party. We lobbied through our caucuses at CMD, based on our parties and women organisations. We wouldn't have managed without the Women Political caucuses and women organizations like Maendeleo ya Wanawake. They were our backup.

Question: Did you ever find your way back to the constitution review process after the initial process was disrupted?

Response: As I said, the first Bomas forum was disbanded, which stalled the process instantly. I participated in the second Bomas conference as the chairperson of the Technical Committee for ALGAK. I was lobbying for the "Local Government That We Want." We had a small booklet that guided our lobbying. I am happy that the devolved government reflects the majority of the wishes we had in our proposals.

Question: What challenges did you face as a woman?

Response: It's a big story. If my memory serves me right, even to get the women commissioners was a struggle. It was a challenge getting women commissioners due to external interference; some women were even taken to court. Women commissioners were strictly vetted, unlike their male counterparts. There was an attempt to divide women into rival camps of village versus urban women. They knew that once women

were separated, Affirmative Action would collapse. There were even slogans to depict rural women as illiterate to divide us. It was made to look like women in Nairobi and women from rural areas were so detached from each other's experiences that they would not speak for each other.

Question: How did you overcome these challenges?

Response: We had a working strategy. Women realised that the amplified differences were meant to divide them and make the movement too weak to defend the women-friendly proposals in the constitution. At Bomas, I can tell you, most of the work was done at night in secret meetings. That is when we looked for the caucuses such as the 'villagers' and the civil societies. The Maendeleo ya Wanawake also put us together to speak in one language. What I like most about women in political parties, then, is that we refused the classifications. If Mumbi was LDP and LDP was not talking to Democratic Party, we had an original caucus of people working in the offices of political parties, the secretariats. Mumbi Ngaru in the Liberal Democratic Party, Julia Ojiambo in KANU and Waithera for DP. Waithera was very, very popular; I don't know where she is now. There was also Happy-Gloria. We worked harmoniously to champion women agenda through our parties that, for all reasons, were rivals.

Question: What can you say about the state of the women's movement in the country?

Response: Sometimes, we just look at numbers, and of course, numbers are essential. As women, we have come a long way, and we still have a journey to take. A lot of capacity building has been going on since Bomas, but I think we still have a long way to go. From my point of view, we don't have a powerful women's movement like we used to have. This is my concern.

Question: What would you tell us makes you proud of your contribution to the women's movement?

Response: I am happy that my contribution led to increased women's representation in politics and other governance organs in the country. We may not have reached the one-third threshold. Still, we've risen from the time we used to have 7% representation of women in Parliament, and now we're at about 15-20, which is not a very bad thing. We still have to work hard and increase our representation.

Question: Please tell us about your current job.

Response: I am a political advisor to the former Prime Minister. In that office, I'm able to cover many counties in the country. What I've seen in the counties is growth at the grassroots level. That growth is accompanied by economic activities that are happening on the ground. I may not have the figures with me, but it is clear that businesses are thriving despite the challenges. Previously village markets closed at 5:30 because women had to get to their rural homes before darkness fell. Markets were not connected to the power grid, and they lacked water. Today, if you visit these markets, you find women are selling their wares at least up to 7pm because the lights are there. That is a significant achievement. The infrastructure, especially roads, makes fresh produce from farms get to the markets and fetch reasonable prices. You can see there's growth, and I think it's good for us as women.

Question: Here at the University of Nairobi, we have the Women Economic Empowerment Program. Which economic empowerment strategies can we borrow from you to empower women economically?

Response: I only talk about the Women Enterprise Fund. It is a good initiative by the government. Still, the problem is that that information is not trickling to the ground. Though the majority of women are working tirelessly, their economic up-lift is still wanting. Most of them need a soft loan to increase the wares they sell in the market stall, small business or kiosk. When you mention a fund started to support women businesses, they seem not to know how to get it. I cannot comprehend why people who disburse those facilities do not reach the grassroots woman. It is not enough to name a fund for women and allocate funds; equally, the intended beneficiaries must be accessed to benefit from the funds.

Question: Have you heard about Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) Fund?

Response: Yeah, those things are not on the ground, unfortunately.

Question: So, what do you recommend so that women can access devolved funds?

Response: Information is power. You will just have to put on your walking shoes, not sit in your offices. You must walk to where the women are. We've had too many capacity-building workshops for women in towns and at the national offices. It is time to go where they live.

Question: What can we borrow from your experience?

Response: Let me emphasise this point: You will have to leave your offices in Nairobi or wherever and walk to where the women are. You can give women funds, but nothing much can be achieved without a talk by the experts. The organizations, and officers managing the Women Enterprise Fund, must go down to where women are. They must understand the women's actual living conditions and package financial programmes that speak to their capacity and needs. This is not the time for boardrooms and workshops. We have to put on our walking shoes and walk to where the women are. Probably, if it is farming, put on the gumboots with them. Stay there for an extra day or two. Put on their rubber shoes and go to the garden with them. Change their thinking. This is the way to go.

Question: What lesson can we learn on mobilisation during the constitution-making process?

Response: I think we need a conversation, an excellent discussion about ourselves. I say this without any fear of being condemned. When women took political parties as the beginning and end of their struggle for empowerment, they lost it. This is because parties have their interests over and above women's quest for empowerment. I suggest that strong women in political parties rise again and do inter-parties consensus building to take women empowerment a notch higher.

Question: In your view, what is it that women need to do to re-energise the movement?

Response: We need a conversation. We need a serious discussion of 'what message we take down to the women. We must avoid falling into the trap set for us by men keen to sabotage women empowerment. Men like to associate women with political parties, especially when that association works against a woman's local profile. For example, when I commission a project in Kiambu, people are keen to associate me with the ODM, my political party, unlike my male politicians. In such events, I am likely to be introduced as, "*Huyu ni yule Mumbi wa ODM*" (This is Mumbi of the ODM party). They know too well that ODM is not a dominant party in Kiambu due to stereotypes popularised by local politicians. Once I am introduced like that, the 'ground' shifts suddenly. You begin to hear, '*Ametumwa na Raila*' (she has been sent by Raila). The same narrative affects a strong Jubilee woman operating in Nyanza. This explains why I insist that we change the conversation and a mindset that disadvantages women leaders through stereotypes and biased narratives.

Question: You are so passionate about changing the narrative. How do we go about it?

Response: We still have a lot of work for the women's movement and everybody in the country. Sometimes I get frustrated because it is like fighting the same battle 20 years later. I keep asking myself, "Why should my daughter fight the same battle she found me fighting? Is it that I failed to win the war?" While it is commendable that we have done so much, the struggle for gender equality and women empowerment is not yet won. Those who have moved up need to put on their walking shoes again and return to the trenches. There is a concern that the younger generation is not passionate about the struggle the way we were. This has to be corrected. Recently some ladies told me, "Mumbi don't feel very discouraged. You belonged to a generation that was trainable and that's why we have you. The young women we have today are not trainable." The utterance made me realise we have a generational issue.

We must change the strategy, listen to them and engage, not in large groups, but even on a one-to-one. I have a program with young people in their 20s, they just call me and say, 'we just want to come and have tea in your house, and 18 girls come and they sometimes ask me very difficult questions and I tell them 'I will say it as it is, so that you choose what to retain and what to discard. To induct young girls into the movement, we must be direct and say it as it is. We need to sit down with them and even allow them to cry if they have to. Allow them to say it and cry about the frustrations they go through. In our political party, I have such sittings. I allow young women to come, and I listen, and I share their experiences. My experience with young women is that contrary to the perception that they are not 'trainable' or interested in taking over the baton, it is the approach that has not worked. We need to review our strategies to include communicating with young women and inducting them to be young champions of the women's movement. It is possible.

Interviewer: Thank you very much Mumbi, it has been a session full of lessons for me.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A Conversation with Ms. Fatuma Hassan



“I am also happy that women have taken up openings created by the constitution to serve the country in various leadership positions. Women are finally coming out to compete for leadership opportunities as men. In the past, women were either silenced or rendered invisible. The new constitution has given women presence and voice”. ~ Fatuma Hassan

Biography

Born in Central Kenya in a town called Kiganjo, Fatuma began her career as a P1 teacher and later worked with the Oman Embassy as a Public Relations Officer. She is a founding member of the Democratic Party (DP). She joined the Second Liberation Movement with former President Mwai Kibaki in 1992. She holds that Women can create order in political parties by voting in reliable people and that women should also vote for more women to make a change. She was also at the forefront during the constitution-making process pursuing the inclusion of women’s issues into the constitution such as under representation in all decision-making organs. She presented the minorities at the Bomas of Kenya.

Interviewed by Beatrice Kamau and Gideon Muendo

Question: Fatuma, it is gratifying to know that your life reflects the

Kenyan women's struggle for political and economic empowerment. Your experiences in this long journey will inspire the younger generation to continue with the battle. That is why we are happy that you accepted to do this interview. Perhaps, you can start by telling us about your childhood, education, and work life.

Response: My name is Fatuma Hassan. I was born in Central Kenya in a town called Kiganjo. Do not confuse the two because when you say Kiganjo, sometimes people think I was born in the Police Training College. I was born in Kiganjo Town, not the college. My father was a businessman in Kiganjo Town from the 1940s. I think there were 15 families in that town, and it's still the same up to today. There was a police station and a small hospital, I remember. It is still nearly the same up to today, the way it was at that time. I went to school in Nyeri District. I joined the Teachers' Training College and qualified as a P1 teacher. I taught for some time before I left to take a course in Public Relations. I then worked with the Oman Embassy as a public relations officer. After some time, I joined politics and became a veteran politician.

Question: How did you become a politician?

Response: What inspired me to join politics is my life in Isiolo. It was a cosmopolitan town and district at that time. It is now known as Isiolo County. Several tribes were living in Isiolo: the Meru, Turkana, Somali, Borana and other tribes. Many as they were, these communities couldn't get political representation during elections. I decided to fight for all the communities in Isiolo to gain political representation. That was during the Moi regime. I can tell you it was difficult. Several times we were arrested or just followed wherever we went. We did not give up despite harassment by the state. In 1992, I joined the Second Liberation Movement with Mwai Kibaki. I believed Kibaki was an outstanding leader who could bring people together.

I switched to Kibaki's side and became a member of the Democratic Party (DP). I was one of the founding members of this party. When I joined the party, I met John Keen, Beth Mugo, Njenga Karume, and George Muhoho. Muhoho had left the priesthood and joined politics. He was working for the second liberation. The chair of our party was President Kibaki. I opted to work with this team. President Kibaki asked me to vie for the Kamukunji Constituency seat. I told him I had a mission to work in Isiolo, not

necessarily to get a seat but to make sure the people of Isiolo get equal access to political power. He allowed me to work in Isiolo. I worked at the national level with him to popularise the party, but my main job was in Isiolo. There was a lot of outcry in 1992 when I gave the nomination to the various tribes in Isiolo. I did not see any logic why a candidate from a single tribe with over 4,000 votes could not get the nomination because a few selfish individuals thought they had the right to lead. I asked them to vote for leaders who they thought would take them forward. In that way, we were able to get all the ethnic groups in Isiolo nominated. Due to my focus and selflessness, I changed the politics of Isiolo to date. No one tribe in Isiolo can claim to be in charge of leadership without consulting the rest. And that is what Kenya should be, I think.

Question: Did you vie in 1997?

Response: No, I did not vie. As I mentioned earlier, I chose to help the various communities in Isiolo. At that time, I was in charge of nominating candidates all over the country. In Isiolo, I ensured that the county seats, then called civic seats, were divided equitably among the various communities. If somebody from any other tribe wanted to become a member of parliament, they were not victimised because they did not belong to a particular tribe. We made sure that everybody had access to political leadership. They were all free to contest without being discriminated against based on ethnic background.

Question: Were you able to bring women on board?

Response: We were able to bring many women on board. In Isiolo alone, two women were nominated.

Question: What challenges did you face when you were bringing various communities together?

Response: Normally, there are local gatekeepers, the men. They think they must be the ones representing the people. Such people made a lot of noise. Mwai Kibaki was the chairman of DP. He told them he was bringing service to the people of Isiolo. He summoned me, together with the traditional gatekeepers who were complaining, to a consultative meeting. At the meeting, I was challenged to defend myself, which I successfully did. Mwai Kibaki concurred with me that I was not at fault since everybody had the right to contest of any part in Kenya.

Question: What did you do in the Second Liberation?

Response: My role was to fight the administration of President Moi because there was no freedom of expression at all. Under that administration, the representation of women in the country's governance was negligible, almost nonexistent. Apart from the Kenyatta government, I don't remember any significant women representation in the Moi government. Maybe Zipporah Kittony, but beyond Hon. Kittony, there were other women, you know. In a Parliament of 259 members, imagine there was only one woman. None other woman was nominated or elected. You can see that women were not represented in that administration.

Question: How did you, as a woman, manage to assert yourself in the central management of DP?

Response: It is because President Kibaki, as the Chair of DP, and his colleagues, who were senior in the party, were not against women taking leadership positions. The party promoted freedom of expression and equal access to leadership positions by women and men in Kenya. The party did not discriminate against women. Women occupied senior leadership positions, including the Executive Board. We were four women on the Executive Board of the party: Rose Waruhiu, Beth Mugo, a lady from Mombasa, and myself.

Question: Which positions were you women leaders holding in the management of the party?

Response: We were holding Deputy Secretary's position, Assistant Organising Secretary and the women portfolios.

Question: Kindly, tell us why people call you 'Fatuma wa DP'?

Response: I was given that name because before we were joined by the lady from Mombasa, I was the only Muslim woman at the party's top echelon. I was representing the minorities from Upper Eastern and North Eastern. At that time, all the people from Upper Eastern and North Eastern were in KANU. They used to call KANU 'Mama na Baba'. Even though they had received a raw deal from the KANU government over the years, they strongly believed in the independence party. They didn't know anything else apart from KANU. In fact, when we went to tell them to join DP, which was an opposition party, they would run away from us. They thought that if they talked to us, they would

be arrested. We visited them several times and explained that they stood to gain more through DP than KANU. Gradually, they started joining the second liberation, especially the elderly men.

Question: What was your role in the Democratic Party?

Response: John Keen, the Secretary-General and myself made sure we had women representation all over the country. We made sure that we treated women fairly to appreciate the changes we wanted for the country. I was, at that time, a compelling public speaker in political rallies. I would move audiences with my articulation of issues.

Question: Please share with us your role in the constitution-making process.

Response: Just as the constitution review process commenced, we started offering civic education all over the country. We worked under various political and religious bodies to make sure women understood what changes we wanted and what changes they also preferred. We wanted to change what came from the *wananchi*. We intensified civic education by highlighting what was wrong with the old constitution, what needed to be changed and what the women wanted to be included in the document.

Question: Briefly share with us your recollection of some of the critical issues that came from women?

Response: Women raised issues of under-representation in all decision making organs, including employment and political representation. We worked with Maendeleo Ya Wanawake to access the grassroots movement of women.

Question: What can you remember about the constitution-making process in Bomas?

Response: I was in Bomas as an observer, representing the minorities. Whenever we saw things were going wrong, we brought it to the attention of the commissioners. We told them 'this is not the right way,' because we already had a draft on what people wanted. We informed them, 'this is what the people want and if you go this way it is wrong.' The commissioners listened to us and considered our input in the process. We were the defenders of the voices of the larger Kenyan community that was not present in Bomas.

Question: In your assessment, how did political parties support women's participation in the constitution-making process?

Response: Bomas brought together two parties: the citizens through their representatives and the government. I was on the side of the citizens. We made sure that the government does not abandon or hijack the initiative. Whenever we noticed laxity or excesses on the parties at Bomas, we convened a press conference to call out the guilty party. Fortunately, there was always goodwill from the leadership of President Kibaki, Prime Minister Raila Odinga and all key leaders.

Question: Were you involved in the negotiations to ensure gender equality is included in the new constitution?

Response: I played a significant role with Prof. Wanjiku Kabira to ensure gender equality was entrenched in the basic law. I can sincerely tell you that Prof. Kabira played a substantial role in ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in the constitution. In fact, these women leaders who advocated for gender inclusion, whether it was Hon. Martha Karua, or Hon. Ngilu, relied extensively on Prof. Kabira's knowledge, skills and foresight. She would even write speeches for women leaders to ensure they did not miss out on the critical issues during their presentations. Prof. Kabira had an NGO which trained women leaders on gender issues. Most of the delegates had passed through that training. We also did a lot of Civic Education. The NGO was called the

Response: Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD), known simply as, The Centre. That NGO helped women get positions by giving us ideas on which jobs were available and which positions would be entrenched in the constitution.

Question: All this time, you were working with DP?

Response: Initially, I was in DP and as you are probably aware, we moved to NARC when several parties merged to form the grand coalition which ultimately formed the government.

Question: Comment on the contribution of men in supporting women's issues during the constitution review process?

Response: Yes, I remember there were men of goodwill that supported the inclusion of women's perspectives and relevant safeguards in the constitution. There was much

political goodwill from the leaders, both from President Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga. At that time, there were several influential NGOs. Such Civil Society organisations (CSOs) supported the women's cause.

I don't know where they disappeared to after the promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya 2010. I can tell you that NGOs were influential during the struggle for the second liberation. The CSOs were led by some of the brilliant and gender-sensitive people like Kiraitu Murungi. All those NGOs, apart from The Centre of Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, were headed by men. These men supported the empowerment of women.

Question: At what stage do you think women's influence in governance was at its best?

Response: Women of Kenya became vocal and influential under the NARC government because President Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga supported women's issues. The two leaders, for example, nominated women in both the Central Government and local government. They also gave women positions such as Ambassadors and other top positions in the civil service. President Kibaki also introduced an ambitious initiative to nominate about 50 women. However, the women themselves fought the idea. At that time, the Minister for Justice was Martha Karua.

Question: What are the key gains for women in the constitution?

Response: The 30% gender representation rule. Men and women are now equal and can contest for any seat during elections. I think it is the women themselves that are lagging. If women vote for fellow women, I think they can get it. The majority of the voters are women. I worked as a director for the presidential race from 1992 to 2007. I found out that the most loyal people are the women, followed by the youth when it comes to voting. They are so reliable.

Question: As a woman leader from marginalised communities, have things changed?

Response: Things have changed a lot. When fighting for the second liberation, there were all sorts of abuse from the people who thought we were doing the wrong thing to talk to the public. It was a problem for some men to see a woman speaking confidently in public. It is not religion that bars women from leadership; it is ignorance or intimidation by male leaders who do not want to be overshadowed by powerful women. But now, I am delighted. I can even see how they elected a woman MP in Garissa, Sofia Abdi, in Ijara. Many women have been nominated. The Women Representative seat in

every County is a positive step because it ensures that more women get to parliament. This has helped a lot in addressing gender parity concerns.

Question: What challenges did you face in promoting gender equality and women empowerment?

Response: At that time, some leaders did not want other tribes to have their representatives. They were driven by self-interest. Later, they came to know that once you elect someone from this other side, you can discover a better leader than a person who is not from your tribe. They can be able to help you, and this promotes harmony. The same applied to electing women as leaders. Once a lady was given a chance, people noticed that they were capable and supportive of everybody. We experienced a lot of challenges then because some leaders did not want that.

Question: What are the challenges you faced as a woman?

Response: At times, some men did not want any women near them. There were women from our minority tribes who also could not stand a woman holding an office. This problem was also in DP. There was a time women locked all the women leaders' offices. We fought back, and the Chairman of DP, Mwai Kibaki and Secretary-General, John Keen, came and opened our offices and warned our adversaries not to interfere with us again. We encountered other multiple challenges. There were times my name was maligned for no apparent reason. People are enlightened these days, but at that time, people were not so critical. That time men used insults and abusive words to scare women leaders off, but we persevered.

Question: Why was there a strong women's movement during the constitution-making process compared to the current situation? Is it that women celebrated the gains and relaxed?

Response: Honestly, the women's movement is not very strong as before. In my view, we lost it when women leaders ignored the women in the rural areas who are the majority. If they fought for women's rights the way we did, they would have gained more. Seemingly, women leaders have forgotten that they must fight for the majority of women who are still disadvantaged in many ways in rural areas of Kenya.

Question: What is your take on Affirmative Action and women's representation in leadership positions?

Response: The two-third gender rule has not been met as provided for in the constitution. The law has only been applied to the County Assemblies. The National Assembly, the Senate and all leadership positions in government are yet to comply with the two-thirds gender rule. It follows that even with the gains entrenched in the constitution, women are still shortchanged.

Question: What, in your assessment, are the most significant gains for women in the constitution?

Response: The current constitution provides for equal opportunities in education and also employment. I am also happy that women have taken up openings created by the constitution to serve the country in various leadership positions. Women are finally coming out to compete for leadership opportunities as men. In the past, women were either silenced or rendered invisible. The new constitution has given women presence and voice.

Question: Share your thinking on the current status of women's economic empowerment and how it can be enhanced.

Response: I do not think women are fully economically empowered. It is only a few women who own a few businesses here and there. As you know, in Africa, the men are in charge of a family's wealth. Women are not fully empowered in that respect. In my view, women should be given equal opportunities in business by enhancing their access to cheap finance. Even though women-friendly facilities are available, women cannot exploit them due to a lack of collateral. These are bottlenecks that must be addressed to empower women economically.

Question: What are your views about the money set aside for women by the government?

Response: I have heard about them. That is an excellent initiative by the government. My concern is how that money gets to economically disadvantaged women. I hear that women must access that money through banks where interest rates are high. If that is the case, then the facilities may not be helping women.

Question: What about where the government has set aside some money?

Response: We need to make sure that we get that 30%, because it might be in writing but do we get it as women? We need to find out. I doubt it because, first and foremost, they don't have the finance to do the business. They also do not have people to guarantee them. So the facility ends up benefitting other people who are already economically empowered. I wish the government had an independent institution to disburse these funds to women at the lower levels of society. The government should make sure that funds allocated for women's economic empowerment are accessible to all women, especially women at the grassroots. I do not think grassroots women have access to those things.

Question: In your view, has the Women Enterprise Fund addressed the concerns you have?

Response: I have heard about the Women Enterprise Fund. This is the same fund taken to banks at high interest rates. The government has a lot of goodwill in supporting women economically. The problem comes in the administration of the fund. It is channelled through banks that charge a higher interest rate, thereby scaring away economically vulnerable women that it is meant to liberate from poverty and dependence. These are the concerns that the government should look into.

Question: What specifically do you desire the government to do?

Response: The government should make sure that this money is available to the common woman at the rate they can repay. The same applies to the Youth Fund also because there are women who are also youth. The outcry is about the interest rates that banks are charging and how they recover the loan in case of default. The government should create more awareness of these funds so that women come out and apply for them. The interest rates should also be minimal.

Question: Are you still in the leadership of DP?

Response: I'm not in DP anymore. You know what is happening in Kenya right now. There are no permanent or principled political parties, which is very bad for us. People keep hopping from one political party to another. Politicians and political parties are not working for the good of the ordinary person. They are working to benefit politicians who stand to gain from electioneering. In the subsequent election, the politician would hop again to another party, searching for electability and the benefits that come

with it. You never get to know any objective reason why politicians defect from their parties. Unprincipled party-hopping has created chaos in our political system.

Question: What would you tell women leaders keen to participate actively in political parties?

Response: Women can restore discipline in political parties because they are disciplined. Indeed, women can make a difference. I keep on asking myself, “Why don’t we have parties like other advanced countries? Like America and Britain?” The parties that have been there from time immemorial. In those countries, it is the ideologies of the party that people vote for and not the leaders. But if you keep hopping from one party to the other following a leader, when will you learn about principles and ideologies? We should be principled in political party affiliations. KANU has been there for a long time. Although we may not subscribe to its doctrines, KANU is still vibrant, unlike DP and FORD, almost dead. Even if DP is still there, it is fragile. I say that because nobody is talking about DP, nobody will join DP today. We need parties that are consistent and principled. Women can create order in political parties by not voting in people who hop from one party to another because they are unreliable people. Women should also vote for more women to make a change. If women are to vote for men, let those men candidates be youth; at least, they are responsive to women’s issues.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Fatuma.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A Conversation With Ms. Daisy Amdany



“Lobbying is one of the strategies that we used to enable us to work with the women on the inside. We were able to defend women’s gains with goodwill, commitment and donor support. Political gate-way is very important in being able to expand and secure women’s interests”.

~ Daisy Amdany

Biography

Born in Nairobi, Daisy was raised and educated in the city before proceeding for further studies in Switzerland. On her return to the country, Daisy encountered discrimination based on gender at the workplace. Her story demonstrates how effective advocacy around gender issues can facilitate policy change to recognise, promote and protect women’s concerns, especially in the Constitution and other enabling legislations. Daisy’s role in the constitution-making process confirms the centrality of activism and informed advocacy in pushing through and protecting women’s gains in the Constitution.

Interviewed by: Wambui Kanyi

Question: Good afternoon, Daisy?

Response: Good afternoon

Question: It is a pleasure to meet you after many years. Thank you for accepting this interview. The University of Nairobi Women's Economic Empowerment program is conducting research on women and economic empowerment. In this particular project, we are focusing on women's role in the constitution-making process because we want to see how the strategies the women used then can be applied to promote women's economic empowerment. It is our hope that your contributions will help in achieving the project goals and objectives.

Response: Okay, you have my consent.

Question: Thank you, Daisy. I have a few questions for you and if any of them is not clear, you are welcome to ask for clarification. Perhaps, we can start by you telling us about yourself.

Question: Okay, I am Daisy Amdany. I was born here in Nairobi some years back.

I went to school in Nairobi not far from here, in Westlands a place called Green Gates. I then joined Consolata primary before proceeding to Loreto Msongari for secondary school. After high school, I went to Nairobi polytechnic for an Institutional Management course. From the polytechnic, I went to Switzerland for hotel management. Before coming back to Kenya, I stayed there and worked for a while in the hotel industry. However, I fell sick while in Switzerland and decided to come back to Kenya. That is really how I got into advocacy issues to address discrimination against women. Until then, I never really encountered discrimination against women. We were not raised with those distinctions. We were just children. When I grew up, I had the privilege to learn in a high school managed by nuns. We were never conditioned to imagine that we were lesser beings than boys.

The nuns taught us to excel and reach the sky in everything. I was shocked when I returned to Kenya after my stay abroad. After college, I had the privilege of working in an establishment managed by women. The owner (also the manager) of the

establishment, which is a four-star hotel, was a woman. It means that all along, there were women exercising leadership in management. I believed that there were no limitations based on sex until I came back home. Of course, I started looking for work within the hotel industry because that is what I studied. The first shock I encountered was during an interview for the job I had applied for. The manager who was interviewing me said that he would not give me the job because I was a woman. I was very shocked. I was like, “you’re not going to give me the job because I am a woman?” And he said that employing a woman was very difficult, especially a senior position similar to the one I had applied for because I was still very young. He said, “You will go and get married. You will want maternity leave.” Instead, the manager said they would offer me housekeeping, which I did not apply for. In yet another place where I had gone for a job interview, I was told that they would only take me as an intern. I was like, “I have graduated, I have work experience. Why would you take me as an intern?” But later on, someone told me that is because they have an attitude towards women. I decided that, the hotel industry was not the industry I would work for here in Kenya. That is why I went to work in a firm that was doing advertising as an assistant media manager. At that point, just by coincidence, I discovered that the women were being paid less for the same work done. I found that quite strange. I remember talking to the director, and he was like “don’t bring those things of badgering here”. I didn’t know much about badgering at that time. Now, we were having a conversation with a good friend of mine, Njoki Ndungu, who is now a Lady Justice (Judge of the Supreme Court), on discrimination of women in the workplace. It happened that Justice Njoki had just opened the Kenya chapter of Law and Development in Africa. She told me, “you need to come and see because this is a real problem that women face all the time.” When I visited the organisation run by Njoki, I came face-to-face with reality on how women and girls were discriminated against, and I was like no, this is wrong. And, that is how I got ushered into women’s rights.

I remember when the first time I went to West Pokot, I met these women who shared with me their experiences. It sounded to me that their life was like a punishment. They talked about how they were denied the right to go to school, how they were circumcised, and forced into early marriage. I couldn’t imagine a life like that. I realised that I had lived such a sheltered life because, in life, you do not choose where to be born. And I was like it could have even been me, I could have been one of these women here and I often wondered what made these women tick. I wondered, what talents and gifts we denied them by excluding them; oppressing them; and denying them the

opportunity to go to school or to have an expanded worldview. Later on, I went on to study a church ministry because I was also interested in spiritual matters at some point. I got interested in preaching, and I thought I wanted to preach, so that's like a mix-up of my experiences. My experiences have influenced my work.

Question: Now, having encountered firsthand discrimination against women and then the observation among the Pokot community, tell us about your role in the constitution-making. For example, which organisations did you work with? Who are some of the women leaders you engaged with?

Response: I ended up getting involved in the constitution-making process because of the women leaders I was already working with to address discrimination against girls and women. I was already involved with a number of women's organisations in conducting advocacy around women's issues. Some of the organisations I worked with included the Women's Political Alliance and the Women's Political Caucus. Another important organisation was the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development that really brought together the women's rights organisations to begin the advocacy around women's issues in the constitution. So, really that is how I ended up getting involved in the constitution-making. That is how I met people like Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, people like Wambui Kanyi, Rose Waruhiu, Cecilia Kimemia, Alicen Chelaite, Prof Julie Adhiambo, because all these women were working together.

The Women Political Alliance brought the women's rights organisations together and equipped us with the skills to go out and do the advocacy on safeguarding the women's gains in the Constitution. By that time, the Bomas process was already threatened by the politics of the day. Kanu had just been defeated in an election, and the incoming government seemed to be satisfied with the fact that they were in government. So the Bomas process started getting interference from politics. Finally, the government ended up walking out of the Bomas process. The women had done so well in terms of organising themselves by making sure that the delegates from the districts were involved. Moi, of course, had insisted that only Maendeleo ya Wanawake could nominate women participants but women's rights organisations scuttled that idea. By that time, Maendeleo ya Wanawake was an affiliate of KANU.

I remember, Wambui, you people you used to go and sit with delegates at night and explain to them why it was important to safeguard the women gains and not to give way. At some point, I remember some of the members of parliament were

telling rural women that some of the positions that were being created would not benefit local women as they would be taken by queens. I remember how it took the efforts of the women's rights organisations to educate women delegates that it was important to stick together to defeat the propaganda of those keen to scuttle women's empowerment. The push to keep women united helped in keeping women's agenda alive in the entire constitution-making process. Because of their unity of purpose, women's issues were passed by acclamation in what was known as *kura ya makelele* (*the noise vote*). After all the effort we put in at Bomas, the draft constitution was rejected at the referendum. When the draft constitution was rejected at the Bomas, the women did not give up. We sustained a strong push for contentious issues to be identified and some minimum reforms to be carried out in time for the subsequent general elections. When parliamentarians agreed on minimum reforms, they identified various groups, except women. They decided to do the multi-sectoral forum on the minimum reforms. They said that every sector was to ensure that at least a third of its delegates to that multi-sectoral forum were women. We said no to the proposal and insisted that the women must join the forum as a sector. Prof, Wanjiku Kabira brought women together and put a strong team to look after women's interests in the constitution-making process.

Our chief strategy was lobbying. You remember Hon. Martha Karua at that time was the Minister for Justice. We relied on advocacy to ensure that the women got their space. Finally, the process was opened up to accommodate the women and we went in. I think you were among them, Wambui, Faith, myself and a few others. We were eight in total and our only role was to safeguard the women's interests. We said that whatever the case, whatever the politics our role was just to ensure that politicians do not tamper with the women's issues as contentious issues. You can remember that they had actually identified the women's issues as contentious issues particularly the affirmative action and the district seats. We wanted to ensure that whatever came out of the Bomas for the women remained intact regardless of the politics. Immediately after Bomas, when the talks collapsed, there was what they were calling consensus building. They said they were going to do consensus building because the NARC administration had committed to deliver a new constitution in one hundred days. The consensus-building was to create a document that was to be subjected to a referendum in 2005. The idea was to tease out non-contentious issues that could form part of the constitution. Hon. Charity Ngiru and Hon. Cecil Mbarire told us that the politicians were actually planning to remove some of the women's issues. One of the proposals that Bonaya Godana brought up was that instead of a third being given

to women 35% of seats be reserved for women, youth and people with disability to share among themselves.

Women had a plan to sustain the pressure to protect women's gains. They used to go to parliament to lobby for support, and sometimes, they went there for demonstrations. Politicians suddenly moved the talks from parliament to Naivasha. This caught us unawares. We did not know what to do but we had good allies like Lucy Githaiga and Betty Murungi who energised us to follow the politicians to Naivasha. We got into cars and drove to Naivasha. The Members of Parliament were very shocked to find us there in the morning. They were asking us: "What are you doing here?" We told them we were not leaving until they assure us they would not touch women's gains. The MPs changed the venue of their meeting again. They argued that Naivasha was too close to Nairobi. So, they flew to Kilifi at the Coast. The idea was to go where women would not locate them easily. Women did not give up. We followed the politicians to Kilifi. We went to Action Aid, Lucy Githaiga was there. They had the Gender and Governance Programme (GGP) program. We explained to them that eroding women's gains in the Constitution would distress women after all the effort that was invested in the Bomas process. We had formed what was called the national women consensus-building group. And so, they flew us to Mombasa, and we were booked in the same hotel with the parliamentary committee that had moved there. The Parliamentary Committee members were very upset. They even told the hotel to throw us out. They said that we could not stay in the same hotel. We moved out of the hotel but planned a visit to lobby them. When we went back to start lobbying, we found riot police officers waiting at the gate. We thought robbers had targeted our MPs. Little did we know the policemen had been invited to keep us away. We called Hon. Charity Ngilu, who was inside the hotel, and she was furious. "How dare you call the riot police for the women?" She threatened to walk out and usher us into the hotel. We were allowed into the hotel. Eventually, we actually succeeded in safeguarding women's gains because we had allies among the politicians who were telling us what was happening. Luckily enough, some of our reliable informers were male politicians. One of our strongest supporters was the late Hon. Simeon Nyachae, the chairman of the select committee. Lobbying is one of the strategies that we used to enable us to work with the women on the inside. We were able to defend women's gains with goodwill, commitment and donor support.

After the referendum, the women were split, which was very unfortunate. We tried our best not so much to support the referendum but to tell women that it was important for our gains because the politicians everybody was sticking with their issues. The

women were split along party and ethnic lines. You remember we even had a meeting at the KICC on women's issues. We resolved to stand with our issues so that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Of course, the Wako draft was defeated, but we were able to stick with our issues and safeguard the women's gains. Thereafter, we went into a multi-sectoral engagement where there was still an attempt to marginalise women by identifying the women's issues as contentious issues. We went in there and insisted that none of the women's issues should be altered. Although the talks collapsed, at least we ended up safeguarding our gains. I think we succeeded because of collaboration between the women who were in the legislature and men who supported the women's issues and used the women's rights organizations to raise advocacy.

Question: You have mentioned some of the women's organisations and some of the women in the legislature at that time. Were there other women organisations that you worked with other than those in the legislature? Were there men as well other than the male Parliamentarians?

Response: I think that many women who came participated in the Bomas process as delegates and many others who came through the Maendeleo caucus ended up being serious champions. I remember people like Happy Gloria and Julliet. There were a number of women lobbyists. I cannot remember some names because of time. We used to meet as women leaders at what we now Multimedia University of Kenya (MMU). We also had young women from the universities like Jacky, the ones who used to do the math for us. We had members from all the current 47 counties. It is interesting that Maendeleo supported the women's quest for an inclusive constitution.

Question: You have told us that you got involved in the process during the period of the Bomas or what we called the national constitutional conference, and that is when you got involved in terms of safeguarding the women's gains. What did you do? You have given us quite a number of the strategies that you used.

Response: Well, the women themselves knew exactly what they wanted. Let me say that it was not a case of telling the women what they wanted. Women knew what they wanted. And it was very shocking to see how the exclusion of women was systemic. The state did not seem to recognise the place of women in society. Women were known either through their fathers, or their husbands. If you did not have a father and your husband was dead; it was through your brothers, if you had no brother,

then it was through the chief or pastors (religious leaders). The state did not accord women the right of agency. If you were leaving the country, as a woman, you would need to provide immigration with the letter from your husband saying that you are not kidnaping the children or that you have been given permission to travel with the children. Discrimination against women seemed systemic.

In one of the events where we were demonstrating outside the Parliament, I remember one of the askari asked me, “does your husband know that you’re coming here to disturb leaders?” According to the laypersons, women were not supposed to go near Parliament. If you went there, you were going to disturb leaders in their work. You should be at home and seek the permission of your husband. We had a constitution that did not recognise women as citizens with equal rights. It was broken down into many segments: One you could inherit, the culture and traditions, and these are the things we have always been telling the women. You’re not discriminated against because you are from a certain tribe. You are discriminated against because you are a woman. Women were considered as property. You know it is like a cow owning a farm. So, women were objectified such that they couldn’t inherit from their parents or husbands. Opening a bank account as a woman was either through your parents, your husband, and you needed permission to handle money. I remember that even one of the women from Tiati said that when they would work or sell something and get the money, this money would be taken away from them because a woman was not supposed to have money. That whole system of exclusion was what women wanted to throw off the yoke of oppression that was infested in every area of their engagement. And it didn’t matter whether it was at the rural level where you were subjected to cultural discrimination and exclusions, some of which were devastating. If you were not married it was like you were a nobody. You didn’t have status. If you were widowed, it was even worse. You were discriminated against or inherited. If you refused to be inherited together with the goods, you were disinherited together with your children. You become destitute. You were rendered destitute unless you proved making contributions to the household. Many women were left destitute. These women told their stories. When we look at what we call the women’s gains today, we look at the issues that really safeguard women’s rights. One is the recognition of women as citizens born with equal rights as their male counterparts: equal rights in marriage, property ownership, land rights, and the right not to be discriminated either through education. Previously, women were penalised for being mothers, you were to decide to be a mother or to work, or the penalties that came with it is that your reproductive rights were threatened. I think that the women really knew what they wanted and that you can see it adequately captured in the constitution.

Question: Now, what strategies did the women employ to approach different categories of people as they tried to push for their agendas?

Response: Oh, Yes, they did. I think one of the best strategies that we used was information sharing and awareness creation. We managed to create awareness among fellow women from rural communities because they were targets of manipulation by men to divide the women's movement. We succeeded in this effort. Another strategy we used was identifying the hostile members and devising strategies to approach them. We strategised to lobby Members of Parliament who were difficult by sending women who knew how to talk to them. It was our duty to build understanding with difficult MPs through persuasion and effective advocacy. Our other valuable strategy was keeping strong allies faithful to our agenda. This helped us to deal with a few women who were not for the women's schedule. Such women were the most disappointing lot. They were negotiating downwards. They were saying different things from what we were saying. We also organised ourselves by bringing in quite a large group of women to be able to physically demonstrate and vocalise women's power. The women would say, "Here we are. This is how we are represented. Anybody telling you different things is speaking for themselves because this group represents a cross-section of the Kenyan women." I also think that having men speak positively in support of women's issues was a major strength. Some of our strong male allies include Hon. Paul Muite, Hon. Kiraitu Murungi and Hon. Simeon Nyachae. The late Mutula Kilonzo and Kipkalia Kones were also in the league of our strong male allies. These male MPs spoke in places where their voices needed to be heard. Simeon Nyachae, who was the chairman, insisted that the women be included. Remember that they had refused for the women to come and present their issues before the committee and that actually gave us good mileage. Nyachae became now the strong emissary to carry our plan in the House.

Question: My other question is, as women tried to influence the constitution-making process, did they encounter any challenges?

Response: Yes, politics, you know, and I think this is also something that we need to recognise because if we are going to overcome, we must be able to also see our weaknesses. The politics that we saw taking centre stage on the national landscape infiltrated the women's movement. A lot of it was tribal in nature so if a certain political leader was being vilified, it became difficult for women close to that politician to be perceived differently.

So, I think that is also problematic and I can see it today also where women are divided not even around their issues. Still, they are divided along with the male political elite formations so that they cannot come together and say that we, as women, don't care about what you people are fighting about, these are our issues. I think that also saw the weakening of women's lobbying because the women were able to safeguard a lot of their gains until the divisions emerged. We saw it in the commission. We saw those divisions, but they were not divisions based on ideology or disagreement around what the women wanted; no, it was political in nature, which also carried a tribal tone. So, I think those are some of the challenges we started seeing in fighting for our rights: it was like sabotage.

Question: Okay, and now that was political, were there other challenges maybe even among the women themselves beyond the politics and ethnicity?

Response: I think some of the challenges women faced were also a backlash against women themselves within their homes. Some of the women who were real champions ended up also facing quite a lot of backlash in their homes because they were seen as not being 'good' women. I remember one of them a great champion, ended up having serious domestic issues and was even beaten. She was subjected to domestic violence, and she was kicked out of her own matrimonial home. The subjugation of women and women being put down has been concealed by calling such women 'good women' while those who agitate for their rights are perceived as 'bad women.' These dichotomies have been employed by society to divide and intimidate women from pursuing their dreams for a free and better society in which their dignity as persons is recognised and respected. Women who agitate for women's rights are branded as those who want to take over power from men. They want to take over the roles of men who in turn begin to fear that women are being emasculated. I think that also is a problem because such insecure men put up determined resistance. I remember when we came back from Mombasa, and we were at the station waiting for our luggage, Hon. Gideon Konchella said, "Oh my goodness, if the women who are coming to Parliament are like you people, then we have killed ourselves." So, the fear of strong women who know their rights, women who know what they want, is seen as a threat. I think that many women have faced backlash because of threats, especially in rural areas. Politicians also use the strategy of demonizing strong women. So, they want women to send the weak and ill-informed women that they can manipulate. "Don't bring us strong women, don't bring us women who can hold the ground. Bring us women with whom we can work with. I think we see it even today after the space has been thrown wide open. We now

have the women who are now holding the mantle for women's rights. Some of them are still manipulated into supporting the men and their status.

Question: And when you look at The Constitution of Kenya 2010, what are some of the most important gains contained in the document?

Response: For me, the greatest gain is recognising the idea that the people are sovereign, and that power emanates from us people and not from them, the duty bearers. The sovereignty of the people is supreme, just as the supremacy of the Constitution. This means that person is subject to the constitution whether a citizen or duty bearer. For me, that is one of the greatest gains that we have gotten in the Constitution because up until then, the sovereign seemed to be the leader. Whereas The Constitution of Kenya 2010 is not that easy to amend and all persons are subject to the rule of law. Another gain in the new Constitution is that it makes the participation of the people in major decisions mandatory. Public participation is now the norm because the people are sovereign. We are supposed to be actively involved in the governance of our country by monitoring how we are governed. It is also our responsibility to uphold the rule of law as citizens and for me, that speaks a lot because Kenyans like to lament a lot. Voting in elections is part of citizens participation in determining their governance system, whether economic governance, social or political. For me, political governance is central because it is at the political level that many decisions are made, legislations are passed, resources are allocated, budget is done, division of revenue, prioritisation of projects, all these things are done at the legislative or executive level.

This explains why women must be involved in politics. It is where decisions are made. The first election under the new Constitution brought in more women than we ever had in independent Kenya. This essentially put the women at the centre of the change that needs to happen because for all the things to be resolved, whether it is cultural issues, political issues, social issues, they will be resolved through legislative programs, policies, and budgets. The constitution puts women at the centre of the change that needs to happen. Ever since we got more women into Parliament, we have actually seen many laws that have been enacted to secure women's interests such as the Domestic Violence Act, the Marital Property Act, and you know it is the women who actually started agitating for these laws. Still, they are the ones who brought a bill to the House on food security to avoid this perpetual situation where Kenyans are dying of hunger. Putting women at the whole level of governance, that for me, is significant.

So, the recognition that women have equal rights and opportunities such as the right to inherit property, to own property to live anywhere, and to inherit even your parents show the enduring gains of the new Constitution.

The right to marital property and equal rights to look after children because we know how men have abandoned women. We know the majority of women are raising children in single-family-headed households where men have abandoned the woman and the child. So even when you look at it from an economic perspective, women were economically marginalised and denied the rights to even economic empowerment because they are denied one of the most economic critical factors of production, which is land and land ownership. Land could either be used by women for tilling because they do most of the labour - women provide about 70-80% of the labour. Because they don't own the land, they don't have the say over how the productive resources from that are utilized.

So, you will find that while they provide all farm labour, women are so poor. They have the opportunity now to own and inherit the land. Still, aside from that, the state should actively promote programs that will address the marginalisation, which is not just political. Often, when we talk about marginalization, we look at politics, and there has been a lot of focus on the political angle. Political gate-way is very important in being able to expand and secure women's interests. The government has a responsibility to look into the issue of the exclusion of women again. Cultural, economic, or political, programs must be put in place to address the challenges women have faced historically including emerging obstacles. I believe that women who have access to credit can become more productive. Hon. Ngilu has been championing easy credit facilities for women. During one of her campaigns, Hon. Ngilu said that she would want a commitment from the two principals, that when they come to power, 30% of all procurement opportunities would go to women entrepreneurs.

Question: Thank you, Daisy. My next question is linked to that in terms of the strategies that you told us women used to mobilise. What lessons can we learn from the way women mobilised themselves and negotiated during the Constitution-making?

Response: I think the best lesson that we can learn is that there is power in unity. If we agree on something and we move together as one even if there are dissenting voices, we can do a lot more. If women work together, they will form a strong force. Two, women must keep male allies closer. We need to have male allies because

Interviewer: Thank you very much, Daisy, for your contributions to the information you have given us. We appreciate your time, and we are sure the information you have given us will go a long way in meeting the objectives of this program. We look forward to continuing working together towards women's economic emancipation for women's economic empowerment. So, thank you very much on behalf of the University of Nairobi WEE-Hub.

Daisy: Thank you, Wambui; it's my pleasure.

QUOTABLE QUOTES FROM THE PATHFINDERS

i. On Leadership

“Leaders come and go. If people know that leaders come and go, there would be no crime, no pressure, no anger, no grudge and anything. They would serve faithfully and be prepared to hand over the baton to the next leader”. ~ **Hon. Jael Mbogo.**

“When a woman is in a position of leadership and decision making, at whatever level, they need to ask themselves: what have I done to contribute to my community, especially girls and women?” ~ **Hon. Martha Karua.**

“If we nominated a woman, we expect them to properly use the opportunity by showing themselves to the community and showing their expertise to increase women leaders”. ~ **Idah Odinga.**

“I teach the ideals of the Constitution, which includes affirmative action, women empowerment, the history of the women’s movement in the country, the need for realisation of women empowerment as required by the Constitution. My students, both women and men are pretty vibrant. I am happy to state that men will have shortly have different attitudes towards women. When you explain the need for women’s empowerment, they understand quickly and appreciate it. I teach the Feminist theory, the Social Foundation of Law, and women’s role in development.” ~ **Dr. Nancy Baraza.**

“There are ordinarily many streams that converge and form a big river. Though we all started from the periphery, along the way, women congregated at the centre. We considered having many groups a strength because we ultimately agreed on issues central to all women of Kenya. That is how women approached the constitution-making process. We were pretty confident that being the most significant population in the country, we deserved to participate actively in the country’s governance and other spheres of life.” ~ **Ambassador Rukia Subow.**

ii. Collaboration and Working Together with Men

“Men cannot continue walking on one leg. They must bring in women on board to walk with two legs.” ~ **Nyerere** at Arusha Conference.

“Let us allow women to do what I usually call radical surgery to bring back dignity to all Kenyans by slaying the devil of greed” ~ **Hon. Beatrice Elachi**.

“Let’s also admit that talent resides in both men and women. Let’s open doors to tapping the best talents in this country from both genders”. ~ **Hon. Martha Karua**.

“If you are not where the policy is being made, you know you can only be a beggar”.
~ **Prof. Wanjiku Kabira**.

iii. Self-Mobilisation and Women Empowerment

“When women mobilise around a plan, change is inevitable, like in the constitution-making process” ~ **Ms. Maimuna Mwidau**.

“When you empower a woman, you are not empowering a woman alone; you are creating a better future for the family, the children and other vulnerable members of society.” ~ **Ambassador Rukia Subow**.

“Right from joining the armed struggle for independence to fight alongside their male counterparts, organising delegations to negotiate for spaces in decision making, forming feminist groups and organisations and agitating for women-friendly legislation, we see a self-revealing narrative of feminist consciousness that cuts across the various parts of the country at different stages.” ~ **Elizabeth Auma**.

When you ask me what motivated me, it is the plight of the women... during the peak of emergency ... I saw it all; women’s pain remained with me for a long time. The people who suffered most during the state of emergency were women. The way women suffered at the periphery moved many hearts to relook and rethink their plight.

~ **Hon. Jael Mbogo**.

iv. Solidarity

“At that time, Phoebe led the Kenya Women’s Political Caucus while Prof. Wanjiku Kabira was in charge of the Kenya Women Political Alliance. Though the two ladies led seemingly competitive caucuses, they worked harmoniously to secure women’s agenda in the constitution-making process. Other women leaders I worked with at the Commission included commissioners Alice Yano and Salome Muigai”.

~ **Ms. Maimuna Mwidau.**

“What I remember is that we came together and agreed that if a woman is supporting proper women-friendly position and they call out for help, you, as a woman, must actually go and support them.” ~ **Prof. Kameri -Mbote.**

v. Grassroot Mobilisation

“Information is power. You will just have to put on your walking shoes, not sit in your offices. You must walk to where the women are. We’ve had too many capacity-building workshops for women in towns and at the national offices. It is time to go where they live. This is not the time for boardrooms and workshops. We have to put on our walking shoes and walk to where the women are. Probably, if it is farming, put on the gumboots with them. Stay there for an extra day or two. Put on their rubber shoes and go to the garden with them. Change the thinking. This is the way to go.” ~ **Mumbi Ngaru.**

vi. Use of Traditional Power

“Men see these women (elderly) as not so radical, as soft-spoken, using moderate language, but if they are old, they can be witty, challenging and authoritative.”

~ **(Kabira, 2012: 19).**

vii. Knowledge of What Women Want

“When the legal framework for reviewing the Constitution was being made, we could negotiate that all the review organs must have 1/3 reserved for women. We also arranged for space for people with disabilities. If you go to the records, you’ll see the first Constitution of Kenya Review Act 1998 reserving the 1/3 space in all the review organs” in an attempt to explain how the journey of women’s reserved space in the Constitution came in and culminated in the gains of one-third rule in the Constitution.”
 ~ **Hon. Martha Karua.**

viii. Selflessness

“We were not looking for positions. We wanted a better future for our children and girls. That is what was driving most of the women.” ~ **Amb. Rukia Subow.**

“We need to come back to that selflessness that women pioneer like Prof. Kabira had. They never thought about personal benefits. To change the country for the better, we must be willing to sacrifice individually and collectively.” ~ **Fatuma Hassan.**

ix. Sisterhood

“The beauty about the women’s strategy was that it brought all women together, irrespective of their religion, region, party affiliations or ethnicity. We all came together and understood that the women’s agenda is the same wherever you are.”
 ~ **Dr. Eddah Gachukia**

“Our creed as women was that even if you’re in or out of government, rich or poor, Wanjiku or Maimuna, your problems are the same. I think that is the reason why we stuck together. When men noticed that we were united, many started taking our issues seriously and supporting us.” ~ **Ms. Maimuna Mwidau.**

“Women’s movement was more robust and productive through solidarity, sisterhood and leveraging on networks”. ~ **Prof. Kameri Mbote.**

x. Lobbying

"I started receiving invitations to attend seminars. As a woman, I learnt that I could defend my own rights and my fellow women". ~ **Rhoda Maende.**

"We had a booklet that guided our lobbying. What I like most about women in political parties, then, is that we refused the classifications. If Mumbi was LDP and LDP was not talking to DP, we had an original caucus of people working in the offices of political parties, the secretariats." ~ **Hon. Mumbi Ngaru.**

xi. Research and Sharing of Findings

"I generated crucial evidence that was badly needed to lobby political parties to adopt affirmative action or implement it." ~ **Wambui Kanyi.**

"Participation in the 1980 and 90s research activities gave me a mental commitment to documenting women's experiences and roles in society." ~ **Prof. Wanjiku Kabira.**

"In the fall of 1976, we met in Lusaka, Zambia. We formulated the concept of the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD). We had a broad goal of unifying African women's research not being blurred by religion, geography, or ethnicity. We tried to understand the situation of African women to develop our own tools. We strategised to participate in global platforms with our own ideas instead of always being told African women are inferior. Even today, the European concept would not accept that African women have power because they treat us as victims. Personally, I don't like that view of African women being victims of our men or victims of our situations. It was part of the colonial ideology that Africa was not a developed region and not advancing. We rejected that whole notion and tried to create new ideas." ~ **Prof. Achola Pala.**

"I am currently a resource centre; I am like a library where you come and dig out what you cannot get from wherever you are." ~ **Hon. Jael Mbogo.**

xii. Organisational Networks

“At Bomas, we had different caucuses. We had a specific tent dedicated to women from the whole country to discuss gender issues and lobby. Other prominent groups at Bomas were the professionals, legal experts and district delegates. The majority were the district delegates. Professionals understood the law and sensitised women on women-friendly constitutional provisions, and voting strategically on the issues.” ~

Ms. Maimuna Mwidau.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

2005 Referendum: A constitutional referendum was held in Kenya on 21st November 2005 where Kenyans voted against the new proposed constitution.

Affirmative Action: The practice or policy of affording additional opportunities for individuals belonging to groups regarded as disadvantaged or subject to discrimination.

Askari ya Chief: The Chief's Police

Bomas Draft: The draft constitution which came out of the national constitution conference from 2004-2005

Baba na Mama: Father and Mother

Bembelezad: Coaxed

Bui bui: Kiswahili word for a veil worn by Muslim women

Constitution of Kenya Review Commission: A commission formed in 2001 which was mandated to ensure a comprehensive review of the constitution by the people of Kenya, generally known as CKRC or the Ghai Commission

Home guards: They were a government paramilitary force in Kenya from early 1953 until around 1955 formed to respond to the insurgent Mau Mau uprising attacks.

Haki Yetu: Kiswahili Phrase for Our Rights

IPPG Talks: Inter Party Parliamentary Group talks were initiated in 1997 to ensure a level playing ground for all political parties as well as promote free and fair elections

Kabisa: Kiswahili word for completely

Kenyatta: The first president of the Republic of Kenya

Kiosk: A small structure from which groceries are sold

Kimathi: Leader of Mau Mau liberation movement

League of Kenya Women Voters: A non-governmental organisation in Kenya that promotes women's active participation in politics and public affairs through the electoral process as voters and leaders

League of Muslim Women: A non-governmental organization which promotes the values of Islam as well as empowering women.

Mau Mau: Mau Mau rebellion/uprising was a militant African nationalist group that arose in the 1950s among the Kikuyu community of Kenya to fight against the British colonial rule.

Haki na Usawa: Justice and Equality Kura ya Makelele: Voting fracas.

Mabati: galvanized iron sheets.

Mashinani: Rural.

Madharau: Contempt.

Muhindi: An Indian.

Mheshimiwa: Kiswahili word for Honourable.

Mlolongo elections: General elections that were held in Kenya on 21st March 1988 where KANU was the only political party and the president was the sole candidate. Voting involved voters queuing behind the photographs of the favourite candidate and they were counted.

Mwalimu: Kiswahili word for a teacher.

Mwakenya: Kiswahili word for leakage.

Mzungu: Kiswahili word for a white person.

National Council of Women of Kenya: A women's organisation that brought other women's networks together.

Nyayo: The second president of Kenya was commonly referred to as Nyayo which translates to footsteps due to his championing of 'Nyayo philosophy' which meant he followed the footsteps of his predecessor the first president of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta.

The Ghai Commission: Was a commission headed by Prof. Yash Pal Ghai which wrote the foundational draft of Kenya's constitution from the year 2000 to 2005. Eventually the draft with amendments from the Committee of Experts was put to a referendum in 2010 and adopted by Kenyans in August 2010.

Thingira: Kikuyu word for hut

Raila Odinga: An influential Kenyan politician who once served as Kenya's prime minister and contested for presidency in 1997, 2007, 2013, and 2017. **Section 2A of Constitution:** In 1982, Section 2A of the constitution made Kenya a single-party state with KANU as the only party in Kenya until 1991 which was again to make Kenya a multiparty state in 1992 conference.

Sulumeti Committee: Was a committee created to oversee the preparation of the law to amend the constitution in 1998/1999.

Ufungamano Talks: These were talks held during the constitution review process between the religious and civil society organisations. The talks were often held in Ufungamano House on Statehouse Road.

UN Women's Conference: United Nations held a conference in Nairobi in 1985 which kickstarted the Kenyan women's political movement.

Wangari Maathai: Was a Kenyan social, environmental and political activist and the first woman to win Nobel Prize for Peace in 2004. She was also the founder of the Green Belt Movement which planted millions of trees in Kenya.

Women Political Alliance: A women's organisation started in 1999 in order to lobby and negotiate for women's agenda in the struggle for review of the constitution.

Women Political Caucus: A women's political organisation founded after the defeat of Phoebe Asiyo's motion on Affirmative Action as a political women's movement to mobilize the women as individuals and organisations in the struggle for a new constitution.

Women Representatives (or Women Reps): Members of the Kenya

National Assembly representing the 47 counties; a special seat exclusively for female members in Kenya.

Wananchi: Kiswahili word for citizens

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This book is a great account of ordinary women doing ordinary things that yielded extraordinary results. The Pathfinders' stories in this book demonstrate the variety of jungles that women find themselves in as they navigate different circumstances in their daily lives. The women pathfinders have literally taken Antonio Machado's admonition: Traveller, there is no path and made the path for themselves and other women by walking it. The book communicates a powerful message that collective determination and grit can lead to results that transcend the interests of the individual travellers along life's journey.

Prof Patricia Kameri-Mbote

In the post-independence story, the woman has remained invisible unlike that of men who are considered the sole heroes of the Republic of Kenya from the colonialists. The term 'heroine' was yet to be conceived.

Consistently and largely ignored in the telling their full story in pre-independence, women have been treated as fillers to the story of the second liberation, which commenced after 1963, culminating in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. **History** is always prominent

because historians chose to highlight what one hand did despite the equal, seamless and complementary function of the other hand.

Indeed, this is the trigger of this **Conversation with the Pathfinders**, for the woman to pour herstory- not to counter- but show the contribution she has made and how it has shaped the country today and the path to the future.

Njeri Rugene

The transformation of the Kenyan society that has been ushered in by the Constitution adopted by the country in 2010 took the efforts of very many actors. The contribution of the women's movement as captured in this book is testimony not only to the agency of women in constitution making but also to the power of collective action. It documents for posterity the toil that these pioneer group of women made in charting a path towards greater involvement of women in politics and leadership. It is mandatory reading for anybody interested in women's empowerment, leadership and constitutional governance.

Prof Collins Odote



CONVERSATIONS WITH PATHFINDERS

KENYAN WOMEN IN POLITICS, LEADERSHIP, SOCIAL MOBILISATION AND CONSTITUTION MAKING



MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE,
GENDER, SENIOR CITIZENS
AFFAIRS AND SPECIAL
PROGRAMMES



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