

# JOURNEY TO LEADERSHIP

**WOMEN LEGISLATORS IN KENYA'S TENTH PARLIAMENT**





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# Foreward

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Women's political leadership in Kenya has come a long way: from just one woman Member of Parliament in the second Parliament (1969-1974) to the current 22 women MPs in the Tenth Parliament (2008- 2012). Hopefully the figure should significantly rise in 2012.

By profiling the women legislators in the Tenth Parliament, the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK) sought to document their electoral journeys, their successes and challenges, and how they have influenced debates in Parliament. In producing this publication, AMWIK also seeks to celebrate the legislators who have braved the many odds as they affirm the place of women in political leadership.

Kenya is dismally ranked at number 103 in the World in terms of women's representation. Rwanda in comparison is ranked number one in the World with 56.3 per cent representation of women in Parliament. Sweden and South Africa follow at 46.4 per cent and 44.5 per cent respectively according to Women in National Parliaments, a report by Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009).

Uganda, on the other hand, is number twenty one and Tanzania is ranked twenty third. Kenya's performance in terms of women's representation at key decision making organs pales in comparison to its reputation in other areas amongst them economy, sports and technology.

Thus the Kenyan women's journey to politics and experience in the public arena becomes the more interesting to share and read. Their experiences are as varied as the factors that define their activities including age, educational level and ethnic community. From former community mobilisers and teachers to lawyers and university professors, some had their hearts pulsate for leadership from their school days while others stumbled onto leadership positions by chance or fate. We hope that these experiences will inspire other women, more so the younger ones, to join elective politics. We also hope that they will motivate more people to support women's leadership.

Kenya, on the other hand, has been signatory to various international instruments, amongst them the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies (NFLS), Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The third International Women's Conference held in Nairobi in 1985 recommended practical solutions (NFLS) amongst them the promotion of women to positions of power at every level and in every sector to achieve parity with men. Now Kenya has made its commitment to one third representation under the new Constitution and hopefully these stories should help entrench this commitment. These experiences are therefore even more timely as women now have more opportunities for leadership including the 47 seats at the County level.

Also, from stories of the 22 women legislators, strategies could be developed on how to continually engage and encourage other women seeking leadership. We hope you enjoy the experiences as much as we have enjoyed compiling them, making great discoveries and mining golden nuggets along the way.

**Ms. Jane Thuo**  
**Executive Director**

# Acknowledgements

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The profiles of the 22 women legislators in Kenya's Tenth Parliament are a celebration of their individual journeys to leadership. The Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK) acknowledges the cooperation received from the legislators who made the time to tell their stories to the writers. Their contribution will serve to encourage and motivate other women in Kenya and beyond as they seek political leadership at all levels.

The Kenya Women Parliamentary Association secretariat coordinated the initial meeting and subsequent follow up with the MPs, and we are grateful for the support. We appreciate all those Personal Assistants who made it possible to interview the women MPs.

AMWIK is immensely grateful to the individuals who contributed at various stages in the development of this publication. Special appreciation goes to Pamela Mburia, the editor of the publication for her keen dedication in carrying out the assignment.

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**“If you have decided you want something, don’t look back. You must have good reasons for wanting it.”**

## Hon Amina Abdalla

### NOMINATED MP

How many women in Kenya have had the privilege to serve for two consecutive terms as Nominated Members of Parliament? Perhaps it is only Hon Amina Abdalla, the soft-spoken Kanu nominated MP. Serving in the Tenth Parliament on her second term, Amina concurs with the author of 'Outliers' who attributes success to the time spent in any chosen area.

Amina's father often referred to her as Madam Chairman because of the time she would take practicing for a school debate and the vigour with which she would lobby friends. "Dad now calls me Mr Speaker when he listens to debates in Parliament."

Born and brought up in Nairobi, Amina attended New Pumwani Primary School, then Ngara Girls High School before proceeding to State House Girls School for higher education. She went on to graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture and Home Economics at Egerton University, after which she joined the NGO world.

Her first employer in 1993 was the GTZ (now GIZ), a German non-governmental organisation, where she worked for a rescue project at the Daadab refugee camp in North Eastern Kenya. Behind her soft voice and easy smile is a mobilization genius, going by her exploits at coordination activities in the various posts. She later joined the World Conservation Union, IUCN, where she rose to the position of Regional Projects Coordinator for Eastern African soon after completing her master's degree at Cornell University in New York.

It was while at the IUCN that Amina developed interest in politics. The environmental programme that she managed required her to negotiate with donors to give money for various programs that are implemented by governments in the Region. "As a person in the middle, I noticed that the success of any environmental program depended on political class and leadership and nothing technical or financial was as crucial," she observes. She felt frustrated especially when she had to deal with chief executives who cared less about what they did. In late 2002, she took leave of absence from her office to campaign for a presidential candidate.

Amina dispels the idea of a particular role model. She is motivated more by policy and those who do not perform their duties than those who do. She remembers with admiration, her first meeting of the Kenya Women Parliamentarian Association (KEWOPA) where Martha Karua encouraged them to participate actively. "I hope that the increase in number of the female members in the ninth Parliament will not merely translate to addition of 'flowers' in the august House," Karua had said.

Thus, taking the vital lesson from Karua, whom Amina says she admires as a good representative as well as legislator, the nominated MP is rather philosophical regarding the conduct of an MP: "Talking as a politician is one thing and talking sense quite different, yet talking with action is another version of political talk." The caution with which she utters her words is evident when she contributes to parliamentary debates. "Parliament is a serious place where policies are made. That's why every MP should be serious on the floor of the house," she says.

Amina has not plunged into elective politics but she has been actively involved in peace building initiatives. One of these is the Amani Forum, a regional parliamentary peace initiative. In an earlier interview, Amina further said of politics: "When you work with marginalized communities and seeking ways to help them improve their lot, you are playing politics. Politics is the wheel around which our lives revolve. It is not just talking."

A sharp operative who is keen to detail and strategy - perhaps some of the greatest assets she drew from the NGO world - Amina supported Kanu's position to support President Kibaki in his re-election in 2007. The role she played in the giant PNU campaign team where she represented Kanu in the election board was perhaps the major reason that she earned herself the rare re-nomination to Parliament.

What impact did she make in the first five years in the House? "I brought a motion on the Drugs Control Authority and helped create a manual that acted as guideline in public service appointments," she answers with confidence.

Amina is a member of the powerful Justice and Legal Affairs Committee and the Chairperson of the Committee on Delegated Legislations. In September 2009, she was co-chairperson of the two committees that objected to the modalities on the reappointment of the director and two deputy directors of the Kenya anti-Corruption Commission that resulted in the exit of the controversial former director, Aaron Ringeera.

Earlier in 2008, she moved a motion in Parliament that sought to reform the Parliamentary Service Commission, the body that is chaired by the Speaker and which determines perks and salaries for MPs. Although her motion was a stillbirth, she is happy that all the concerns she had raised in the motion are in the new Constitution.

With both her nominations Amina believes that she is a beneficiary of the Inter Parties Parliamentary Group (IPPG) amendment of section 33 of the former Constitution, which required all nominations to have gender balance. As a co-opted member of the sub-committee reviewing Parliamentary Standing Orders, she has been instrumental in engendering the entire Standing Orders and specifically all parliamentary committees.



Amina recounts her other successes: "I have successfully lobbied the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Delegated Legislation Committee and the Implementation Committee. The committee on delegated legislation was my baby that I moved in the Ninth Parliament. I'm passionate about laws related to the fight against drugs. I moved a motion in 2002 for the National Agency for the Campaign Against Drugs (NACADA) to be made a statutory body."

The environmental scientist is vocal on the need for women to become relevant in the political arena: she asks women to invest in political parties to the extent of owning some of them. She says: "Political parties are the slaughter houses of political ambitions of women." She challenges women to offer their expertise and other resources to parties in order to gain recognition. "It is only after parties recognize your strengths that they begin to tap into them." Amina, nonetheless, regrets that the Parliament has lost many good legislators because of the choices made by constituents. She urges the electorate to make informed choices, regardless of gender and parties, to put good legislators in place.

Just like Amina's eye was originally set on sitting at the helm of the United Nations as the most strategic place for transformative change, she now realizes the immense power wielded by the Speaker and says she would like to be Speaker of the Senate. She is prepared to face the male opponents in this race because, she notes, "Change can only be realized through institutional reforms." She is aware that violence in its many forms deters women from running for office but she says that she will not allow this to intimidate her.

Hon Amina Abdalla recalls that before she was nominated to Parliament, "people had wrong perceptions of women who wear the buibui." She was determined to change that perspective. Among some of her unintended achievements is that she has earned respect for women who share her religious belief as witnessed in their representation on many high powered commissions.

A proud mother of two, Abdalla went down in record as the first MP to have children while serving in Kenya's Parliament. The recommendations and gains made by members who proceeded on maternity leave through the Akiwumi report were a direct result of her recommendation after the experience.

Amina acknowledges KEWOPA's contribution in building the capacities of women members of Parliament as well as propelling the legislative agenda. She, however, hopes that the donor community will move a notch higher to explore possibilities of funding tangible projects on the ground so that the women receive maximum support.



“Improving the roads network, agriculture, education, expanding economic opportunities and general well-being of the people are top on my agenda.”



## Hon Beatrice Kones

**MP FOR BOMET** | ASSISTANT MINISTER, OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
AND MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

For a newcomer in elective politics, she has eschewed the herd mentality so prevalent in Kenya politics and resolved to be her own person. The grit and aplomb she carries herself with can only be the preserve of a seasoned politician, not debutant, who risks even more as a woman serving in an overwhelmingly patriarchal community.

Hon Beatrice Kones, the MP for Bomet and assistant minister in the Office of the Vice President and Ministry of Home Affairs epitomises independence of mind, a rarity especially so by a woman from a society that relegates women to playing second fiddle. She plunged into competitive politics after a tragic air-crash took the life of her husband, Kipkalya Kones, who was the Bomet MP and Roads Minister up to early 2009.

Friends and close associates describe her as trusting and loyal to her constituents in Bomet Constituency, which is why despite the turbulence her party has plunged in, she remains loyal to the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

Her mettle was put to test in 2010 during the new Constitution referendum campaign where she stood by the new set of laws, when leaders from her community campaigned to shoot them down. The political risk she faced at the time did not make her beat a retreat to put her preference at par with that of other people's.

As chair of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation between 2000 and 2005, she rubbed shoulders with the high and mighty in politics. MYWO was at some point cast as

a women's wing of then ruling party Kanu. In principle, the organisation advocated the rights of women, but in practice, seemed to be propagating the political agenda of the governing elite.

It is in MYWO that Beatrice met her mentors - Phoebe Asiyo, Grace Ogot, Grace Onyango, Dr Julia Ojiambo and educationist Dr Eddah Gachukia - who inevitably had an influence on the assistant minister's political orientation.

Beatrice is described as a diligent servant of the people she serves. One of her supporters, Nicholas Kipleliet Rono, talks of her as the pillar of her late husband Kipkalya Kones in Bomet constituency. "Beatrice enjoys massive support from the constituents. She is in touch with the people, having actively participated in managing her late husband's campaigns," says Rono. Besides politics, Beatrice is also a businesswoman and a large-scale tea farmer.

A youth leader in Bomet, Kiplang'at arap Sigei, says Beatrice has emerged from the towering shadow of her husband and become her own person. The rapid transformation is attributed to her past as chair of MYWO where she would conveniently shed the tag of her otherwise high-achieving husband.

"She has cut an image of her own person with the ability to network and manage affairs of the constituency. Her election was not about sympathy, but her ability to deliver and develop the constituency," says Sigei.

Beatrice is testimony to the power of education in the liberation of women. She is one of the few women of her age from her ethnic community who went to school at an early age at a time when the role of women in society was that of homemakers. Born to Christian parents, Beatrice went to local primary schools before joining Sosiot Girls' Secondary School for 'O' levels between 1973 and 1976.

During her time at the school, she is said to have been an active students' leader serving in different roles. Two years after completion of secondary school, she joined Thogoto Teachers Training College in Central Province (now Kiambu County) from 1979 to 1981.

Like many other politicians, Beatrice cut her teeth in political leadership when she served as a teacher and later inspector of schools between 1993 and 1995. She resigned as an education officer to manage family businesses and prop her husband's political career, who was then a minister in the Office of the President during retired president Daniel arap Moi's reign.

She said upon her election in 2009 that having served as a teacher and schools inspector enabled her to develop valuable relationships with the local people as well as people management skills. The two roles require the holder to have patience and tolerance, also critical ingredients when dealing with people in politics. Beatrice put these traits to work by providing the necessary back up her husband required to win successive elections in Bomet during the Kanu era and even after he quit the independence party and joined the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

In views she expresses at various forums, including Parliament, one finds a common thread that saw eight other women elected from her community: service to the people. It is generally agreed among the Kalenjin that male MPs have been a major letdown since independence. The bulk of her supporters are women, who are increasingly challenging men for elective positions, including administrative ones such as chiefs, district officers and regional education officers. The election of one of their own was meant to turn around the service delivery, which Beatrice acknowledges.

In her acceptance speech upon being nominated by ODM to vie for the seat, she said: "Improving the roads network, agriculture, education, expanding economic opportunities and general well-being of the people are top on my agenda."

As an Assistant Minister for Home Affairs, deputising Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka, her performance is monitored closely. The Parliamentary Hansard records that Beatrice oversaw the installation of the closed circuit television equipment in the country's main prisons as a way of insulating the inmates against brutal prison officers and also dealing with rampant sexual molestation of inmates by their colleagues.

After the election of Kones, nominated MP Shakila Abdalla said of her victory: "There is an increasing confidence in women leadership and things can only get better."

However, it is Assistant Minister Jebii Kilimo and Marakwet East MP who put the feat achieved by Beatrice in proper sociological and political perspective when she said: "It is the beginning of a gender revolution that is going to spread to the rest of the country. It gives women the confidence that they can match men in every respect and even outdo them."





“What one does once in Parliament and for the people is what the voters assess.”

## Hon Beth Mugo

**MP FOR DAGORETTI** | MINISTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SANITATION

For a woman who was a school headmistress at Kambui primary School in Kiambu when she was only 19 years, her leadership and mobilization skills came to test early in life. More than 50 years of public service have not robbed her of the chubby cheeks where broad smiles often shine when this composed politician shares a time with the constituents.

On her third term in Parliament, Hon Beth Mugo, the MP for Dagoretti, is one of the most experienced politicians in Kenya. Her political journey started later in life, and during the 2007 elections, her age was a campaign issue with one of her challengers invoking the generational change mantra to push her out of Parliament. She was too strong and beat him with more than 4,000 votes.

Beth conducts her politics with civility, earning the support of the older voters, those who love work and less talk. “My development record is there to see. I have worked with men and women at the grassroots and I am satisfied with what we have done so far,” she would say during the 2007 campaigns.

An orator, she still carries with her a media demeanour, having joined the industry through the Voice of Kenya (now KBC) in 1964 and held senior positions. A favourite niece to Jomo Kenyatta during his presidency, Beth joined the Hobby Group of Hotels in 1976 and served as executive director four years before she left and founded Beth International Ltd, a chain of retail outlets specializing in the export of African artefacts and jewellery.

The MP is a graduate of mass media from Syracuse University in New York and a onetime director of the Kenya Women Finance Trust. She has managed to mix administrative and business skills to achieve her goals in life. It is these qualities that have helped her hold the Dagoretti seat firmly since 1997.

Being seen as having been born with a silver spoon is a battle Beth has always fought, both at personal level and political arena. However, her development record since she won the Dagoretti seat is proof that she is a self made politician.

She has struggled to cut herself the image of an independent minded politician, a characteristic she aptly demonstrated in the 2002 elections. She attributes her success in politics to the women groups she worked with before making a debut in politics. They asked her to stand for election and when she appeared reluctant the women groups pressurized her husband who persuaded her to enter the political arena.

Her husband, a former envoy, has remained one of her greatest supporters. Her grip on the constituency since her first entry when she garnered 24,279 votes against her challenger Kangethe Gitu's 6,996 remained tight until 2007, when she effaced her toughest challenge. Her experience and a sense of political maturity were enough to accord her a resounding win. Her argument has always been that a name is not enough to earn you more than one term and what one does once in Parliament and for the people is what the voters assess. In Parliament, she is a member of the House Business Committee.

Beth, who formerly served as Assistant Minister for Education, is testimony that age is just a number and it would not be a surprise to see her earn herself another term in Parliament on one of the main seats in the constituency in 2012.







“As a  
parliamentarian  
you need to  
know your  
place and why  
you went for  
the seat in the  
first place.”

## Hon Cecily Mbarire

**MP FOR RUNYENJES** | ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR TOURISM

As a student at Egerton University, Hon Cecily Mutitu Mbarire, the MP for Runyenjes, had the hallmark of a politician. She joined the student union and became a leader. Those who were with Cecily in college remember her for her resilience and determination. “She was determined, and if she wanted something nothing would stop her,” says a former colleague at the University.

Cecily's late father was a politician, who represented Runyenjes Constituency in Parliament. It must have been from him that the daughter acquired some skills in the art of campaigning and winning elections. In 2002 she was nominated to the august House. There she developed a very close friendship with Charity Ngilu, MP for Kitui Central, thus gaining useful insights into survival in the political jungle. And truly the lessons she got from Ngilu were not in vain as she would end up defeating seasoned politicians in the 2007 General Election to take charge of the Runyenjes parliamentary seat.

Like other women candidates, Cecily had a rough time from her opponents. The seat had attracted close to ten other contestants. She garnered well over 30,000 votes, giving her closest rival a margin of over 10,000 votes. Political analysts attributed this win to the great support she had from women and youth, being a young female politician. Her campaign agenda focused on empowering the common people and articulating the issues of women and the youth.

The campaigns were, however, not smooth and some of her opponents gave her sleepless nights.

While some opponent urged the constituents not to vote for a woman, others argued that she is married outside the constituency and that she would not be able to represent them well. However, these jibes did not deter Cecily from getting what she had set her sights on. Her youthful supporters, who called her siste (slang for sister), were fully behind her. She beat all odds to emerge the winner shocking not only her opponents but also people from the neighbouring constituencies in the now Embu county.

Cecily had plunged into politics in 2002 when she was nominated to Parliament. In 2005, she was appointed an assistant minister in the Ministry of Transport. However, after the 2007 elections she found herself holding the docket of assistant minister in the prestigious Tourism Ministry. She also serves as Secretary of the Kenya Women's Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA).

Having been a youth leader prior to joining politics, Cecily's support base is dominated by young people. Asked about her plans during the Tenth Parliament, Cecily responded: "I have been pushing for matters that concern youth and women but I hope that by the end of my term I will not only help to give Kenyans better laws but also play my role to ensure we get a new Constitution - one that adequately takes care of every Kenyan." This she did and images of her campaigning for the new law remain entrenched in the minds of Kenyans. The women's gains in the law formed the basis for her support of the document.

Vouching for a functional Constitution, Cecily has taken to advancing the women's agenda in a country where many communities are yet to fully embrace women as leaders. At the same time the MP has been keen on reproductive health rights and especially the issue of teen pregnancies and abortion. She has been quoted saying: "We cannot bury our heads in the sand while our country is losing more than 4,000 teenage girls from back-street abortions each month." She has repeatedly been quoted in the media condemning cases of rape and defilement, as well as calling on the government to institute stiffer penalties for sexual violence offenders. The MP has been working with organisations whose mandate includes training young girls on life skills.

Cecily is among the young legislators in the august House. When challenged about how she hopes to overcome the hurdles associated with being an MP she said: "As a parliamentarian you need to know your place and why you went for the seat in the first place, otherwise you may end up treading a path that is contrary to what put you there. On the other hand, there are far too many intrigues, tribal confederations and heckling - that make life quite difficult." She has been vocal against the alleged corruption in Parliament, saying that it was immoral for legislators to be paid money so that they can vote for or against bills or motions.

Born on 26 December 1972, Cecily holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics and Sociology from Egerton University and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Gender and Development Studies from the same institution.

She took a national leadership role in 1996 when she became the head of the Youth Agenda, an organisation that promotes the advancement of young people in all areas of society. It was during her tenure that the Kenya National Youth Policy that addresses the many challenges facing young people was developed.

Some of the issues addressed in the policy include employment creation, health, education and training, sports and recreation, environment, art and culture, youth participation and empowerment.

The policy document addresses the specific needs of youth with disability, street youth, youth infected by HIV/AIDs, female youth, unemployed youth and those out of school.

At the local level, Cecily has used her position as an Assistant Minister to assist the Embu community in a number of issues. She has helped to establish a new route to climb Mt. Kenya from the Embu side. The move is expected to spur economic growth, with 10 per cent of tourists who climb the tallest mountain in the country each year expected to use the new route.

She also took centre stage in discussions to put up a university in Embu County. Once established, the institution is expected to benefit thousands of people who want to pursue higher education. At the constituency level, the MP has embarked on a number of development projects which include building and equipping health facilities, building classrooms and science laboratories and improving the road network. "We are glad that Runyenjes is among the constituencies which will benefit from the fish farming program under the economic stimulus program and we are calling upon farmers to take advantage in order to make extra income," Cecily said during the launch of the project where 20 fish ponds were dug and farmers provided with fingerlings.

The MP also put her mobilisation skills to work when in 2008 she hosted over 30 parliamentarians to raise funds for a savings and credit society for women in Runyenjes Constituency. The MP is also credited for organising several free medical camps to address the various health needs of the electorate.

Cecily has made good use of the lessons learned from her colleagues in Parliament. She will put the lessons to work in seeking to capture a prime seat when the elections under the new Constitution take place in 2012.



“I was born to work for the people.”



## Hon Charity Ngilu

**MP FOR KITUI CENTRAL | MINISTER FOR WATER AND IRRIGATION**

Since she joined politics in 1992 and vied for the Kitui Central parliamentary seat on a Democratic Party ticket, she has remained the face of a successful woman politician, an ally any politician would want to associate with. Her development agenda that hugely targets women and the youth has ensured her firm grip on the seat for the last two decades.

Hon Charity Ngilu, MP for Kitui Central and Minister for Water and Irrigation has a place in the annals of history as the first woman in Kenya to vie for Presidency in 1997. Although she never made it to presidency, Ngilu left a remarkable presence in the political arena. She rose to political fame during the multi-party insurgency and was in the forefront advocating political change and a new Constitution.

“I was born to work for the people. From my humble background, I cannot afford to let down those who trust me with their votes,” she said in an earlier interview. Ngilu has a passion for good leadership and on many occasions, she has pointed out that good governance is the country’s major asset.

Ngilu occupied position nine in a big and humble family of thirteen children in Mbooni where she was born. Like many girls in rural Ukambani, she tasted poverty and it is this drive to escape want that she studied hard and was admitted to Alliance Girls High School in Kikuyu. “Education was the only way to get out of poverty. We worked hard and that is why we still work hard to date. I learnt the virtues of working hard when I was very young,” she says.

The Minister did not score the required marks to gain entry to the university, so she joined the Government Secretarial College to train as a secretary. She would immediately land a job at the Central Bank of Kenya and in 1973 served as secretary to the then powerful governor Duncan Ndegwa. Two years later, she resigned to do a business management course at the Kenya Institute of Administration. This qualification would enable her to join Manhattan Overseas Corporation as an administrative manager, where she worked for three years.

Ngilu had learnt during her early childhood and pre-adult years to independently struggle to shape her life. This attitude towards life led her to make a mark in the business world when she worked hard to raise her profile from a secretary to a remarkable entrepreneur opening a chain of businesses as diverse as a bakery and a plastics factory and becoming a Managing Director.

Ngilu thereafter joined the NGO world where she got involved in serving the community. Her leadership traits were evident and she quickly took up leadership positions in community based projects and mingled with the high and mighty in the political arena. The exposure awoke in her a persona that she had not known before - aspirations and dreams of making it big and powerful in politics.

She was in luck: the country was going through a wave of change and yearning for new energetic leadership that would replace the old guard. Therefore when she announced that she would enter politics, the reception was overwhelming. She put in a strong campaign and during the country's ever multi-party elections held in 1992, Hon Ngilu pulled off a big surprise by capturing the Kitui Central Constituency seat on the Democratic Party (DP) ticket, beating the former powerful Cabinet Minister, George Ndotto.

Ngilu usually has a knack to make the right political decisions even when everyone thinks she has lost it. Apart from jumping out of the DP ship in 1997 in favour of Social Democratic Party (SDP), she still retained her Kitui central seat. Due to changing political realities, Ngilu has confounded both critics and supporters for sending mixed signals, especially when she has found herself in need of a tough decision. In Parliament she proceeded to inject a new kind of leadership and became a powerful player and a role model for a younger generation of female politicians.

Throughout her tenure in Parliament and politics, Ngilu has vehemently refused to be relegated to second-rung status as a female politician. She has won several accolades in this stand and has been viewed as a role model and mentor to many women. She is on record for emphasizing at every occasion that women must rise above being good managers – of the man, the home, the children and all things spicy and sweet – and boldly step out into visionary leadership.

From then on she was unstoppable, with her eyes set at nothing less than going for Presidency. The euphoria that followed her announcement in 1997 that she was vying for presidency did not only rock Ukambani but the entire country. Throughout the country, the chanting was "Kaa Masaa, Masaa ni ya Ngilu" (Keep time. It is time for Ngilu). As the first woman presidential candidate in sub-Saharan Africa, she became a symbol, a trailblazer.

Ngilu served as Minister for Health from 2003 to 2007. During her tenure, she is on record for fighting for the introduction of a new insurance bill that would ensure that every Kenyan had access to affordable health. "I have also worked with women and I know access to health remains their biggest problem. I want to work in this ministry so that no woman or child will die for lack of healthcare," she said in her first media interview as Health minister in 2003.

While at this Ministry, she also made it one of her priorities to address women's reproductive rights. Thus, in March 2003, she generated controversy when she told a meeting of the International Planned Parenthood Federation that abortion should be legalized in Kenya, maybe due to the many lives that were lost in illegal abortions. Despite the opposition from religious leaders, Ngilu won admiration for her "stand and thought" from women's organizations, among them the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA).

After the national accord that saw the end to the election and post-election violence, Hon Ngilu was appointed as Minister for Water and Irrigation. She quickly took charge with much enthusiasm to deliver water to the forgotten arid areas.

Hon Ngilu is widely travelled and has attended many local and international fora gaining vast leadership exposure and qualities. She is still a formidable political force and her constituents have not shown any wavering support. This means that with such enormous political experience, she still is likely to make it to a powerful leadership position. Together with elective politics, Ngilu has served as member of the Parliamentary Committee on Health and as member of the Parliamentarians for Global Action.

She once served as a member of the globally recognized Centre for Development and Population Activities and the World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of Health.

Her motherly mien which she exhibits in both private and public functions has endeared her to all who interact with her. She has a heart to support her loyal friends and she will throw caution to the wind to defend them. This has on several occasions landed her in trouble with the police. As the 2012 elections beckon and the county governments became the talk in local politics, it remains to be seen whether Mama Rainbow will still defend her seat or venture into the more senior county seats.





**Sometimes MPs  
ask questions  
whose answers  
they can  
easily get by  
placing a call  
to the relevant  
ministries.”**

## Hon Esther Murugi

**MP FOR NYERI TOWN | MINISTER FOR SPECIAL PROGRAMMES**

Hon Esther Murugi Mathenge survived gender discrimination on the way to the top and does not shy away from stating her mind, especially on “real problems” affecting the country.

When the parliamentary results started to trickle in on 28 December 2007, a story in the local dailies was headlined, “Woman beats 11 men to take Nyeri seat”. Unlike many stories on the parliamentary elections which were normally clamped together, this story was published on its own - apparently, it was one of the surprise stories from Central Province.

The reason “11 men” was highlighted is perhaps because Nyeri town electorate were considered too chauvinistic to vote in a woman. It was true that Esther had, among other things, overcome a well-orchestrated campaign against a woman candidate. In fact, in the heat of the campaigns in the Nyeri town, the eleven men usually organised joint public rallies - effectively sidelining the Party of National Unity (PNU) candidate.

Despite this isolation, Murugi beat all the men to the ballot. To date, the Nyeri Town MP is yet to fully surmount the acrimony that arose from that election. She describes her opponents: “We are yet to mend fences. They begrudge me just because I beat them. Didn’t a woman have the right to win the Nyeri seat?”

Four months later, Murugi was named in the Grand Coalition cabinet. This came as a sweet surprise, in view of the very high competition for the seats. “I never thought I could have a chance. There were so many competing interests and coming from the

President's backyard only diminished the slightest hope," she says. At the Party level, she is the Deputy National Women Leader of the Party of National Unity and also the Nyeri Branch chairperson.

Murugi the politician was largely unknown outside Nyeri. However, she had been in the grassroots for more than ten years during her involvement with Soroptimist International, an organization that seeks to empower women at all levels.

What many people did not know about Murugi is that 2007 was her third attempt to capture the Nyeri town seat. In 1997, she had stood against former detainee Wanyiri Kihoro and lost to him. This did not discourage her. In 2002, she was headed for a win before PG Mureithi switched parties at the last minute and got the NARC ticket. "I knew the odds were against me even before the elections were concluded as the candidate had a lot of resources and there was the Narc wave," she confides.

So just how did little known Murugi suddenly perch at the top of one of the highest political branches in this country? "I had never thought I would end up in politics. My only concern for people was their welfare," she says. Nevertheless, Murugi reveals that leadership runs in her extended family with her aunts and grandmother being community leaders at different levels.

The mother of two grown children believes she has undergone almost a full cycle in life, although she is keen to defend her Nyeri town seat in the 2012 elections. To understand the full cycle, one may need to look at her rich professional resume that is interspersed with a long stint in the NGO world under Soroptimist International.

At the dusty Githiru Village in Nyeri municipality, Murugi attended the local primary school before joining Highlands Secondary School (today's Moi Girls' School, Eldoret) for secondary education. She then enrolled at the University of Nairobi in 1973 for a Land Economics degree.

It is this course that makes her unworried by gender intimidation. There were only two girls in a class of forty. To this she says: "I have worked with men for long since then. The course was largely unknown among women."

It is perhaps her exploits in the real estate field that best reveal her go getter attitude. After graduation, she joined the Ministry of Lands as a Lands Officer in 1977, where she worked for three years. But her life was destined to the private sector and her ambitions could only propel her faster in the real estate field. After the government job, she joined Nairobi Homes as Property Manager before starting Mugi Property Consultants a year later.

After another year, she moved to Milligan & Co Ltd - again as Property Manager. She seemed a woman in a hurry to assert her position in real estate. In 1989, she founded Lustman & Co Ltd, a registered estate agent where she has been director. She is a member of the Institute of Surveyors of Kenya.

Today, Murugi is happy to be a politician only that in Kenya, in her view, they seem to talk too much and do little for the people. "I was looking forward to a Parliament where members would hold serious debates only. Sometimes MPs ask questions whose answers they can easily get by placing a call to the relevant ministries," she observes.

Murugi was not specially prepared for the business in Parliament, so she sought guidance from the Standing Orders. However, in 2008 she got invaluable training by a partnership between Education Centre for Women in Democracy (ECWD) and the Centre for Multi-Party Democracy (CMD).

Her relationship with colleagues in Parliament is cordial and in her own words, it is largely work related. The straight-talking MP feels that women MPs are yet to be properly bonded. "I think I can count the number of times we have had tea as sisters. It is rare to meet because our politics is so party oriented that if a woman MP comes from a different party, chances are you will disagree on as many issues as could arise," she regrets.

Addressing the welfare of people is still dear to her. In her tenure at the Gender and Children Services ministry, Murugi is credited with passing of the National Policy for the Elderly People and the National Policy for Persons Living with Disability.

The Nyeri Town MP epitomises women power and believes women need to be supported to make a mark in a male dominated political field. She is of the opinion that resources meant to support and prepare women for political posts have not had much impact at the grassroots. "I do not think there is corresponding value to the resources that are supposed to support women," she observes.

Before she left the Gender docket, Murugi had started to design a data bank on women who want to vie for political positions. "I wanted to have a one-stop shop where we could have all relevant information about aspiring women candidates. We would then see what challenges they were facing and seek ways to help them as per their specific needs," she explains.

Rarely do you talk to Murugi and fail to note her regular use of the word "project". Yes, she loves projects and when we talk to her at her Special Programmes Ministry office, we note that every project she embarks on gets funding.

Her pet projects in Nyeri are doing well, among them the dilapidated Nyeri Provincial General Hospital "This institution was built almost a hundred years ago and its facilities are outdated as government funding is limited. We now have a development partner who will help us revamp it," she reveals. Murugi has also helped to complete an irrigation scheme that draws water from Gura River .The other one is the Gatitu-Riamukurwe water project.

Since her transfer to the special Programs Ministry, Murugi's hands are full. It is a Ministry which co-ordinates several other Ministries on urgent disasters. She describes how different life is from her time at the Gender Ministry: "At Gender, it was more of policy work while at Special Programmes, I am dealing with fire fighting. It can be quite chaotic."

Simple in fashion and grooming and perhaps drawing from her private sector experience, Murugi dislikes bureaucracy. In fact, she is regarded in media circles and ministries she has worked in as accessible. She describes her personality as forthright. "I do not like pretending. We must confront situations that affect us decisively," she declares. A staunch Catholic, she loves reading fiction as a hobby.

As for now, her challenge is the conclusive resettlement of Internally Displaced People (IDPs). And then she will be back on the tumultuous Nyeri political terrain to defend her seat.

“This hectic life has helped me to perfect the art of knowing when and how to change very fast from one responsibility to the other, and the rest just falls in place.”



## Hon Elizabeth Ongoro

**MP FOR KASARANI** | ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR  
NAIROBI METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT

Assertive is the adjective that best describes Hon. Elizabeth Ongoro Masha, the 42-year-old Member of Parliament for Kasarani Constituency in Nairobi. Confident, firm, eloquent and intelligent, Elizabeth also has a nose for opportunities. “As long as I can identify a prospect, wrapping it up becomes the easier part,” she says.

Elizabeth has exceeded the expectations her parents had of her, given that her birth came as a welcome disappointment to her late father. The late Tom Mboya, the prominent politician, was then a household name. “My father had looked forward to the birth of a son to name after the politician, and then there was me,” she recounts with amusement.

The fifth child in the family, to say that the expectant father was disappointed at the birth of yet another daughter is to put it mildly, according to Elizabeth. Like most men then, her father longed for a son not only to carry on his legacy, but also to show his might. All his five children were girls. To deal with the situation, the father handed over Elizabeth to her paternal grandmother for upbringing, to give her parents a chance to try for a son. She was only six months old. “They thought that a breastfeeding mother was likely to take longer to become pregnant again, while the reverse is true,” she explains. Many years later today, Elizabeth has become the politician her father desired, and an influential one at that.

Elizabeth won the Kasarani Parliamentary seat on her first attempt, with the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Party ticket and was appointed the Assistant Minister for Nairobi Metropolitan Development in the coalition government, a position she still

holds. She is also a member of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA), and sits in the Constitution Implementation Oversight Committee. Ministers and their Assistants are not allowed to sit in committees, but this was an exception. She is also the National Vice Chairperson of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party and the first female politician to head Kasarani Constituency, which was previously known as Mathare Constituency.

Elizabeth strives to meet as many of the needs of the people she represents in Parliament through projects that impact the lives of the poor directly, and focusing on programmes aimed at not only alleviating poverty but breaking the vicious cycle of poverty. "My most favourite projects are education oriented because only education can break the poverty cycle," she says. She has initiated the construction of a girls' boarding primary and secondary school for girls who end up with early pregnancies due to lack of a friendly and conducive learning environment.

Her other projects in the constituency include the Kasarani Youth Support initiative, Kasarani Savings and Credit Cooperative Society and the 'No Babies With Babies' initiative, which aims at reducing early pregnancies. At the same time, apart from reviving the construction of the Kasarani Youth Polytechnic, Elizabeth has established the first operational constituency office in the constituency. Her other initiatives include the refurbishment of health centres and schools spread across the constituency, infrastructural development and the construction of new maternity clinics in some of the worst informal settlements in Kasarani.

Growing up under the care of her grandmother, she learnt how to be responsible early in life. Her grandmother was a birth attendant running her own clinic in Uyoma, Nyanza Province, and she often asked Elizabeth to assist with simple tasks. "The one thing I remember doing regularly, especially during a night birth, was to hold up a lamp as grandmother helped a woman to deliver her baby. This means that I started taking care of babies early," she recalls. Besides the assistance she offered her grandmother, Elizabeth also emulated the strictness and preciseness the disciplined old lady exhibited.

Living with her grandmother also exposed Elizabeth to a kind of discipline that is rare. "My grandmother was resolute with everyone who lived under her roof, with the strictness of a school principle. There were many such people, which made her home look like a school," she explains. Elizabeth recalls a bell being rung for different announcements in the day for the tens of people who lived in her grandmother's home. "Most of them were destitutes, patients, distant relatives and workers. Grandma ensured that the bell was rung early to wake them up to start their day with a bath at 5am." Afterwards, everyone had to be engaged in work, whether around the home or in the shamba. "If you didn't do any work, you didn't eat anything; and this rule applied to visitors as well," says Elizabeth.

The MP was an orderly, organised and highly independent three-year-old girl by the time she rejoined her family to start school. She had acquired the qualities that made her grandmother a dependable and competent health practitioner, traits that she has maintained to date. "To me, being organised is something I grew up with," she says. Her organizational skills are evident from the way she manages programmes in Kasarani Constituency and the ministry she heads. An early riser, Elizabeth is on her feet actively participating in the tasks at hand, and only stopping when she retires to bed. She reveals that time is always of essence to her while at home or at work, and that she has none to waste.

For a child who had a deprived childhood, Elizabeth has worked tirelessly to be where she currently is. Her father, a strict Catholic catechist, and her mother, a housewife, relied



on subsistence farming, which could not sufficiently support their 12 children. Because it was a closely-knit family, the poverty was not apparent to young Elizabeth until it threatened her advancement to secondary school. She recalls when, at 12 years of age, she could not join Alliance Girls' High School despite having led in the Certificate of Primary Education in Maseno District. Because of her excellent grades, she had also been offered admission at Mary Hill Girls' High School, a national school sponsored by the Catholic Church.

Being conservative Catholics, Elizabeth's parents did not want her to join Alliance High School as she was already being prepared to become a Catholic nun. Apart from that, they could not afford Elizabeth's fees at Mary Hill and for her elder sister who had also sat the same examination and passed relatively well. "My parents did not even know the significance of the schools that I had been called to, leave alone where they were situated," she laughs. "Accustomed to exercising fairness, my parents paid for my sister to join secondary school before me," she adds good-naturedly.

As fate would have it, an uncle who had been studying abroad returned to Kenya in the thick of Elizabeth's school fees crisis, and he sponsored her first year of secondary education at Mary Hill Girls' High School. This, however, stopped prematurely at the end of the first year, due to his own family obligations. The bright Elizabeth remained home for two years, "assisting my mother with daily activities, serving at the church and feeling very sad about my circumstances. In the midst of it all, I stayed optimistic that my life would turn out differently," she reminisces.

These early struggles continue to shape her approach to issues. Elizabeth is known for never turning her back on a needy person who approaches her for help. "I always recall my own struggles through life and imagine what life would have been like had I not met the people who helped shape my life," she states. Other than using the Community Development Fund (CDF), Elizabeth has often dug deep into her own pockets to educate a needy child, or pay hospital bill for an ailing person, often relating with the situation.

Always performing her tasks with passion, Elizabeth sewed clothes, dusted tables, pews and shelves, and just about any other assigned duty with so much passion at the Chapel of Siriba Teachers' College, later renamed Maseno, that the priest in charge identified her skill and intelligence. He offered to take her back to school and secured a place for her at Rang'ala Girls' High School, a Catholic school in Nyanza. On the day her father took her to school, Elizabeth insisted on discussing the details of her admission privately with the head teacher. "There was no way I was going to fall behind my contemporaries, so I lied that I was meant to be joining form four and after an entry exam, I made the mark. My parents were surprised to know what I had done," she says, laughing.

The go-getting Elizabeth made great friends at Rang'ala High School, one of them being the outspoken nominated MP, Millie Odhiambo. "The students never performed well. The school had no facilities such as a library or laboratory, and the teachers appeared demotivated," says the MP. But she noticed that Millie and her friends studied hard because they seemed to have a greater purpose. "Given the two years I had lost, I joined their study group and had to put in extra effort, not only to catch up with them, but also to achieve my goal of going through form five and six and joining university," she states.

At the end of the year Elizabeth passed well and she joined Lwak Girls' High School the following year. Thereafter, she was admitted to Kenyatta University to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Education. "I felt so disappointed that I was joining Kenyatta University and not the University of Nairobi to study Law as I had purposed. Teaching is a noble career, but I had really desired a career in law," she says.



At KU, Elizabeth was experiencing freedom for the first time in her life, away from the watchful eyes of her parents and the church. Like the other girls from rural conservative Christian schools, she found the interaction between male and female students rather discomfiting. Elizabeth had previously spent the school holidays working in the convent as payback for her scholarship. Her only near contact with boys had been a deliberately ill-timed outing to a boys' school in Nyanza, soon after her form six exams. "We almost killed the nuns when we discovered that they had taken us to the school that had closed a day earlier and there were no students in sight," she says in amusement. This astounding freedom notwithstanding, Elizabeth maintained her principles, continuing to serve God as best as she could under the new circumstances and environment.

Being exposed to a lot of money for the first time, in form of pocket money (boom) given to all students at the time, Elizabeth discovered her knack for business. She became a 'moneylender' and also sold second hand clothes, shoes, cosmetics and jewellery to fellow students, making good profits that enabled her to support her parents and pay school fees for her siblings. She was able to build for her parents their first iron sheet roofed house while at the university. By the time she was graduating, Elizabeth was certain that business was her calling, and not teaching. For the second time in her life, she turned down a chance to join Alliance High School, this time as a teacher. "I had seen enough poverty in my life and I was determined to break the vicious cycle, so I left campus with business proposals, plans, stamina and determination," she says.

Struggling through life from her sister's two roomed house in Ayany Estate in Kibera, Nairobi, Elizabeth used the resources she had to establish environmental management companies. These businesses performed very well, and led to other companies that included a fleet of vehicles that offered refrigerated transportation of fish from Kisumu to Nairobi. She also got into an environmental management line through a company she called Kenya Refuse Handlers, as well as a construction company that secured tenders in major parastatals in and out of the country. Within a few years, her seven companies had flourished, with more than 400 employees. Elizabeth made her first million three months before her 21st birthday, and bought her first show-room car at 21 years of age.

The one thing that was never Elizabeth's dream was a career in politics. "The first time the political bug bit me was when some of my employees asked why I had never thought of extending my leadership skills into politics," Elizabeth recalls. After this, more people increasingly told her they thought she would bring even greater change to the poor from a political platform. "It took a lot of persuasion, even from church leaders, to consider politics, but eventually I yielded to pressure," she says. But even after getting elected into Parliament, Elizabeth still wonders if it is the best way to solve the problems of the needy. "You spend so much money and time campaigning to win a seat. Wouldn't that money be best used in a revolving fund or something else?" she wonders.

She chose the constituency to represent by drawing from her past life. She knows what it feels like to sleep hungry, but also knows how it feels when God grants you an opportunity to enjoy a five course meal; she knows how it feels to be an underpaid subordinate worker, for her father was one, and she also knows the challenges of an employer, for she has been one. Kasarani Constituency brings these contrasts in her life in scenarios such as Mathare informal settlements bordering the affluent Muthaiga in Nairobi. Her early life in the congested subordinate staff quarters of Siriba Teachers' College where her parents brought them up in utter need, taught her many a life's lessons.

Elizabeth was most interested in representing Kasarani Constituency to bring hope to the people living in poverty. "I have a lot in common with the people living in informal settlements and poverty-ridden environments," she says. Just like most of these settlements border affluent neighbourhoods, the subordinate staff quarters in Siriba

bordered the senior staff quarters. "Like most of our neighbours, we were many brothers and sisters, having very little to eat and wear while the senior staff quarters had very few children and lived much better lives - in bigger compounds and plenty of provisions," she remembers.

When she made up her mind to join politics in 2004, "there was no turning back" even when she received death threats and faced aggressive opponents. Party nominations, to her, were gruelling but the biggest challenge was the electioneering process, having to run against 32 candidates. "Quitting was not an option," states Elizabeth, who does not leave projects half done. The day she was announced winner was also the day she nearly met her death. People unknown to her urged her to reject the victory or lose her life. "Some of my friendlier opponents and key supporters shielded me safely home," she recalls. Two of her worst experiences in the subsequent days were the post election violence with the killing of several members of her constituency, and the kidnap threats on members of her family.

"I would receive a phone call from some of my key supporters in Kasarani and then hear them being killed while still on phone. It was heart breaking," she sadly recounts. Elizabeth had to leave the country for a few weeks immediately after the polls for her safety as she had received numerous death threats and kidnap attempts. "I feel pained that I joined politics to serve the people but started off that way. I'm not giving up as I'm more hardened now and determined to achieve what I set out to do," she states.

Married to Ferdinand Masha Kenga for over 15 years, Elizabeth is the mother of two sons and a daughter. Juggling her time between family and work is a challenge, but she says that being disciplined and focused has helped her manage her time well. "Coming from nothing to where I am meant giving my best. All that I have achieved, from business to ministering in church programmes, to politics and family have been within a very busy schedule," she muses. "With a supportive family, particularly the spouse, you can make it in any endeavour, including politics," she adds.

"This hectic life has helped me to perfect the art of knowing when and how to change very fast from one responsibility to the other, and the rest just falls in place," she says with a smile. In the middle of this hectic life, Elizabeth has also acquired a Master's degree in Environmental Planning and Management from the University of Nairobi.

Encouraged by her achievements in the constituency and at her ministry, the MP is often taken aback by the hypocrisy in politics. "I don't understand how people can say what they do not mean; it is confusing at times," she observes, without expounding. Stigmatization of female politicians through negative propaganda by men, and political violence are some of the greatest challenges she faces daily. But this won't deter her from running for office as Senator or another term as parliamentarian when she makes the decision.

Her parting shot: "Have the courage to change what you can, the discipline to accept and appreciate what you cannot change and the wisdom to know the difference."



“It disturbed me so much to see people suffering while leaders enjoyed the good life after being elected.”

## Hon Hellen Sambili

**MP FOR MOGOTIO | MINISTER FOR THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY**

At the first encounter with Prof Hellen Jepkemoi Sambili, one is struck by her humility. That was one journalist's experience immediately after the 2007 elections when violence over the disputed presidential elections rocked the country. Sambili was among the newly elected 15 women Members of the Tenth Parliament who were discussing with the media the best ways to stem the violence.

The violence was a rude welcome to the newly elected women who had not yet had the time to relish their victory. They went to work immediately; their mission was to preach peace amidst bitterness and hatred where neighbours who had lived together for many years had turned against each other over political affiliations.

She said then: “It is tough. I tell my people not to retaliate, but they tell me, ‘Now you don't want us to fight, do we sit back and watch as our families are wiped out?’ I tell them not to hit back - that is my message to them. They are uncomfortable with it but they are following my advice.” She optimistically told the gathering how her constituents were pleading for peace, and that she was going to be the torch carrying the good news of peace.

A few months later, long after the violence had ebbed, the journalist met her again - this time at a church function where she and her husband, Edward, were speaking about strong marriages. Then she was minister for Youth Affairs and Sports. “I am a minister of the government and men salute me. But at home, I am the submissive wife,” she declared

as the audience applauded. Meet Prof Sambili, the MP for Mogotio and Minister for the East African Community.

The political journey of the MP has not been smooth riding. She took up the then little known United Democratic Movement ticket after she lost the race during ODM's nominations. "I was rigged out even in wards she knew her popularity was exceptionally high," she is quoted as saying. She nonetheless went on to win in a region that voted for ODM almost to a man.

It wasn't easy to clinch the seat; her male challengers engaged in hate propaganda in an attempt to taint her name. In addition, they called her a wolf in sheep's skin because her husband Dr Edward Sambili, was (and still is) a Permanent Secretary in the Kibaki administration. Because of these setbacks, Edward kept off her campaign trail for fear of making the situation worse.

But her effort bore fruit. "I went from house to house selling my agenda to the people of Mogotio. I met elders and told them about my vision for the constituency. I explained how I was going to work with them to make the CDF fund improve their lives. It was tough but with God's grace I made it," she remarked soon after her victory. Hellen had family and friends behind her who believed in her. This encouraged her to fight to the end. And they have stood by her, boosting her determination to hang on and make a difference.

After the gruelling duel, she was appointed minister. And like many people, the appointment took her by surprise, as she is quoted to have told journalists: "I thank God for what has happened to me. I never lobbied for any position."

Her vision was to address the unemployment problem in her constituency as well as improve the feeder roads in the rural areas, which were impassable during the rainy season. This affected delivery of fresh farm produce to the market.

In a Parliament that is traditionally male dominated, she came on board with her academic distinction, and this has kept her above petty politicking. Of note, the Tenth Parliament has three other women with doctorate degrees: Dr Sally Kosgei, Prof Margaret Kamar and Dr Joyce Laboso.

Born in Kipng'orom village in Eldama Ravine in 1959, Sambili joined Kipng'orom Primary School in 1966. However, due to severe drought in Koibatek, she moved to Kiplombe Primary School in 1970 and proceeded to Nakuru High School for secondary education. She joined the University of Nairobi in 1979, where she graduated in 1983 with a Bachelor of Education (Science) degree. Sambili was then posted to Moi High School, Kabarak, as a teacher. Later, she proceeded to Lancaster University, United Kingdom, on a Ford Foundation scholarship to study for a master's degree.

Prof Sambili completed her doctorate and was employed as lecturer at Egerton University in 1993. Prior to going into politics, she was Associate Professor in charge of postgraduate programmes at the Department of Curriculum Instruction and Educational Management, Faculty of Education at the same university. She is founder and member of the Service Learning Programme for Egerton University visiting students and continues to serve as a member of the University's Vice Chancellor's committee on the status of senate and council recommendations. The MP is a member of the British Association for International and Comparative Education.

The realisation that the best way to address the plight of people in the constituency was through active representation led Prof Sambili to vie for the Mogotio seat. "It disturbed me so much to see people suffering while leaders enjoyed the good life after being elected,"

she said in an interview. So she quit her university job and went for elective politics. When she is not busy with her ministerial functions, Sambili will be in her constituency listening to the constituents and working with them to improve their lives as she promised during her campaigns.

Because of her passion for education (which was inspired by her mother who believed in education so much that she took Sambili and her siblings to school after the death of their father), the legislator is involved in the management of several schools in Koibatek and Nakuru. She is a member of the Boards of AIC Moi Academy, Esageri and Solian Girls' High School. She also chairs the Boards of Governors for Noiwet Boarding and Kiplombe Secondary Schools, all in Koibatek.

As Minister for Youth and Sports, she had to deal head on with soccer mismanagement, where wrangles are legion. For a while, she tried to streamline football management. But it proved a daunting task and when she was transferred from the ministry she told the incoming minister: "I welcome you to this ministry and hope you will manage to finish off the projects we have put in place. I, however, admit having failed to deal with the problems affecting soccer in this country and I hope you will find the best solution to the same."

A member of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association since 2008, Prof Sambili serves as Chairperson, African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption, Kenya Chapter.

As the fever for 2012 general election under the new Constitution catches up, Sambili seems to choose her words carefully, providing leadership with a difference.





“When I set out to do anything, I have a lot of passion to do the best.”



## Hon Joyce Laboso

### MP FOR SOTIK

She is a distinguished scholar, gender activist, philanthropist and an astute politician, all rolled into one. Dr Joyce Cherono Laboso, MP for Sotik is a born leader. Confidently walking the first steps of this long journey at a tender age as first born among six children, she commanded attention, offered guidance and superbly shaped up her organisational skills.

A prefect throughout primary and high school and debating club chair in the latter, she honed her leadership and communication skills early, preparing her for service to community. She attributes these responsibilities for further instilling in her the yearning to speak out as well as fight for truth, fairness and justice, for her mates then and the wider society years later.

For a person who grew up in the plush greenery of Kericho tea estates, attended some of the prestigious schools and colleges locally and abroad, is widely travelled around the world for work and social commitments and now in the league of who is who in Kenya, Joyce remains strikingly humble. Drawing inspiration and strength from her two grandmothers, she learned early in life that to succeed - and so she advises girls and women - one must not only work hard but must “never say die.”

As a test to her resilience, the MP with “a serious phobia for heights” has scaled Mt Kenya and more recently Mount Sinai while on a trip to Egypt. The climb up Kenya’s highest mountain was preceded by an endurance test of wits in the rugged plains of Loitokitok; she and her high school colleagues had joined army recruits in rock and cliff climbing, plunging into ice-cold water pools and spending nights in isolation.

"I never tell myself that anything is impossible," says the cheerful MP. She sums up what has guided her since her school and formative years: "When I set out to do anything, I have a lot of passion to do the best, to succeed against all odds. I always spend a lot of time on issues I believe in."

And education is one area Laboso literally immersed herself in, patiently reaching high peaks. She attended Molo Primary and the Kenya High School before joining Kenyatta University for her undergraduate studies in French, Literature and Education. A keen French student from her secondary school years, she proceeded to France's Université Paul Valéry in Montpellier for a post-graduate diploma in Education, majoring in French Language Teaching.

The studies saw her score a first in 1985 when upon return home she was posted as a teacher to Kipsigis Girls. Here, she introduced French as one of the examinable subjects and headed the respective department. To date, French remains a favourite and one of the best-performed subjects at the institution. For the next four years, she juggled between teaching and learning, attending refresher courses for French teachers in France.

In 1989, and still burning to quench her big thirst for education, Joyce went to the University of Reading in the UK for a two-year MA course on Teaching English as a Foreign Language. On her return to Kenya, she joined Egerton University where for the next ten years she would teach in the Literature, Languages and Linguistics department.

At Egerton, she started off as an Assistant Lecturer and hard work saw her rise to full lecturer and eventually the Assistant Dean of students. But the learning bug would hit again and on a Commonwealth scholarship she flew back to the UK, this time at the University of Hull for PhD studies in Gender and Language Education. Interestingly, she also added another feather in her cap, clinching a second post-graduate diploma in Research Training from Hull.

"I have done a lot of schooling," she acknowledges. Even as MP, Joyce still finds time to supervise PhD students and write university papers, besides her pastimes - reading biographies, watching comedies and documentaries.

Joyce is a mentor for school girls in her constituency. At Egerton, she coordinated programmes in the Institute of Women, Gender and Development Studies addressing female students' unique needs on campus; organised seminars, workshops and training on gender-related issues and represented the university in various public engagements, particularly in gender-related advocacy work.

The MP, who has along the way acquired specialist skills in gender mainstreaming, conflict resolution and research, has facilitated numerous civic education workshops in the Rift Valley, impacting skills and empowering women on the same as well as in HIV and AIDS, constitution-making, poverty alleviation and leadership.

Her other leadership roles include membership to the inaugural Advisory Board of the Women Enterprise Fund, Commissioner in the inaugural National Commission on Gender and Development and for two years (2000-2002) was President of Soroptimist International in Kenya, an international organisation concerned with making a difference for women in vulnerable situations through volunteering services. "In this position, I spearheaded an educational fund that has seen over 50 girls from disadvantaged backgrounds complete secondary school," she says.

Her role as rural women organiser and mentor yielded hefty returns when as coordinator of the Rift Valley Rural Empowerment Network the province posted the highest number

of elected women MPs and councillors in the 2007 elections. Prior to that, Joyce had coordinated a successful leadership and gender awareness training targeting mainly grassroots women.

It was no surprise then that when Sotik constituents called her to duty, she dutifully answered, thereby plunging into the world of politics. Although she had served the Sotik people in varied capacities, Joyce regrets the circumstances that catapulted her into politics. It was by a stroke of misfortune, indeed the tragic death of her sister Lorna Laboso, the former Sotik MP in a plane accident only nine months after 2007 elections.

When it dawned on her that the "people had decided" on her, Joyce gave it her all in the campaigns that followed for the vacant Sotik seat. The area was an Orange Democratic Party (ODM) zone and she did not hesitate on her choice of party, the same one that had propelled her sister to Parliament only months before.

"We were still mourning the death of my sister and it was not easy. I had serious challenge at the nominations stage, it was very difficult," she recalled. Some of her opponents thought she had been favoured at the nominations, but she soldiered on, urged on by the huge support from her husband and family. It was also easy to put together a strong and dedicated campaign machine, the same secretariat she had been part of while it campaigned for her late sister. "We quickly mapped a winning strategy in the cutthroat campaign. The (ODM) party leadership offered strong support in the by-election," she says.

Politics, Joyce was to discover, was not a cup of tea. "Some of my detractors lit up Sotik with propaganda, mudslinging and character assassination. Suddenly, people who had always treated me as one of their own, labelled me a foreigner (she is married out of the constituency) saying that I was imposing myself on the people." But with the solid backing of mainly women and the youth, she held on courageously till the bitter end to win the seat.

The MP, who loves singing and dancing, realised that she was now faced with a different song and tune, other than what she was accustomed to at the university. Politics, it emerged, had cast her in unfamiliar territory. "Life in Parliament is interesting, challenging and a mixture of many things. Nothing prepares one for work as an MP, no job description - nothing like in teaching where the system is structured and you work according to a lesson plan," she admits.

She talks of deceit, lies and intrigues characterising local politics. "You deal with people who do not see you for what you are but for what they can get out of you." She points out that the expectations of the constituents are many and high; responsibilities are enormous and can even be scary sometimes. "What with 'you belong to people, they own you and being in the limelight, everyone suddenly is looking up to you'," she wonders.

Worse, the MP finds herself with hardly any time for family - the phone is persistently ringing, trips materialise with numerous visits to the constituency and out of the country. "One is lost in a sea of responsibility and events," she says, adding that as much as life in Parliament may be hectic, she has had to adjust accordingly and is enjoying every minute of it.

Joyce is very passionate about women and leadership. A mother of three, she holds Martha Karua in awe "for her boldness and go-getter attitude", Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai for her "focused and sustained fight for the environment" and Sally Kosgey and Charity Ngilu for their varied leadership roles.

"Both my grandmothers have played a big role in showing me how strong women are. They were very powerful women. Although widowed early, they were able to hold their families together and put their children through school," she says.

In Parliament, Joyce has set her eyes on women and children issues, is keen on good governance and poverty alleviation, and on increase in the number of women in positions of leadership. She is also keen in supporting gender responsive budgeting, the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the Marriage Bills.

She is a member of the Speakers Panel, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Implementation and a member of the Departmental Committee on Education, Research and Technology.

Her priorities for her constituents as contained in a Strategic Plan developed with their input, include improving the dairy industry and roads infrastructure, providing clean drinking water closer to the people, raising the education standards, confronting early marriages and pregnancies and elimination of FGM.

She hopes the gains in the new Constitution will improve the status of women in the country. "Women must seize the opportunity offered by the Constitution. The society must also be educated and sensitised to be more acceptable of women, that women make as good if not better leaders as men," she emphasised.

On what seat she intends to seek in 2012, Joyce confides: "My plan is still in the closet, but as a politician, I will go for a strategic seat." Certainly, she has big dreams.



“I wanted to be the *leketio* (the belt that protects life) between the Pokots and Marakwets.”



## Hon Linah Jebii Kilimo

**MP FOR MARAKWET EAST | ASSISTANT MINISTER, COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING**

She has seen it all - from abject poverty, male chauvinism, destructive cultural practices to elective politics. All these, however, did not deter her in the journey to achieving her childhood dream of becoming famous and successful. Hon Lina Jebii Kilimo broke the myth of a woman's ability to lead in a male dominated community when she became the Member of Parliament for Marakwet East.

Growing up in Kokwo Miso, Kartur Village in Marakwet East District was both a burden and a curse for a girl child. Usually on an empty stomach and with the danger posed by wildlife, her day would start at the crack of dawn when she went to collect salt for the family livestock in the Kerio Valley escarpment, a five kilometre journey up the hill.

Besides the tough chores that Jebii and her age mates endured at a tender age, she also faced the risk of being married off at the age of nine. “In my culture, girls were usually circumcised as soon as they reached nine years, after which they would be forced into marriage, where the young boys would elope with the girls. I did not want that to happen to me, so I would cry a lot whenever I remembered what was in store for me,” she says.

Then one day, a male teacher who had just joined their school gave Jebii the nudge that marked a turning point in her life. “My desire to be an achiever coincidentally started when I was nine years and in standard four. One of my former teachers, Ex Senior Chief Johnstone Labore gave the class an inspirational talk where he urged the girls to shun female genital mutilation (FGM) so that they could drive big cars like the Luo ladies



who were not circumcised and were well educated," explains the Assistant Minister for Cooperative Development and Marketing.

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

"I was to be circumcised in December 1975. Preparations had been made and I was part of the group of girls lining up for the circumciser's knife. However, I cried so uncontrollably that the women said I should not undergo the cut since my crying signified a bad omen," she recalls.

According to Kilimo, the Marakwet culture considers such tears and cries as a serious sign and warning that all would not go well. "My community believes that one will die if she cries before she faces the knife, so my tears helped me to escaped the rite," she reveals.

Her tribulations were far from over. In 1976, instead of proceeding to standard five like her other classmates, she was forced to go and look after her niece. "My eldest brother who was a nurse in Kakamega had a baby and I was sent to stay with them and take care of the baby," she says. But for Jebii, it was better to babysit her niece than be subjected to the tough chores at her Marakwet rural home and also be taunted as the one who could not face the knife like her age mates.

After a year, her brother was transferred to Nairobi and he took her along. In 1977 she joined Madaraka Primary School and went straight to standard six. "I never attended standard five but still when I sat for the Certificate of Primary Education the following year, I passed with 31 points out of the total 36 points," she says with confidence.

Jebii then proceeded to State House Road Girls for secondary education. She walked daily from school to Makadara where she lived with her brother. She would save the two shillings that her brother gave her daily for transport. After saving fifteen shillings, she would buy a packet of sweets which she would sell to her classmates during break time, at a profit.

The MP, who is known for speaking her mind, says that her parents had threatened to circumcise her once she was through with secondary school. She joined Moi Forces Academy where she sat for A-levels in 1982. "I could not go back to my parents, lest they went ahead to carry out their threat. Instead, I went to live with some missionaries in Mombasa. For close to a month, my family did not know where I was. They came to know of my whereabouts at a relative's wedding where I served as a maid of honour," she recounts.

It was at this wedding in August 1982 that Jebii reconciled with her parents. She explains that the emotional event had great significance especially in her relationship with her father who passed on one month after the reunion.

The ssistant minister then worked as a clerk at the Kenya Commercial Bank from 1985 to 1997 when she resigned and vied for the East Marakwet parliamentary seat on a Social Democratic Party (SDP) ticket. She did not make it to Parliament after a campaign in which her opponents used derogatory language, describing her as an uncircumcised child who could not lead the people of Marakwet. "It was like a bad tag on my face," she recalls.

Even with only six votes in her favour at the elections, Jebii remained confident that she would one day represent the people of Marakwet in Parliament. For the following five years when she was out "in the political cold" with no formal job, she volunteered with World Vision, and acted as a translator in their meetings. She also sold maize and sardines (omena) in Nairobi and Kitale to make ends meet.

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

According to the achiever of Marakwet, cattle rustling and FGM are the two major issues she addressed whenever she was given a platform to address members of her community. She believes that these are the issues that propelled her to where she is now - a second time MP for Marakwet East.

"The people of Marakwet were dying because of cattle rustling and I could not just sit and watch. I sought refuge in the Bible and asked God to give me a chance to change the situation. I wanted to be the leketio (the belt that protects life) between the Pokot and Marakwets. I wanted to bring these two communities together and in 2002 my dream was realized when I won the election on a Narc ticket," she recounts.

Besides World Vision, which supported her programmes against FGM in the constituency, she also received a lot of material for the campaign from the Education Centre for Women in Democracy (ECWD).

The battle was not yet over and once again in 2007 she had to face her male opponents who still thought that she was not qualified to be the area MP. They continued to use the same insults they had used against her during the previous parliamentary campaigns. "However, the constituents were on my side this time because of my efforts to end cattle rustling and to promote the rights of the girls, including freedom from FGM," she says, beaming with confidence.

"Most parties were hesitant to nominate me to vie on their ticket and I went with the relatively unknown KENDA Party. Although there was an ODM wave sweeping across the Rift Valley the electorate in my constituency did not disappoint me. I am proud to state that I am the only KENDA legislator in the Tenth Parliament," says the MP.

Jebii, who is married to Eng Philemon Kilimo, an Engineer with the Ministry of Roads, says that women need to claim their space in leadership in all spheres and should not allow men to pull them down.

As the Chairperson of Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) which brings together all the 22 women parliamentarians, Kilimo says that one of her accomplishments has been channelling resources available to the Association to support projects in the constituencies that are represented by women.

KEWOPA has also been in the forefront in mobilizing MPs to support women-related bills, among them, the Prohibition of FGM Bill. She observes that if it is passed into law, the Bill will make FGM a criminal act. She argues that the Children's Act is not powerful enough to eliminating the practice, which is still deeply rooted in some cultures.



“Leadership is not about deception and lies.”

## Hon Maison Leshomo

### NOMINATED MP

Finding herself in the Tenth Parliament could only be attributed to reaping the fruits of what she has been sowing over the last 20 years. Nominated Member of Parliament Hon. Maison Leshomo has consistently advocated the rights of the people of Samburu. For years, the harsh climate coupled with general underdevelopment has left the people in poverty, suffering from recurrent famine and drought and holding onto a pastoral lifestyle which can no longer be sustained. In her own words: “Niliaanza kwa kutetea na kusaidia watu wetu.” (I started by defending and helping our people).

She may not have been well known countrywide, but her track record in Samburu speaks for itself. During an interview with her as her several mobile phones keep ringing and she answers some or asks her personal assistant to respond to others, one begins to see her as a leader who is very close to the people and is easily accessible.

“Nilitazama vile watu wetu walivyokuwa wakiteseka na nikaamua nijaribu kusaidia kwa njia yeyote iwezekanayo.” (Seeing how people from my region were suffering I decided to do something to alleviate the situation). Over the years, she has served leadership roles with no income or support but with only a strong resolve and determination to play her part in improving the lives of the people her community.

Born in Maralal, Leshomo has been the chairlady of Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation in Samburu since 1995. She attended St Mary’s Primary School in Maralal in the late 60s and early 70s, and due to lack of school fees could not pursue further education. Later, she joined a dancing troop at the Bomas of Kenya in Nairobi. While there she became a member of a small group of women who hailed from Samburu.

For her efforts she is the first Lmaa woman to make it to Parliament (Lmaa constitutes Samburu, Maasai and Njemps). She is also the first woman from the region to speak publicly before men. "This was not easy because I had to endure insults from men," she says. "Ilikuwa ngumu mara ya kwanza, nilipewa jina mbaya mbele ya wazee. Baada ya kuchukuliwa kuwa mimi ni kichwa ngumu baadaye wakaniunga mkono." (It was difficult at the beginning and at first they called me names, saying that I was stubborn but with time they supported me).

Leshomo says that when she started speaking publicly about early marriage, recurrent conflict, female genital mutilation, hunger and poverty levels there was a lot of resistance from the men. Women soon embraced her message and supported her and with time the men too embraced her and made her a Lmaa leader. Indeed she acknowledges that it was her excellent mobilization skills that helped to steer her to the heights she has achieved. Andrew Saidimo from Samburu remarks: "When Party of National Unity (PNU) campaigners came to Samburu she was able to organize women from the entire region and they were impressed with her excellent mobilization skills."

In 1992 Leshomo was nominated as a councilor in Maralal and a deputy town mayor between 1993 and 2007. It was at this time that she met great resistance from the male folk and the beginning of abusive language for daring to speak on community issues in public.

She remains outspoken on conflict issues in the region prone to drought. The MP is also vocal in addressing girl child education. "The culture in Maralal dictates that girls at the tender age of 10 years be married off to much older men," she sadly observes.

The recurrent conflict around the Samburu region is one which she has also been focusing her attention on. She attributes the conflict to diminishing grazing land and war turfs around water points. For example, she says, sometimes people from another community seek to graze amongst the Samburu and vice versa, or people fight at a water point. "The conflict that has been ongoing for many years, resulting in many orphaned children and widows, besides losing young men from the community," she says.

Because of the pastoral lifestyle in northern Kenya, access to primary education is usually interrupted. However, Leshomo says that some change is now evident as more children from the region are enrolling in schools. With keen interest in education, Leshomo sponsors some 15 students at various levels, most of them undergoing training in teacher training colleges. She also helps to feed some 150 people from the community. "I don't want to say that I started all this when I became an MP as I have been serving the community for many years. However, as an MP I have been able to expand the scope of my support," she explains.

Leshomo's greatest contribution in Parliament, she says, has been in debates on peace. She sits in a parliamentary committee that addresses peace issues among communities. Her experience in peace negotiations dates back to the early 90s. Between 1993 and 2007 she served in the Samburu District Peace Committee. The Committee has been instrumental in bringing on board professionals from the region to engage in a peace caravan. Peter Lenaniyarra, one of the professionals says: "After the Kanampio massacre in 2009 where many people died, we agreed as professionals to change the image of where we come from." Lenaniyarra says the Laikipia West MP Nderitu Mureithi usually hosts the professionals where for the last two years they have held several sessions with community members at the grassroots level.

During the peace meetings, the district commissioners and district officers have been appealing on residents to stop fighting and focus on education. "We educate them, for

example, on the disadvantages of overstocking their herds, that there is hardly enough grazing land for huge herds of cattle," says Leshomo. She and members of the peace committee say that they have been mobilizing the community to adopt and explore new lifestyles, mainly by embracing education. For Leshomo, these efforts have borne fruit: "Since we started these initiatives conflicts in the region have become rare."

She is full of praise for the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association which she says has given her support as an MP and facilitates some of the training with the communities. "It is a good forum where women MPs meet to discuss issues of interest."

The mother of five advises women seeking leadership: "Ninaomba wanawake wajitokeze na wasirudi nyuma. Mwenye anaelewa shida ni mama. Wanawakewajitokeze na kujiamini na wasiogope." (I appeal to women to forge ahead and should not relent because women understand most problems. Women should offer themselves for leadership and believe in themselves.) "One needs to be truthful and of integrity and speak of what they know they can manage. Leadership is not about deception and lies," she notes.





“I enjoy the mandate and trust given to me by the constituents.”



## Hon Margaret Kamar

**MP FOR ELDORET EAST | ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND MINERAL RESOURCES**

She is involved in many leadership positions, many of which, she says, are voluntary “because that is one of the best ways I can make my contribution of transforming society positively.” The constituents had singled her out for her selflessness and involvement in activities aimed at improving their welfare, so they prevailed upon her to seek a parliamentary seat so that she could serve them better.

Hon (Prof) Margaret Kamar, MP for Eldoret East and assistant minister for Environment and Mineral Resources radiates to the society the same warmth she enjoyed as she grew up in a close knit family. “I had such a memorable childhood,” she remembers. She never experienced the discrimination generally associated with a polygamous family, which she was born in, “because my father was a wonderful head of family, and all eight of us, four boys and four girls, two girls and two boys from each of the two wives, never felt loved less,” she says.

When it was time to start school, she was separated from her three sisters who all went to Standard one while she had to attend nursery school in a different school. “Although I was miserable, I comforted myself that I was more privileged as my school had a cement floor, while the one my sisters attended was built of mud,” she reminisces. What she did not know is that she was learning to live independently at a very tender age. She would later, as soon as she became a teenager, be criss-crossing continents as she studied soil, water and forest conservation, issues she is passionate about.

Interestingly at that early age, Kamar was also exposed to something significant. Her school had swings and the teacher would encourage them to finish their work expeditiously so that they could go and swing. She would do this because she loved the swings.

At the end of the first year she topped her class. "Ironically the swings motivated my performance and I was in for another surprise that would be significant in my life - that when you top, you are rewarded," she says. She recollects the event vividly: "When my name was called out for a reward I refused to acknowledge it in the absence of my father, who had not turned up for the occasion. I cried so much that the management had to send for him."

"My father was so moved that he bought for me a suite case that was only seen with the Indian students in Eldoret town," she explains. In primary school she continued to work hard "to please my father" and he would often surprise her with a gift. By then, she says, she had realized that the anticipation of a reward was giving her so much pleasure in her school work. "My father's rewarding technique worked well with my brothers and sisters and their school results were always very good," she says.

For "O" levels, the MP scored a 1st division of 19 points, to get her admission to Alliance Girls High School, but went to Moi Girls School in Eldoret instead. Kamar did not take that lying low. She accompanied her father and elder brother who was then a student at the University of Nairobi to Alliance Girls High School, Nairobi to find out why she had not been admitted at the school.

They were informed that she had missed out because the headmistress of Moi Girls School in Eldoret had "snatched" her name from the headmistress of Alliance because the former wanted her to join her school where Kamar's elder sister was excelling academically and in discipline. What she hadn't discovered about herself was a trait – never to let anything intimidate her - a trait she would exploit at high school and university, work, leadership position and now as an MP and a minister.

Being a first in stereotyped male positions such as in management leadership, Kamar has had to "shake" male dominance without any apologies. She says: "I grew up in an environment that I was not made conscious of the fact that I was a girl or a woman. My father and brothers treated all of us sisters as equal and thankfully through school, even university, I had not experienced discrimination because I was a woman," she says. It was much later after university education when she was in a leadership positions where this came up.

She recalls while chairing male-dominated meetings and out of the blues a male colleague would interrupt her and offer to explain to the other members that "what Margaret is saying is . . ." "Suddenly it dawned on me that majority of my male colleagues did not think that I had a mind of my own," says the professor.

She cites an instance during a departmental meeting at Moi University when she had to come out strongly and let her male colleagues know that she was in the team by merit, and yes, being young (in her early twenties), and a female at that, did not mean that she did not have a mind of her own. "Henceforth, I also declined to take minutes, a task that had been delegated to me, after realising that it was also a stereotypical position. Thus, this early, I learnt to take up my rightful position in leadership irrespective of my gender."

Even in Parliament, this stereotyping did not stop. "In Parliament, when I was acting as Speaker, I became aware that there was no such word as "chairlady" and often times I was referred to as "Mr Speaker Sir," notes the Minister, adding that when she inquired she was informed by her male colleagues that no man had envisaged a woman would

occupy the Speaker's chair in Parliament. She reminded them that women were taking up leadership in politics and elsewhere and, thanks to the new Constitution, change would come to Parliament. "Soon and very soon, we shall have an address such as Madam Speaker or Lady in Parliament," she says laughingly.

Kamar came into politics by chance. "I was enjoying my work and doing voluntary work in numerous committees where I enjoy mentoring people into positive living and never thought I would end up in politics not to mention political leadership," she says.

But then the political landscape was changing and people in her constituency were calling on her to serve them as their MP. "Interestingly I was touched when I was approached by elders drawn from the many locations in my constituency and they prevailed upon me to run for Parliament," says the Professor. It was a request she could not decline to. Elders were a powerful lot in her community and for them to approach her, it meant they had full confidence in her and would make sure that she sailed through the elections.

What touched her most was that although her community is patriarchal, they requested her to lead them. After much soul searching, she resigned from her Moi University job to campaign for the Eldoret East Constituency seat on an ODM ticket and won.

Although she had the support of the elders, Kamar's exposure and experience in many leadership positions - from school where she was prefect, student leader at the university, and then while working as an extension officer at the grassroots - gave her an edge. "I was already well known by the constituents. I did not endure much verbal or any physical violence during the campaigns," she says. She drew support from the youth, men and women throughout the constituency.

Her extensive education was handy during the campaigns as, she says, "I learnt to survive and be able to put my antagonistic male counterparts in their right place. Thanks to this exposure, I am confident in handling such challenging situations in my current calling."

From 2001 to 2006, Kamar served as a nominated member of the East African Legislative Assembly. Politics aside, she is an achiever in the academia - in her chosen field of soil science. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree from Punjab Agricultural University and Master of Science degree from McGill University in Canada in 1986. She earned her PhD in soil and water conservation from the University of Toronto in 1992.

After her Masters she joined Moi University as a tutorial fellow, where she rose to associate professor of soil science. From 1997 to 2002, Prof Kamar was the principal of Moi University's Chepkoilel Campus after which she was appointed the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Research and Extension, a position she held between 2002 and 2006.

The MP does not hesitate to say that she will vie for elections in 2012. "I have learnt so much as an MP and a minister. I have enjoyed participating in parliamentary committees, the position of Speaker, and oh, yes, I have seen the tremendous difference I have made in all these and most of all I enjoy the mandate and trust given to me by the constituents. I would love to continue with this noble job of serving the community," says the enthusiastic professor.

Indeed, the Eldoret East constituents say she is a powerful and popular leader who is in touch with the wananchi. "Mheshimiwa Kamar is going back to Parliament in 2012, no doubt," says lawyer Paul Kemboi from her constituency. "She listens to the people and, unlike male MPs, she fulfils her promises to them," he adds.

Prof Kamar encourages more women to take up their rightful positions, especially in the political arena, and to unite and work towards a better country. "I believe women have what it takes and can be the solution to the woes that are bedeviling our country," she observes.



“Politics is a  
call from God.”



## Hon Bishop Margaret Wanjiru

**MP FOR STAREHE | ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR HOUSING**

Charismatic, elegant, jovial and convincing words. A straight talking legislator, she has the courage to fend off any challenge that comes her way. She is prayerful and will invoke “the will of God will be done” when pushed to the corner. Exuding confidence, she believes that she isn’t down until she is down.

Starehe MP Hon Bishop (Dr) Margaret Wanjiru Kariuki, is a fighter. She has fought many battles and emerged unscathed and it is this history of success in the face of adversity that perhaps makes her ooze confidence.

“I trust my God to fight for me. I do what I am able to do as a human being and God does the rest. He has been the faithful God to me. He has never let me down,” she affirms.

From her family to her church and recently the political arena, Wanjiru has faced some of the toughest challenges. The energy with which she emerges from such challenges is clear testimony that she is not a pushover, but perhaps one of the most influential women in Kenya today.

She may be enjoying the good things in life today - a good car, a government job, a parliamentary seat, three children and several successful businesses - but Wanjiru knows what it means to be poor. “I was born in a very poor family in Nairobi where struggle for survival was the order of the day. At only 17 years, I had already started to do menial jobs to earn a living,” she says.



She loves hygiene and everything associated with her is always sparkling clean. Could this be attributed to the kind of jobs she did at her teen age? "I have been a house girl, a toilet cleaner, an office cleaner and also a car cleaner," she says of her past. A woman of great faith, Wanjiru believes that a discouraging past does not close doors to a prosperous future. She constantly reminds people that each one has a bright future and that the secret is to pray to God to give us what we do not have.

The Bishop started the Jesus is Alive ministries in the 1990s, and the church has been described as one of the fastest growing in Africa. The ministry is also involved in income generating activities and runs several businesses, something Bishop Wanjiru considers to be in order. "You may find that giving people spiritual food is not enough on its own. We have many poor people among us and as a church we have the obligation to take care of their material needs. Even Jesus had to give people food," she acknowledges.

But it is the political aspect of this charismatic preacher that demonstrates the mettle she is made of. Her constituency is the seat of Government, the Central Business District and is home to the most prestigious businesses in the country. It is also the abode of lower middle class citizens and the constituency is regarded the home of the street wise because of the small informal businesses in downtown Nairobi.

Starehe Constituency is a hotbed of politics and has experienced four by-elections in two decades, the largest number in the country. The first was in 1989, when the then MP Kiruhi Kimondo was expelled by Kanu in 1988. The other two have resulted from party defections in the first multiparty Parliament while the last one resulted from a petition filed by former MP Maina Kamanda following a dispute on vote count in the 2007 election, which had declared the Bishop the MP for Starehe. True to her fighting spirit, the MP recaptured the seat in the by-election.

How did Wanjiru, the preacher with a large following, decide to venture into homes looking for votes?

"It was a call from God. I received a prophetic word, prayed about it and I was given a go ahead. Many people questioned how I would serve God and be in politics but God has made it possible," she replies. "My call is based on Isaiah 62:10 which says: "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people," she quotes.

The MP often uses the Bible to guide her in the decisions she makes on many matters. The political dream is no exception. For those who question whether church and politics can go together, her answer is found in Revelation 5:10 which says: "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth," she declares.

The 2007 election was a battle of titans considering that the incumbent was a cabinet minister and one of the insiders in the President's Party of National Unity (PNU). To make matters worse, Wanjiru opted for the opposition, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Party, in total defiance of what her community would have preferred. On this, she said, "I am not a tribalist. This is the culture I want to fight as it is a major cancer in our society. I never view things from a tribal angle. I went to ODM as a strong member. At the time of entry I was not empty handed. I had many followers," she says.

During the campaigns, Wanjiru would pray for the powerful Pentagon team and many came to her church. "We were praying to be guided by the Spirit of God," she states. However, she is apprehensive that after the election, the politicians did not go back to the church. "There is this tendency of people getting close to God when they are facing a challenge. When they cross the river, they forget God. Maybe this is why they do not have peace after they assume office," she says of the political elite.

Wanjiru was blessed to be appointed assistant minister for Housing. "I enjoy working there because housing is a major problem in Nairobi and my constituency in particular," she says, adding: "Within the informal settlements of Starehe, we didn't have toilets and bathrooms and I knew that Housing would provide the facilities to the constituency." The results are evident, especially in the upgrading project and the many sanitation blocks.

In September 2010, Mama wa Kazi (hard working woman) - as she is known in street language - surprised friends and foes when she triumphed in the Starehe by-elections by garnering 29, 287 votes against her closest rival's 25, 416. Wanjiru is believed to have reaped votes from the youth, whom she has been working closely with. "Mimi ni mama wa vijana. Sitawaacha kamwe. Lazima tusaaidiane tupate kazi. (I am a mother to young people. I will not disown you. We must work together and try to get jobs for you)," she told campaign rallies at the time.

Asked how she manages her church with all the official and political duties that come calling, Bishop Wanjiru, who has an honorary doctorate in divinity, says that she believes in delegation of duties. "Many of my church roles are delegated to a very able team of trained pastors. They conduct more than 20 services in a week. However, I still preach most Tuesday's and Sunday's and I hold a six days conference once a month. In addition, I preach in other countries and hold mass evangelism crusades," she said.

A televangelist with a large following, she still finds time to preach in a weekly TV programme, dubbed "The Glory is here".

Bishop Wanjiru is not perturbed that the elections are beckoning in 2012. "We shall be there when the time comes. At the moment, I want to fulfill the promises I made to Starehe constituents, most of which are already accomplished," she says, with characteristic confidence.

She concludes the interview with these words: "To God be the Glory, for all the things He has done."





“I’m an ordinary person with extraordinary dreams for my homeland, Kenya.”

## Hon Martha Karua

### MP FOR GICHUGU

For Martha Wangari Karua, MP for Gichugu, the march to the House on the Hill is driven by her passion for justice and the rule of law. In her characteristic determination, she believes that come the 2012 elections Kenya could have, in her, the first woman president.

It was a scene not easily forgotten - dozens of curious wananchi scrambled for the few seats and cramped into the courtroom in Nairobi. The defendants on the dock were council members of the Law Society of Kenya (LSK). Their crime? Speaking politics. In those days, speaking politics could simply mean giving a divergent opinion from that of the government or its officials.

Among the defendants was Martha Karua, the only woman at the LSK council. The members of the public had jammed the courtroom in a silent protest and support of the accused persons. “This was the era of the Moi regime where standard democracies and freedoms were gravely violated,” remembers Martha, then a charismatic lawyer who had stood out as a fearless and tireless advocate of the people’s rights.

The Martha of today carries with her the same passion for justice, the same principled nature she had as an advocate and is only growing stronger and bolder in her pursuit to see her beloved nation free from impunity and corruption. Certainly Kenya’s foremost female politician, she is described as a resilient reformer whose track record on fighting for the rule of law and upholding people’s rights remains uncontested.

An opinion on the MP depends on who you are - her admirer or her critic. To her admirers, she is a leader who will not be intimidated by anyone or shy away from any political fight if she believes that what is right and true is being abused. She is regarded firm and resolute in upholding the law and abiding by the rule of law.

During the controversial vote tallying at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre in December 2007, her true character and energy to uphold the rule of law came in handy. In fact, she walked out of the fiasco with the tag of "the only man in PNU", a reference to her tough stance in defense of what she believed was the best legal course of action in the crisis. "I still believe the post election violence was unfortunate and unnecessary. In fact, the matter should have gone to court for determination," she states.

One of Martha's most ardent supporters, former Naivasha MP Jayne Kihara describes her as "consistently consistent" and a defender of what she believes in. "I admire her boldness and forthrightness. When you cross her path, she will tell you directly. She does not hold a grudge or send someone to tell you about it. After this, she moves on," says Kihara. The former MP believes Martha will be Kenya's first female president, the best president Kenya will have had so far.

Her critics, on the other hand, say she is too tough on account of her no-nonsense approach to issues she holds dear. When we catch up with her at the Party's head office, Narc-Kenya, on a sunny mid morning, it becomes an opportunity to interact with this firebrand politician who has her hands full.

She has one meeting after another, receiving calls from her constituents, a press conference to attend and also a number of women and political leaders seeking to talk to her. Some of them just want to express solidarity with what she has said or done. "I am at peace meeting people. I talk to them and they directly tell me what they think is going wrong in the country and how they think it should be addressed," she says.

And although the four-time MP has earned herself the tag of the Iron Lady of Kenya's politics, the journey has been long and winding. Born in a humble family of eight children, four boys and four girls, Wangari, as she was known then, hated injustice. In fact, it was by no accident that when she attended various secondary schools in Kirinyaga, she used to joke with her classmates that she would one day be the MP for Gichugu.

"My childhood dream was to become a judge. At the time, I did not know the Gichugu MP dream would come true," she says. It finally did in 1992, but not before an illustrious career achieved in working at both the judiciary and the legal profession.

After High School, Martha joined Nairobi Girls' School (today's Moi Nairobi Girls') for her A-Levels after which she enrolled at the University of Nairobi in 1977 for a degree in Law. After graduation, she immediately joined the School of Law for the statutory post graduate course that is a requirement to practice law.

Contrary to the plight of graduates today, Martha easily got a government job as soon as she graduated. In her days at the university, students loans covered the three basics; accommodation, tuition, and food, something she invokes when she discusses how the education system could be improved.

"In my time, I was able to get assistance in the key areas in order to pursue my education, I don't see why we can't provide the same support and opportunities for our students these days," Martha notes.

In 1981, at the age of 24, she became a district magistrate and served at the Makadara and Kibera law courts for six years. Earlier, she had worked in Nakuru and Nairobi Law courts. It is from here that she established Martha Karua & Company Advocates, her door to private practice and eventual plunge in the world of politics.

By the time she was leaving the judiciary in 1987, Martha had risen to be Senior Resident Magistrate at the Kibera Law Courts. Her stint in private practice run for fifteen years (up

to 2002) and it is during this time that she would engage in pro bono cases, including the treason trial of former Subukia MP Koigi wa Wamwere and the late assistant minister in the office of the President and former Nakuru MP Mirugi Kariuki.

Apart from handling cases that had strong political overtones, Martha had a passion for family law - especially distribution of matrimonial property - after realising that the norms in society did not favour women inheritance.

Her other love, and it remains to date, is the constitutional and administrative law. "I have always advocated the strict observance of the rule of law, not merely because the law should be followed for its own sake, but because it offers guidelines and protections for each individual," she asserts.

But the political bug would bite Martha only three years into private practice. In 1991, she was one of the young Turks who lit the fire for the clamour of multiparty democracy. But then, like today, the limelight was given to the male protagonists. She became a member of Kenneth Matiba's faction when the original Ford Party split.

Martha first faced discrimination against women in politics at the onset of her political career. She was rigged out in favor of a competitor in Ford Asili party elections. Sensing that the same would occur in the nominations Martha decamped to DP where she contested successfully for nomination as a parliamentary candidate in 1992.

The Ford Asili debacle would be a blessing in disguise. She put up an engaging campaign and won in the first multi-party elections. And since then, Ngatha ya Gichugu (Gichugu's great daughter) as one Gikuyu pop musician pays tribute to her in a song, has not looked back.

When Narc came to power in 2003, Martha was appointed the Minister for Water. In 2005 she was given the Justice and Constitutional Affairs ministry to head. During President Kibaki's second tenure in 2008, she was one of the people appointed to the "Half cabinet", a list of 21 Ministers President Kibaki named as the post election violence intensified. She was re-appointed to the post.

In April 2009, Martha would score another first. She became the first minister under the Kibaki administration to voluntarily resign. "What is the point of being given an office without matching authority to run it?" she posed to the media. The President had appointed judges without consulting her. She felt that her position was being undermined at a time the government, through the National Accord, had committed to judicial and governance reforms, among others. "My efforts to establish this were thwarted when my recommendations were circumvented," she asserts.

Yet Martha Karua is more than this. She is a working mother of two, a passionate lawyer and has been fighting for human rights and helping the needy. In 1999, she was the first female lawyer to be nominated and win the Jurist of the Year award, by the Kenyan chapter of the International Commission of Jurists. She was awarded for her work in service to the people and a high level of professionalism.

The Gichugu MP has also served as a member of two of the country's most strategic civil society organizations, the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and the League of Kenyan Women Voters, where she was the founding chair. A strategist who is clear on where her political path is headed, Martha has been reaching out to key Kenyans and explaining her mission.

Martha believes that her twenty years of experience testify that Gichugu constituents have faith in her leadership. "Voters are very quick at discarding underperforming MPs. I



have remained their MP because I have lived up to their expectations," she says. Martha regards Phoebe Asiyo, Wangari Maathai and Edda Gachukia as her role models as they "inspire women that all is possible."

For many years, Martha, an articulate debater in Parliament, took interest in parliamentary reporting relayed on state Radio KBC in the famous programme, "Today in Parliament". "I think it is from this interest that I strongly felt I could not remain a spectator in a game I could play," she explains. Her venture into politics was no easy ride and on several occasions, she had her home surrounded by hired goons and some of her supporters were assaulted with pangas. "There was violence and many death threats came my way. However, my resolve to give Gichugu a new type of committed leadership gave me strength," she states.

Martha seeks to enlist the support of Kenyans, keen on change. Already, many women groups have endorsed her candidacy. "I do not believe in rush hour campaigns. There is no early campaigns for me. You have to allow the people to get to know you as a candidate and hear you out, and they need to be able to process that in an environment that is not overcrowded with the campaign hullabaloo that is characteristic of rush hour campaigns," she observes.

Back home, Gichugu has remained a model constituency with the MP initiating many water projects and improving infrastructure and education. Before the coming of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), Martha was already lobbying organizations supporting development for assistance.

So, why does Martha attract admiration and criticism in equal measure? "I speak my mind, expressing my opinion on what I believe is wrong," she says. Since her resignation as Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs in 2009, Martha has continued to champion the cause of the implementation of the Constitution, the respect for the rule of law and has been a strong voice against the culture of impunity in Kenya.

The MP says that no one oriented her to parliamentary procedures but she simply read the standing orders of Parliament. "Whether it is the first time or not there is a standing order to guide you through house proceedings. You read it to know how to bring and pass motions, asking questions and whatever other business," she explains.

The Presidential hopeful says her relationship with other parliamentarians is work oriented. "Parliament is not a playground but a platform for me to represent my Constituents and conduct serious business of nation building."

Martha was an official of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association before she was appointed to the Cabinet. "I have nonetheless remained an active member," she says. Martha believes women leadership has come of age and resources are needed to prepare them for political leadership.

"We need media support. We want our issues to be heard far and wide. Let the media take up that responsibility and not to discriminate against women," she appeals.

And what is her advice to women aspiring for elective political positions? "Be focused and do not be distracted by all the things people will say about you. Press on until you achieve your goal.

There is still more to come from Martha who has been a guiding light in moments of great travail in Kenya. Her parting words: "I remain committed to the reform agenda, and will do whatever it takes to see my beloved Kenya prosper and live under the new dawn - the new Constitution."



“I have taken my work as an MP seriously and I make sure that I read all bills that come to the floor of the house.”

## Hon Millie Odhiambo

### NOMINATED MP

“In politics, there must be some mystic. That is when it works. Not unleashing your plans early is one of the rules of the game. However, you must keep in touch with reality on the ground because politics is about humanity and all politics is local.” This is the response from Hon Millie Odhiambo-Mabona, a Nominated Member of Parliament, when asked whether she would vie for an elective seat in 2012.

The political bug bit Millie very early in life. While still a pupil at Homa Bay Primary School, she was fascinated to be part of the titanic political battle for the Karachuonyo Constituency seat between the then all powerful KANU Secretary, the late Hon Okiki Amayo, and Hon Pheobe Asiyo. Millie had disappeared from home and as her mother looked for her all over Homa Bay town she was indeed lost in a different context - in the counting Hall of Homa Bay County Council where ballot boxes arrived from all over the district from as far as Isebania, Kuria and other places. Even after a recount of the disputed results, Mrs Asiyo emerged the winner, felling this political giant. This incident remained for a long time entrenched in Millie's young mind.

“It amazed me that Asiyo had beaten Okiki Amayo, a man who was considered to be very powerful - what with all the machinery that had been put in place to ensure his win,” says Millie. “What I saw in Asiyo was the power and strength of a woman in a man's world. I saw Amayo weep uncontrollably after losing the election.” Millie was fascinated by this celebrated woman who turned out to be her greatest political role model.

However, Millie's political interest could also be a case of a “chip off the old block”. Her late father was a politician. “I grew up in politics as my father was a member of the

Regional Assembly for Nyanza, during the Majimbo system. By the time he died, he was vying for the Mbita seat," she explains.

As she grew up and got into a bigger public space, Millie's involvement in politics continued. "I was keen on women's political empowerment and trained women in political leadership and empowerment. I also did a lot of legislative advocacy and lobbying with parliamentarians. This prepared ground for the work I am doing in Parliament now," says Millie. She adds: "I later reconnected with Hon. Phoebe Asiyo at the Caucus for Women's Leadership, a non-governmental organisation, and she encouraged me to vie for political office. I was not keen as I saw my role then as more of a 'King-Maker' than the 'King'."

This was to change in 2008 when ODM nominated her as a Member of Parliament, where Millie represents a special issue as opposed to a geographical constituency. Her forte is human rights (with a focus on women and children's rights), governance and equalizing opportunities for all. She therefore pays attention to all national issues due to this wide constituency.

Even before her nomination to Parliament, Millie was instrumental in initiating laws that seek to protect women and children. "I was the initiator of the Sexual Offences Bill while Njoki Ndung'u was the mover in the House," she notes. She was also instrumental in other laws of significance to children such as the Children Act, the Criminal Law (Amendment Act) of 2006 and mainstreaming children and women's rights in the Constitution.

Millie was the founder and executive director of the CRADLE, a non-governmental, organization committed to the promotion of the rights of the child. "Through the CRADLE, I helped thousands of children. I brought children's issues to the national arena," says Millie, who believes that the years she spent at the CRADLE shaped her national agenda. She also worked as a legal counsel for the Federation of Women Lawyers and a Program Manager for Le'twal International on a program on implementing the treaty-based rights of women and children in East and Southern Africa.

While she has influenced key legislation locally, Millie has also contributed to international and regional legislation and law. "I have worked at regional and international levels on policy and legislation related to women and children's issues," she says. The legislator has consulted for the United Nations Children's Fund, World Health Organization, among others. "I contributed immensely to the UN study on violence against children in 2006," she notes.

Millie first joined party politics when she realised that the Orange Democratic Movement was focused on reforms. "For a long time I did not want to align with any party but in 2006, I was asked to help with the campaigns for Mbita MP Otieno Kajwang'. I went to the campaigns as the campaign manager, where I realised that politics is hard work but not utterly impossible. I got the opportunity to shadow the MP, and did a lot of networking and mobilisation," narrates Millie.

For Millie, involvement in political campaign was an enlightening experience which, coupled with the lessons she has learned in Parliament, prompted her to write a book on women in politics. "As they seek elective positions, many women are discouraged that they do not have money and yet they could use other means such as their God-given mobilization skills," she observes. Millie believes that the book - "Politics Unpackaged: Lessons for Aspiring Women Politicians" - will give women hints on dealing with issues such as those touching on morality, dealing with political brokers, marketing oneself and unleashing the woman power within the individual.

Millie was actively involved in the ODM's presidential campaigns under the banner of the "Western Kenya Presidential campaign unit", which was her brain child. The team consisted of over twenty Members of Parliament who campaigned in over fifty constituencies in Western, Nyanza and Rift Valley Provinces. "With the elections over, I was planning to go and do a PhD but I was surprised to be told that had been highly recommended for nomination as the party needed women with wit and grit," she confidently reveals.

While Millie does not hold any party position, she is a member of the executive committee by virtue of being an MP. "As a nominated MP I wanted to consolidate knowledge base and experience. It has been a unique opportunity because the demands on me are not like those of an elected MP," she observes. The nomination gave her the opportunity to bring about 10 legislative agenda to the House. One of them, the Counter-trafficking in Persons Act, has passed. Other legislations she intends to push through include the Child Justice Bill; Ratification of Treaties Bill; Victim Protection Bill; the In Vitro Fertilization Bill. "I have taken my work as an MP seriously and I make sure that I read most Bills that come to the floor of the House," says Millie.

She reveals that most first time MPs are not equipped for the rigours of the life of an MP: "The challenge with being a Member of Parliament is inability to deal with people who come to you with a myriad of problems. When I came to Parliament I had a generous heart and was too trusting. I thought every case that came to me was genuine. I gave out all the KSh3 million that I had been given as grant for buying a car. I had to look for money from elsewhere to buy a car," she explains.

According to the legislator, the induction to Parliament is not comprehensive. "You sort of learn a lot of things on the job. Everyone presumes that you know that you will give a maiden speech and what it entails. No wonder some MPs chicken out and never speak in Parliament," she observes. "I gave my maiden speech with very few MPs in the House and this worked for me. The first days for a new parliamentary term should be focused on giving MPs tips, and they can learn about standing orders later," she adds. However, Millie's legal background and familiarity with steps in legislative drafting and lobbying made matters easier for her.

The Kenya Women Parliamentarians Association (KEWOPA) is another vehicle that helped Millie particularly in networking. "KEWOPA provided a platform for us women to share experiences not only among ourselves but also with women MPs from other regions," says Millie. "It also facilitated our meetings and working with grassroots women. KEWOPA helps in mobilising women."

In recognition of the need to have practical aspects of capacity building, Millie, who is an alumnus of Nairobi and New York Universities Law Schools, founded The Maiden Institute of Leadership, Legal Innovation and Education (The MILLIE Institute), a virtual institute that focuses on mentorship. She believes that women politicians can learn a lot from women who have been there before, like Phoebe Asiyo. "Asiyo will always sit with women telling stories of her experiences and you do not need to be in a workshop. This is the approach the Institute takes," she explains.

Millie has always been fascinated by strong and powerful women. "I found Chelagat Mutai, one of Kenya's first female MPs, amazing in the political arena," says Millie. Internationally Madeleine Albright, a former US Secretary of State, captured her imagination. "I was fascinated by her power and ability to make major decisions."

Millie is mentoring young women, by letting them shadow her. "When I was a lawyer I would take them with me to court. Today, I walk with them in my political life. This is a

way of telling them that they can also be lawyers or politicians. They would also see the challenges." She adds: "I go to schools to talk to girls so they can engage with me as a politician. In mentorship, there has to be a personal angle."

On how she relates with her constituents, Millie says: "I like walking down the streets, shopping and undertaking regular tasks so I do not lose touch with reality. On the streets, it is strange that young and older men easily recognise me while young women are clueless as to who I am," she observes. "This is because women are not socialized to like politics. It is important to interest girls in news and politics. I encourage my nieces to watch news so as to stay informed of current affairs. They must know politics," she states.

Is the nominated MP ready to take the plunge in the 2012 elections? Her response: "Watch this space."







“Lack of empowerment has discouraged a number of women from seeking leadership positions.”

## Hon Naomi Shaban

**MP FOR TAVETA** | MINISTER FOR GENDER, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

From the time she started working, she has been involved in development activities. She took special interest in education of girls, assisting the youth to get admission to colleges and securing jobs for them. All along, it never crossed her mind that she would one day join politics - until some women from Taveta encouraged her to do so.

Hon Naomi Shaban, the MP for Taveta says that because of her previous experience serving the community, her appointment as Minister for Gender fitted as snugly as a glove. Soon after she landed at the ministry, she was busy planning the launch of the African Women's Decade that took place in October 2010. The event brought Shaban to the limelight as she hosted some 3,000 delegates from all over the world, including 700 women from the grassroots.

The launch of the African Women's Decade came at a crucial time when the continent is being called upon to move from commitment to action. The ten year campaign envisages that the African Women's Decade 2010-2020 will be the rallying point and platform for action to deliver gender equality for women in Africa.

Speaking at the launch Shaban said: "It is an undisputed fact that gender equality and advancement of women are critical and essential to sustainable development. We also need to create mechanisms that support and facilitate gender equality work at all levels."

By the time the African Women's Decade was being launched in Nairobi, only 28 African countries had ratified the Maputo Protocol. Kenya became the 29th country to ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women as an indication of its commitment to gender equality during the launch of the African Women's Decade. That Kenya ratified the Maputo Protocol at a time when Shaban was at the helm of the gender ministry catapulted her to even greater heights among the female folk. Being in charge of the gender ministry at the time, for Shaban it means that she will leave a legacy that many will remember for a long time.

A dentist by training, the MP first came into political limelight in 2001 when the Taveta parliamentary seat was declared vacant in a by-election. She had a difficult time convincing the local council of elders to allow her to vie for the seat in the by-elections. The elders could not imagine a woman representing them, not when they had so many crucial issues such as land that needed to be addressed.

Perturbed by their actions, Shaban who is known as a down-to-earth politician, defied the elders' request. They in turn went to her mother to ask her to prevail upon her daughter to abandon her parliamentary bid in favour of a man. "I refused to succumb to this cultural bias against women and went ahead with my campaign for a parliamentary seat," says Shaban. She was appalled by this traditional belief that a woman should not aspire to positions of leadership.

She describes the belief as outdated, retrogressive and counterproductive to women seeking elective positions in the community. She was denied a Kanu nomination after the council of elders sent a delegation to the party's headquarters in Nairobi to restrain the party from nominating her. "I was perturbed with the elders' decision but I decided to soldier on with my quest," she asserts. Having lost the chance to vie through Kanu, Shaban then approached the former Vice President and Ford Kenya National chairman the late Michael Wamalwa who granted her a certificate to participate in the by-election.

The elders aside, other people supported her ambitions. Her mother gave her blessings and other women said they would back her candidacy. She then decided to go full blast into political battle.

Was Shaban ready for political leadership at this time? She says that although she was not ready, her supporters convinced her that it was the best opportunity to test the waters in the by-election which followed later. After the competitive race, Shaban managed third position, and this gave her an opportunity to talk to the elders about why women should also be given a place in political decision making.

By the time the 2002 general elections were called, she had done her groundwork well and easily romped home on a Kanu ticket. "That made it easier for me to campaign. In fact this time round the council of elders decided to give me a chance," says Shaban. She retained her seat in 2007 after beating a team of nine other contestants. She was subsequently appointed to the Cabinet, becoming the first woman from the Coast region to become a minister. Shaban's appointment as Minister of State for Special Programmes in 2008 was her main challenge as her immediate function was to resettle displaced persons. She is also the national deputy treasurer for Kanu.

The Council of elders appreciated when she was appointed to the Cabinet. The doubts they may have had that she would not succeed easily faded away. They all feel proud when they see her on national TV and hear her speak on radio or in the newspapers.

"I am encouraged that Taveta people have confidence in me and that is why they gave me a second chance to represent them in Parliament," she says. The MP believes

that women could equally serve this nation like men but some cultural practices were hindering their efforts to ascend to power.

While encouraging more women to vie for political positions in future, Shaban challenges them to start campaigning early. "Lack of empowerment has discouraged a number of women to vie for leadership positions with men. However, those of us who have been there are encouraging them to go ahead and follow their hearts as politics is not a preserve of men," she says.

As she sits at the table with the top management of this country, Shaban cannot forget her humble past. She remembers the time she had to learn to make ugali for her siblings while her grandparents were away working on small pieces of leased land in Taveta. Shaban's family had relocated from Mombasa to Taveta to live with her maternal grandparents following the death of her father. "Due to grinding poverty, my mother had to move to Nairobi to look for a job to fend for us," she says.

Shaban did not like the job her mother was doing at a printing firm. "My mother was an errand girl with everybody ordering her around in her place of work," recalls the MP. "I realised early that it was only through education that I would be able to live a life that was different from my mother's, and dedicated myself to do extremely well in school, she adds. My grandparents helped in shaping my destiny, despite the heavy chores at home." Above all, Shaban attributes her success to her mother who had always encouraged her to work hard.

After scoring excellent grades in the certificate for primary education in Mahoo Primary School, Shaban went on to study at Bura Girls' in Taita and Butere Girls' schools. "After paying my fees and meeting domestic needs my mother hardly had any money for anything else," says Shaban. She passed her 'A' levels and worked briefly for the Housing Finance Company of Kenya before admission to the University of Nairobi to study Dental Surgery. After graduation in 1988, she was posted to Kenyatta National Hospital for internship then to Kajiado District Hospital where she served as a Dental Officer until 1995 when she resigned to engage in private practice.

"I thank God for the life of my people and honour bestowed on me to serve them. God has chosen all of us to be a blessing to one another," says Shaban. She would like to keep her plans for 2012 under wraps, although she knows the seat she would want to campaign for.



“I am a servant of the people and therefore I discharge my responsibilities in line with what they envisage.”



## Hon Peris Chepchumba Simam

### MP FOR ELDORET SOUTH

Five months after the embers of post-election violence had died down and Kenya was beginning to pick itself up again, the Standard newspaper ran a lead story that screamed: Kalenjin Revolution. There was much excitement regarding the high number of women who had been elected to Parliament and civic bodies in the 2007 elections.

The 'alarming' story in the Standard on Saturday was an acknowledgement of the sea-change that had taken place in the Rift Valley politics. The region, known in the past to be overly conservative and decidedly averse to women leadership, had elected eight of them to Parliament. Out of the 15 elected women MPs, Rift Valley provided the bulk from the Kalenjin community.

When AMWIK caught up with parliamentary debutant, Peris Chepchumba Simam, the MP for Eldoret South, she disabused society of the perception that women can only play second fiddle to men in decision-making. In her opinion, the election of eight women from her community is testimony that the erstwhile socio-cultural biases in our societies that stood in the way of women's advancement are finally on the brink of being put to rest.

Change, asserts Peris, is inevitable - whether generational or gender.

“When I was growing up, I witnessed poverty and deprivation in society. I always thought of how someone could change the lives of the people so that the world would be a good place for us all. It was at this early stage that I developed a passion to serve the people. I wanted to bring about change and this, I thought as I grew up, I could only

achieve by taking the lead in providing solutions to the challenges that we faced," says the mother of three.

According to Peris, leadership comes to her naturally. While in primary and secondary schools, and through college, she held various leadership positions that shaped her worldview and interaction with people around her. Thus, adept at seizing the moment when it is opportune, Peris sensed her chance in 2007 and grabbed the opportunity by resigning from her government post to enter politics. She had been a biology, mathematics and agriculture teacher at Kipsigis Girls' School.

"There were hurdles all the way. I was faced with the challenge of being a woman pitted against seven men and a community that still had reservations about women leadership. My strongest point, however, manifested when I was running against the old guard. They had been in senior positions in government and Parliament, but had failed to initiate development. It made it easy for me to reach out to the electorate and convince them about the merits of electing a woman. People yearned for alternative leaderships. The previous MPs had divided the people," explains the legislator.

She acknowledges the great help she received from fellow teachers, who incidentally are influential opinion shapers at the grassroots. She won the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) nomination against the incumbent, and went on to capture the Eldoret South seat against all odds. She says that she opted to join ODM because it promised constitutional and economic reforms. "The party fitted the bill at that time," she observes.

The election was fiercely fought, she says, and one needed to have resolve and a steely determination to overcome the tirade from men. "Luckily, I had the strong support of other men, including my husband (Enock Simam), who has a special place in my heart because of his support and resilience. He is very strong, else he would have thrown in the towel." She adds that they would at times go campaigning together and he was a great source of motivation. "Few men would allow their wives to join the murky waters that politics can at times be," she says of her experience.

Although Kenya's Tenth Parliament boasts the highest number of women since independence, Simam says the country still has a long way to go in empowering women to influence decision-making. She says there is need to use the new Constitution to create a critical mass of women in positions of leadership to make a socio-economic impact in development.

Her philosophy of life has echoes of French author and novelist, who in his classical Germinal novel, subscribes to the 'naturalist' movement philosophy. She says her plunge into politics and subsequent election to Parliament was not accidental; they were pre-determined by the environment - social and economic - she grew up in.

Peris recalls the many times she had to restart her campaign afresh, seeking solace from God: "Leaders are made by God. Without God's will nothing happens. I remember fasting for a whole week to seek God's guidance during the campaigns," she tells of the challenges, social, physical and spiritual she had to go through. At the end of the day, she says, it is her strong personality that would often succeed the encumbrances that came her way.

The MP's greatest influence is former US first Lady and current Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who she describes as pragmatic, tough, fearless, and highly intelligent and determined to serve humanity. From her she learnt how to combine her roles as a mother, wife and political leader.



"When I need spiritual and intellectual lift, I often draw inspiration from women I grew up admiring. Hillary Clinton is a woman of amazing character and determination. When she was first lady she stood by her husband throughout the stormy period that many times threatened to bring down her husband (Bill Clinton). From her I learnt the virtue of patience and the reward of determination," explains Peris. She adds that she became a grassroots mobiliser through application of some of the things she has learnt from Clinton, whom she read about extensively."

Asked how she manages her demanding schedule, Peris explains: "I multi task like other great women in the world. Women are created to multitask. When I am at home I am a wife and mother at the same time. I cook for my family. When I have the time I take my family out and sit down with my husband to plan," she reveals.

Thanks to her victory in 2007, Peris says, she has been instrumental in encouraging women to take up the leadership mantle in her Eldoret South Constituency. "When you come to my constituency, you will find that majority of the local leaders are women. Most of the chiefs and sub-chiefs are women and society is gradually accepting them as capable leaders."

At home, Kitui Central MP and Minister for Water Charity Ngilu and Marakwet West MP Lina Jebii Kilimo inspire Peris as leaders with exceptional character. While Ngilu was the first woman to run for presidency in 1997, Kilimo, on the other hand, went against 'taboo' running and winning a parliamentary seat in a region that remains under the clutch of men.

She too has a lot of admiration for the Eldoret East MP, Prof Margaret Kamar. "The Kalenjin community still has reservations about women leaders. But I am happy this is changing with my election and that of Prof Margaret Kamar, as well as other women MPs from the community," she says.

"Although these women belong to rival parties, we, through Kenya Women Parliamentary Association, usually put aside our political party affiliation to push through the House what we consider matters critical to women's advancement. Together, we strongly supported the provision in the new Constitution that calls for at least a third of elective seats in Parliament, civic authorities and other public offices being held by either gender," explains Peris.

I know the problems facing the people in my constituency and as a mother I serve them as a mother would her children, without favour or discrimination," she declares. Top on her agenda was proper utilisation of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). "This fund has not been utilised well in the past and that is why the constituency has lagged behind with high poverty levels," she states.

"During my tenure, I have striven to inculcate the culture of servant leadership. I am a servant of the people and therefore I discharge my responsibility in line with what they expect of me. A servant takes instructions from her or his superiors. My constituents are my superiors. I am their leader only as far as being their common rallying point. This is the kind of servant leadership that has been missing. Past MPs used to impose their will on the people, and that is why decision-making was not all-inclusive," she observes.

In Parliament, the former teacher says, all women MPs have to deal with stereotypes that project them as beauty objects to be admired. If it's not their fellow legislators, it is the television cameras zooming in on certain parts of their bodies. "What goes on in the debating chamber is still a challenge to women. I was once disappointed and even embarrassed when cameras focused on women MPs' legs. I do not expect that in this age and era women should be reduced to objects of pity or admiration," says Peris.

In Parliament, the MP is a member of the Agriculture, Livestock and Cooperatives as well as the Lands & Natural Resources committees. She is also the Vice Chairperson of the African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption (APNACH), Kenya Chapter.

Peris attended Kapkoi primary school from where she proceeded to Turbo Girl's and Bishop Njenga Girl's High Schools. She has a Diploma in Science Education from Moi Teacher's College and Bachelor of Education (Science) degree from Kenyatta University.

One of the MP's memorable moments in the House is when she asked a question that raised health concerns about the energy-saving electricity bulbs the government had began distributing for free for domestic use. "Continued distribution was going to plunge the country into a serious health problem. I look back with satisfaction that I saved the country from self-inflicted disaster that would have adversely affected many households," recalls the MP.

She also has plans for provision of extension training to farmers so that they can diversify their core businesses for maximum returns. As a prop to her poverty eradication programmes, she has lined up development education and empowerment of youth and women to participate in socio-economic activities.

Peris believes that the work she has accomplished in Eldoret South is testimony that she is delivering according to the promises she made to voters. She is optimistic that her track record will speak for her when she seeks one of the elective seats in 2012.



“I have learnt invaluable lessons from the senior women MPs.”



## Hon Rachel Shebesh

### NOMINATED MP

Hon Rachel Shebesh is one of the most outspoken women MPs and is excited at the opportunities available for women under the new Constitution. She has a passion and selfless commitment to represent the marginalized people in the urban areas.

When we caught up with her for this interview, she was from a meeting of the Constitution Implementation Committee, of which she is a member. “We have made our case. It is important that there is adequate representation of women in this committee,” says Shebesh.

Perhaps this is why Shebesh, who is never afraid of speaking her mind, has earned herself the tags: defender of women rights, spokesperson for the youth and champion of persons with disabilities. The ODM nominated MP is arguably one of the most visible and vocal voices on cross cutting issues. Shebesh sought an elective post in 2007, with women and the youth as her supporting base. “Women and youth are a reliable constituency.”

A professional fabrics designer, she interacted with communities in the slums of Nairobi's Kasarani area before she decided to assist them build their own capacity. “No woman MP just ‘happens.’ It is a result of hard work and dedication. The communities in the slums needed someone who would lobby their case. I worked with them long enough and this opened my eyes to the bigger picture,” she says.

Initially, she wanted a civic seat, considering that her father was a career civic representative. Rachel admired her father, his ability to network and to speak about local concerns. Equipped with a political family background and a holistic education from

Kianda school, Rachel was ready to have a stab at politics. "Going to Kianda school was a kick-start. I attribute my people skills and my debating talent to the school's curriculum," she says.

"I made a conscious decision to sacrifice my design business for two years to work in the grassroots in Kasarani Constituency," she says. And so, by the time aspirants were declaring their intentions, she was a marketable pick. Kasarani, an urban and cosmopolitan constituency, was definitely not a walk-over for any aspirant as the dynamics change overnight. When Shebesh weighed her party options, ODM was the best vehicle. "I did my research and saw that the party's manifesto was in line with my personal aspirations. I did not want to become MP for the sake of it but I wanted to impact the lives of the disadvantaged groups in my constituency," she explains.

They say once bitten twice shy but this dictum did not apply in Shebesh's case. Although she did not get the ODM party ticket, she threw her weight behind the party's candidate Mrs Elizabeth Ongoro, who clinched the seat. "I had options. Either I was elected or I was nominated. Either I was appointed an ambassador or I became a commissioner in the gender affairs," says a confident Shebesh, about her choices and strategies. It's no wonder then that the relationship between the two MPs is enviable. "I must support her and we have decided that for me to succeed she must succeed. We do not believe in women fighting one another," she adds.

She urges other women aspirants to have options when they are bargaining. "My party knew that I had no problem with being nominated. It is more difficult to be nominated because the party does not take a gamble. The party had to have confidence that I had a constituency to serve as a nominated MP and that is the urban marginalized groups," she says.

Shebesh appreciated the fact that being a child of two worlds did not affect her campaigns in Kenya's sometimes ethnically polarized context. "Being a Kikuyu by birth and Luhya by marriage may have posed identity challenges for some people. I am an urban-born and married in a rural constituency. Some people thought I was betraying my tribe while taking advantage of my husband's. Others thought that with my background, I would not understand slum issues. But I assured my supporters that I would be accountable to them."

Indeed, it came as no surprise to her when the internet community, operating under her husband's clan Ingo.com, embraced her and celebrated her nomination. "When I am with my husband's Eshirandu clan, from Khwisero, in Kakamega, I am at home. I support them as much as they support me," she says.

Shebesh believes that the slum is a reality as long as the communities are not empowered. She recalls a success story with a women group in the slums. There were 35 members, operating under the name Vision Sisters in 2002 when she met them. They requested assistance through their own activities. They saved and bought small plots in the outskirts of Nairobi. Now the concept has been replicated across all slums. Women who once sold chang'aa or roasted maize have transformed their lives and are owning semi-permanent houses. The MP believes that the solutions have to come from the people.

Shebesh, who is also the Vice Treasurer of Kenya Parliamentary Women Association (KEWOPA), says that KEWOPA is her most important caucus. "I have learnt invaluable lessons from the senior women MPs. I am available to represent MPs or ministers in official functions and we want women MPs to succeed."

For a person who had to learn her way round the house, Shebesh comes out as a curious and focused MP. She has been appointed to the Committee on Standing Orders

and Rules and is in the Library Committee. "Parliamentary language is full of jargon. I always seek assistance from the experienced members to interpret some Orders," she admits. Like others before her, she was not prepared in the house procedures before she got to Parliament. "I do not shy away from asking about any procedure that I do not understand," she adds.

The MP is optimistic about the new Constitution. She says that it promises women more opportunities. She believes she is on course and has even added the case for and climate change mitigation and disability rights in her docket. She has also expanded her scope to address corruption through the African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption (APNAC) Kenya chapter as the Vice Chairperson.

The new Constitution also offers exciting opportunities for women. "I am spoilt for choice. Senator? Governor? Deputy Governor? MP? One does not need a name, a husband, money, or anything to get to political leadership," she notes.

Recalling her low moments in the campaign trail, Shebesh says that no woman should face any verbal or physical abuse. She is willing to support reforms and legislation that will create a better campaign environment for women in Kenya. "It is good to notice that women have learnt that being called names and being harassed during campaigns is not a deterrent," she notes.

Shebesh is grateful to the NGOs and other civil society organizations for training women and building their capacity as they prepared for campaigns. In her opinion: "For the work that went into preparing women, the results were fairly good though we expected more than 50 seats. Kenyans will soon see that a woman's leadership is about integrity and ethics." However, she points out, women aspirants would need more training on strategic planning and communication in penetrating party structures. That is why she has gone back to school to complete her degree at the University of Nairobi.

In Parliament, Shebesh works with other MPs with a common agenda. "I use my persuasive skills to lobby for common positions on issues affecting women. There are some pending Bills which were crafted by former Nominated MP Njoki Ndungu which must be passed before 2012," she promises.

Shebesh is the UN champion for Disaster Risk Reduction which aims to lobby governments and promote synergy between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. "Vision 2030 will not be achieved unless there are deliberate disaster risk reduction efforts. I admire the Minister for Water Charity Ngilu for the initiatives on boreholes. Similarly, government ought to plan for flooding, drought, etc. There are affordable and innovative solutions to mitigate climate change. Governments must provide the resources. We need a critical mass of a younger crop of leaders with a grasp of global issues," she asserts.

Shebesh says that she has learnt vital lessons in Parliament: "When I came to this house, I wanted things to change overnight; I forgot that apart from articulating the issues, I must work with those who are able to work and avoid lone ranger tactics," says the MP, adding; "For me, politics is not a matter of life and death. It is a privilege and I can only be effective if I serve women well. There must be linkage between the laws and the quality of lives for the constituents. A movement of women and youth will bring change in this country."





“You should never doubt the performance of women, they are performers and the electorate should never doubt me.”

## Hon Sally Kosgei

MP FOR ALDAI | MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE

She once said that her parents often encouraged her to take the lead in everything she did. The responsibilities she shouldered from early childhood moulded her into a resilient person capable of toughing it out with men.

Hon (Dr) Sally Kosgei, MP for Aldai Constituency and Minister for Agriculture, elicits admiration from people who have had the opportunity to interact with her. In the boardroom, especially during cabinet meetings, she is described as an intensely intellectual minister. Usually reserved in public, Kosgei is described by her peers as a tough negotiator away from the public glare.

The minister, who debuted in politics in 2007, has held various positions in academia, diplomacy and the civil service, where she carved a niche as a no-nonsense administrator. Her illustrious career in public service spans four decades, the peak of which was her stint as Head of Civil Service and Secretary to the Cabinet in the government of retired President Daniel arap Moi. She is generally regarded as one of the most powerful and influential leaders in post-independence Kenya.

Dr Kosgei entered politics at a very critical moment in Kenya's history and her skills were immediately called to use when she was part of the four-member team of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) that sat down with their Party of National Unity (PNU) counterparts to craft the National Accord that hoisted the country from the abyss of post-election violence in 2008. “It was a trying assignment as the country's future was shouldered by the Serena Eight, representing various political and ethnic interests,” she says.

The depth of her knowledge and her will power were demonstrated when she was part of her party representatives who drafted the Harmonised Draft Constitution. Now on her second term in Parliament, Dr Kosgei commands great respect among constituents in Aldai and beyond. On her entry to politics after many years of public service, she is quoted to have said: "I am not looking for a position since I have held very many positions in government as a civil servant. What is important is a position to help the people."

The MP says that in addition, she wanted to break the monopoly of local politics, and to prove to her mainly patriarchal community that women were as good leaders as men, or even better. "You should never doubt the performance of women, they are performers and the electorate should never doubt me," she is remembered as saying.

The minister went to the prestigious Alliance Girls' High School from 1965-1968 for 'O' levels from a local primary school in Aldai, Nandi district. Her sterling performance earned her a place in the same school for 'A' levels from 1968-1970. It was from Alliance Girls' School that she joined the University of Dar es Salaam, then one of the most prestigious universities in Africa.

Upon graduation with an honours degree in History and Political Science, Kosgei taught briefly at Nakuru Girls' High School, before she secured a scholarship for master's and doctorate degrees at the Stanford University in the United States where she was classmates with notable leaders including the former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

While at the University of Dar es Salaam, where she studied history and political science, she was a contemporary of the Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete. Kosgei taught political science in the late 70's at the University of Nairobi before she joined the diplomatic and civil services.

Before her last public appointment in March 2001 when president Moi made her the first woman to hold the powerful post of head of public service and secretary to the cabinet, Dr Kosgei had held various other prominent positions in the government.

She is most famous for the period she served as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a position she held after completion of her tour of duty as Kenya's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.

The appointment made her the second woman Permanent Secretary in independent Kenya after Mrs Margaret Githinji, who served in the ministry of Trade and Industry in the late 80s and early 90s. Her peers say Kosgei was more suited for the Foreign Affairs docket than any other public posting she has had, save perhaps that of High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.

One of Kosgei's colleagues at the ministry says of her: "She knew her stuff well and aggressively pushed Kenya's agenda in international circles both as High Commissioner and Foreign Affairs PS."



“If you have decided you want something, don’t look back. You must have good reasons for wanting it.”

## Hon Shakila Abdalla

### NOMINATED MP

On weekends, many of her age mates would sail off in little, leaking boats to join their parents on fishing trips. The expeditions were dangerous as anything could happen at sea, but the children had to help their poor families anyway. Some of them dropped out of school altogether and engaged in fishing fulltime.

Growing up in a poor village in Lamu, nominated MP Hon Shakila Abdalla was always alive to the difficulties her community was going through to make ends meet. “Due to poverty and ignorance, early marriages and child labour were the order of the day. But no one seemed to be bothered,” Shakila recalls. “As a young girl growing up in a village in Faza Island, she felt helpless, wondering what she could do for her community.

“With the coming of self rule in 1963, dreams of a better life for the islanders turned into illusions when the new African government ignored the region,” she observes. “Even today,” she adds, “Lamu is so desolate. There is nothing to show after nearly 50 years of independence. There’s not even a kilometer of paved road.”

After primary education at the local Faza Primary School, Shakila joined Lamu Girls Secondary School and later Utalii College for a House Keeping and Laundry Operations course. Thereafter, she worked for various hotels until 2003 when a doorway to serve her community opened.

The National Rainbow Coalition (Narc) had just dislodged KANU from power and a wave of excitement permeated the country. Abdalla was approached by a group of local elders who wanted to introduce the multi-party era in Lamu and had opted for LDP.

According to Hon Abdalla, LDP was a good bet because it had a national outlook, and its manifesto was sound in the way the party aimed at distributing and managing national resources. "Throughout the push for multiparty democracy, the Lamu people had largely remained in KANU. They seemed blind to the injustice they had endured under the Party, including chaining them to poverty," says Shakila.

Together with the LDP team, they initiated a programme to create political awareness and conduct civic education in Lamu. Shakila explains that she also wanted to take part in campaigning for a new Constitution. She believes that it was due to bad laws that successive governments had kept her community, and Kenya as a whole, under the yoke of oppression.

Shakila was then working at the Leisure Lodge Beach and Golf Resort as the Room's Division Manager. But her activism could not allow her to continue working any more, and she quit the job. "It wasn't an easy decision because it meant that I had to start life without a salary. I set up a small business to make ends meet," she says.

Abdalla and her team, however, needed recognition and approval by LDP for their activities. So far, they were unknown beyond the little islands. An opportunity came when Prime Minister Raila Odinga, then working closely with President Kibaki, visited Lamu to survey development projects.

She figured that if she played her cards well, she would build her reputation through the years by working for the people of Lamu, whom she hoped would give her an opportunity to lead them when elections were announced in 2007. However, her team had difficulties meeting Raila as no one recognized them. Quickly, they devised a plan, bought a present for Raila and sought an opportunity to present it to him during the visit.

"It was a small boat," she recalls, smiling. "When I stepped forward to present it to him, I asked him if he could meet us and he agreed." At the meeting, they explained their mission and got the blessings of the Party.

Soon, it was time for Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization elections. Although she had not been a member, she thought joining and running for a branch position would put her in a better position to serve Lamu. But when she presented her papers, they were rejected because of a clause stipulating that only life members could vie for branch chairmanship.

"I was angry with that provision. It was clearly aimed at locking some people out of the race. How many women in Lamu were life members?" she wonders.

Dejected, she continued with her work, including joining ODM to reject what she terms as the divisive Draft Constitution in the 2005 Referendum. "I told myself that if I was not going to be a leader in Maendeleo, I would have to go for bigger things - to Parliament," she says.

Later, she was elected LDP district chairperson, further preparing herself for the political battle in 2007. When ODM later split between Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka's ODM-K and Raila's ODM, she joined Kalonzo's side. Soon, it was time for parliamentary elections and she became the National treasurer of ODM-K.

"I was so naïve," she laughs, pausing to reflect on her campaign experience. "I thought after all that I had done for the constituency, the people would pick me as their leader. I was wrong. It seemed money was everything. People forgot me just because they were being bribed by my main rival."

Without resources, Shakila's biggest challenge was trying to reach the people with her message. Lamu East Constituency is a series of islands. To move around, she needed boats but had none, nor money to hire one. That meant she had to use passenger boats, which were inconvenient and would cost Ksh 20,000 a day.

"I would walk, sometimes for up to eight kilometers to the venue of my campaign meeting," she recalls. "If it got dark, and it was too late to go back home, I would get a place to sleep until the following morning, when I did more walking."

The campaign period was characterized by mudslinging, with male candidates trying to discredit her on claims that a Muslim woman should not become a leader. "Religion was being used as an excuse, but it was all lies. Islam does not bar women from politics," states the MP.

Nonetheless, she campaigned on a platform of change, human rights, land rights and elimination of poverty. Since independence, adjudication has not been undertaken in Lamu. This means that the inhabitants of the island cannot claim ownership to land, as they do not have title deeds. "We have never enjoyed the benefit of owning land," she observes. Attributing the problem to poor leadership not only in Lamu but the entire Coast region, Shakila says that she planned to use the floor of the House to advocate for land rights.

During the parliamentary campaign, Shakila told her supporters that as their representative she would also seek greater allocation of resources, construction of roads, hospitals and schools, and the improvement of existing ones.

Her main supporters were the youth. "I think the older people still harbour stereotypes about women. Some were saying, 'she must be crazy.' I thought it was just ridiculous," notes Shakila. She was, however, beaten at the ballot.

For Shakila, it was a sweet surprise when ODM-K nominated her to Parliament in 2008. "I never expected it. I think the Party recognized my efforts in Lamu," she says. That also means she had earned the Party's trust, being the national treasurer and coast regional coordinator.

She was ill-prepared for it, and did not even understand House procedures. But she has learnt a lot from her colleagues by working closely with them. Says she: "It depends on how you carry yourself. Ultimately, you earn their respect."

As a nominated MP, she is striving to deliver her promise to the people of Lamu East and beyond. But it has not been easy, she admits. "It's difficult being a nominated MP. You are like a snake without the poison," she says, explaining that she has no control over the Constituency Development Fund or bursaries. However, she has been working with the local MP to initiate development in Lamu.

Shakila's time in Parliament has been an eye-opener. She relates well with colleagues. Members of the Kenya Women Parliamentarians Association, where she is Treasurer, have given her the necessary support. "We work as a family, regardless of party affiliations. We support one another and lobby for women's issues both inside and outside Parliament," says the MP. During the 2009 referendum campaigns, for instance, KEWOPA funded two awareness seminars in her Constituency.

The biggest challenge for women leaders, she notes, is maintaining the lot in the house and increasing the number of women MPs in Parliament come the 2012 general election. "There are also party issues to overcome. You could be very strong in the grassroots but



if your party does not believe in women's ability to lead, you won't get its nomination," she states.

Her seven years in politics have taught her invaluable lessons. "If you have decided that you want something, don't look back. You must have good reasons for wanting it, so let those reasons be your motivation. Also, there'll be many people to discourage you. But don't look at those problems. Instead, turn them into opportunities," advises Shakila. I thank my party for its manifesto of recognizing the marginalized and minority and being gender friendly.

Will her name be on the ballot in 2012? "Definitely! I believe lessons learnt in the past will work well for me," she declares.



**“I felt I needed to do more for the people, to provide leadership and steer development for the community.”**

## Hon Sophia Abdi Noor

### **NOMINATED MP**

She was born and grew up in a grass-thatched hut. And when by chance, school beckoned, she had to often duck from under one acacia tree to another, a book always in hand, to shake off wicked boys who spanked her for daring to challenge their egos. School was uncompromisingly a preserve of boys in her pastoralist and very conservative community.

Tradition demanded that girls be “ringed off” at home, to be “watched” and fervently trained in household chores. It was a waste of time, the flawed argument went, to send a girl away to join boys in the far off and few learning centres in the vast and deprived northern Kenya. After all, she was a source of wealth, to be married off in exchange for sheep and goats, cows and camels, albeit at too tender an age.

Despite all the odds, the village girl made an emotional commitment to succeed. She pursued her vision with stubborn consistency and today, the once inconspicuous barefoot girl in the plains of the arid Garissa district is a high-flying lawmaker.

A nominated MP in Kenya's Tenth Parliament, Hon Sophia Abdi Noor embodies the strength of a woman. She has fought many battles since her childhood - social, economic and political - but has maintained her calm in the face of retrogressive cultural biases and discrimination on account of her gender.

Born three years into Kenya's independence, she vividly remembers her mother's suffering while she struggled single-handedly to bring up her many children. Aware of the hardships, Sophia silently swore to do her best and reward her some day for the great sacrifice in raising the family.

"I saw my mum suffer greatly to bring us up. She was divorced early, was poor and uneducated and struggled with odd menial jobs like babysitting and cleaning to earn a pittance for our upkeep. She was always struggling to put food on the table," Sophia remembers. "Many times I saw her cry; she was lonely and depressed. And seeing her tears made me figure out that only education would free us from the bonds of poverty, hunger, sickness and deprivation," adds the MP.

Despite the usual responsibility for a girl her age, Sophia remarkably put up with all the challenges that school presented. She and mates often sat under a tree to read and write, for lack of school buildings. School was also irregular for the nomadic children as they were often on the move with their families in search of pasture for their valued livestock. When she joined Modogashe Boarding Primary School, the pupils would stay in for months without seeing their families that kept changing camp.

She recalls, "In school, I loved books; I worked very hard and did very well especially in mathematics. Teachers were happy with me, but the boys felt slighted and beat me and other girls who excelled. As a result, most girls quit school, but I persevered."

In her final year in primary school, there were only nine girls out of some 50 candidates. "I continued through primary school and even as girls dropped out, I soldiered on. I did this for mum as I really wanted to make her happy by finishing school. I knew this would get us out of the shackles of poverty and suffering," Sophia said in an interview.

The Nominated MP has made her 70-year old mother, her role model, very proud. "She gave me the strength to fight and persevere." Today, the first born in a big family commands respect from many quarters and is a force to reckon with in the country.

Trained in peace building, gender, human rights defence and governance, NGO management and democracy in Kenya and the US and widely travelled, Sophia has several accolades to her credit. In 2000, she won the coveted International Leadership Institute's (Minneapolis, US) award on social justice "in recognition of a decade or more service towards the elimination of social injustice and intolerance in the world community". She is a Fellow of Les Aspen Centre for Governance (Washington) and International Democracy Fellow (Public Law Institute, Kenya) as well as Law Society of Kenya's Fr John Anthony Kaiser Award winner (2007).

Sophia scored a first upon appointment to Parliament when she became the first woman to chair the parliamentary committee that deals with labour and social welfare. She is also a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Legal and Administration of Justice and was a member of the Parliamentary Select Committee on the constitutional review.

Other roles include membership to the parliamentary group on the environment; Inter-Parliamentary Union; Parliamentarians for Global Action and Parliamentary Children Caucus. The vice chairperson of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association, Sophia is also the secretary to the Muslim Parliamentary Group and deputy secretary-general of the Kenya Pastoralists Parliamentary Group. At her Orange Democratic Party, she is a member of the National Executive Committee and secretary, Disaster and Humanitarian Affairs.

Prior to joining Parliament, Sophia served as a director of the Coast Development Authority; in the National Council for Children's Services; as member of the Kenya National Commission on Poverty Reduction and the National Steering Committee IGAD/ NGO Forum. She was a delegate at the Kenya National Constitutional Conference and also served as a member of the National Steering Committee at the same (so-called Bomas) Conference.

Her phenomenal rise to the top has not been rosy; it launched on a few false starts. A fighter, Sophia has been down a couple of times but every time when nearly out, she summoned courage and any little energy left to wrestle out of the intricate web of failure.

During her secondary school final examinations in 1980, calamity befell Garissa district including her North Eastern Province (NEP) Girls Secondary School. In the infamous Garissa massacre, entire villages were torched by government security agents ostensibly to flush out shifita (bandit) elements. Shots were fired in her school. Many people she knew including her clansmen and a teacher were killed and injured in the operation. The disruption led to mass failure in the examination.

With her poor grades, she squeezed through to Egoji Teachers College in Meru. She recalls: "Smarting from the poor results but undeterred, I worked really hard in the certificate course to emerge the best primary school teacher trainee in my class."

Years later and teaching, a marriage in hand and pregnant with her first baby, Sophia retook the secondary school final examination and passed. It affirmed her competence, boosted her self-confidence and laid the foundation for her thirst for education.

In a befitting climax, and after many years of painstaking patience, Sophia who quit teaching to join the NGO world recently earned an executive master's degree in organisational management from the United States International University (USIU). It came hot on the heels of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Community Development Studies at Tanzania's MS Training Centre for Development Co-operation, Arusha.

In 1997, the battle of her wits unfolded. On a Kanu ticket, she sought nomination to contest the Ijara parliamentary seat, a first for any Somali woman in the male-dominated region. She was a household name after a long stint in development work in the region. Through her stewardship of Womankind Kenya, an NGO she had founded five years earlier, Sophia had literally turned around Ijara, an area whose development had literally stalled.

She won the party nomination but to her disbelief, political brokers and male chauvinists in her backyard could not take in defeat by a woman. "They sought 'higher' intervention in Nairobi, and my hard-earned win was handed to my rival, a man!" she declares.

"In Ijara, Womankind Kenya was like the government. We had started new schools, initiated water and income-generation among other projects with a direct impact on the people. My party nomination was a compliment to the good work we had done," she recalls.

With only two days remaining for presentation of papers to the electoral body, Sophia quickly travelled to Nairobi to shop for an alternative party and got a Ford Asili ticket. Her next nightmare was how to reach the remote and secluded Ijara.

To beat the deadline and reach Masalani town, tens of kilometres away on time, she partly walked and rode on a bicycle from Hola in neighbouring Tana River district. Part of her nightlong journey was by a dug-out canoe ride across the mighty Tana River.

She says, "While I put up with all these challenges, my rival was offered a helicopter ride from Nairobi. My supporters were dejected, devastated and many cried over justice denied."

In the campaign proper, disaster in the form of El Nino rains hit her hard. With meagre funds and resources, it was hard to traverse the vast constituency at a time the rival was

accorded full state support. "Out of the 46 polling stations, I managed to reach 18 only. We lost two clerks and two ballot boxes to the floods and rigging went into high gear. But with all these challenges, I 'lost' the seat by only about 120 votes," she explains.

A dedicated and committed leader, Sophia took the stolen win in stride. "I went back to work; to the people of Ijara, I was their MP and I was happy they had demonstrated this. It gave me courage, joy and I felt honoured and in return, I gave all my time and energy to their service," says the MP.

Through Womankind, she has continued to volunteer services back home in Ijara and Garissa districts. Her record is unmatched to date. "We supported and constructed 10 primary and secondary schools in Garissa and another seven in Ijara. We provided desks, mattresses and mosquito nets, built girls' dormitories, trained teachers and organised confidence building forums for girls in schools," she beams.

"We have supported several youth and women groups in campaigns against female genital mutilation, organised sports for project advocacy and provided funds to kick off income-generation projects. One of the beneficiaries is a women group which has about Ksh500,000 in the bank, 50 herds of cattle, 300 sheep and goats while another group built the first guest house in Ijara," adds the MP.

After a teaching career at Boys Town Primary (1987-89) and Yuga Girls School (1989-92) in Garissa where she was principal, Sophia moved on as coordinator of the Primary Health Care Programme at UNICEF, Garissa. The highlight of her stewardship of the programme included coordination of food aid, education and community empowerment.

When she resigned to start Womankind, Sophia, who remains guarded in regard to her 2012 plans says, "I felt I needed to do more for the people, to provide leadership and steer development for the community."

And she still is doing this. It is what she knows best!







“Politicians should pledge their loyalty to the electorate and not to individuals, parties or regions.”

## Hon Wavinya Ndeti

**MP FOR KATHIANI** | ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR YOUTH AND SPORTS

When many women may want to seek the special women's seats in the 2012 elections as provided by the new Constitution, she has decided to go for the big position: she wants to be the governor of Machakos County. In most constituencies, men have apportioned themselves the plum positions of governor and senator, asking the women to go for the special seats.

Hon Wavinya Ndeti, the MP for Kathiani and assistant minister for Youth and Sports, is however leaving nothing to chance, just like she never did when the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party of Kenya wave hit Ukambani region during the 2007 elections. It was so strong that those who were not part of it were swept away. However, that was not going to shake the foundation on which she stood.

She had done her research well. She knew what she wanted and whether she was on the 'right' or 'wrong' side of the political divide and she would get to her final destination, which was Parliament.

It was not easy for a woman “who had not been there”. Wavinya's induction into national politics came with challenges, as she was perceived to be a rebel - not intent in joining the camp of a politician in the region. However, her victory with an unknown party is a clear demonstration that she had truly done her homework well. She won the Kathiani seat through the Chama Cha Uzalendo (CCU) party, beating 16 male candidates.

The fact that the people of Kathiani voted for me on a little-known party ticket is a sign that they trusted me for the job,” says Wavinya who garnered 28,178 votes against the

second candidate's 9,813. She had campaigned vigorously at the grassroots and was confident of earning victory. She offered the voters a platform for change because they were tired of retrogressive politics. Vying with a party that was considered unpopular also tells that she is a woman who takes her independence seriously. The win was a major accomplishment, knowing that the constituency is home to several powerful and wealthy politicians.

"I speak my mind," she says, a trait she stresses has been misinterpreted by her political opponents. And she has crossed paths with many top politicians in the region for speaking her mind. She says that as leaders, politicians should pledge their loyalty to the electorate and not to individuals, parties or regions.

Married to a non-Kenyan, her opponents tried to use this to discredit her during the campaign to no success. Her supporters included men, women and the youth. "Women and men voted for me in equal numbers and the final tally was a testimony to the confidence they had in my leadership," Wavinya says of her historic win in 2007, adding that service to the constituents is her priority. "I am focussing on serving the electorate and not concerned with parochial regional politics."

As an assistant minister, Wavinya appreciates the importance of sports for youth development. She launched a youth sports tournament for her constituency. The purpose of the tournament that is referred to as Mama Kathiani Tournament is to promote sports in the constituency and to create an opportunity for the MP to educate young people against negative vices such as drugs and irresponsible sex. It also brings together the youth and fosters the spirit of brotherhood and unity, while exposing the youth to different talents.

Other than the tournament, the youth remain key in her development agenda. The Youth Empowerment Centre built in Athi River will help the youth acquire skills that can lead to self employment as well as leadership.

Women's organisations have benefited from her development initiatives. The MP enjoys interacting with the electorate, which helps her to understand their needs and expectations. She has strived to make health care accessible by initiating construction of three dispensaries in the constituency.

Wavinya's focus has been to use the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to spur development and ensure the kitty is managed in a transparent and accountable manner. She wants to leave a legacy of accountability in the five years of her first term in Parliament.

An Information Technology expert, Wavinya previously served as managing director of Lionox Merchants and also of Onix Computer Services. She attended the University of North London where she graduated in Masters in Business Analysis and Design and went on to work as an Information Systems Developer. She obtained her undergraduate in Computer Science from South Bank University in the United Kingdom. The MP also holds a post graduate degree in Business Administration and Marketing from Heirwatt University, also in the UK. Earlier, she had attended Athi River and St Mary's Molo primary schools before joining Kenya High School for 'O' Levels.

Kathiani is both a rural and urban constituency, a combination that renders the work of managing it rather complex. It is home to the industrial Athi River town, and the MP would like to see the constituents benefit from employment opportunities at the factories. "The factories should hire local casuals. This way everybody gains," says Wavinya.

While she believes that an MP should help to bring development to the people and once in a while help them through difficult situations, the legislator regrets it when voters expect the MP to meet their personal financial obligations.

She reiterates that a leader must guide the people towards a culture of work for them to earn what their upkeep. "The electorate need to develop a culture of hard work and shun the culture of expecting handouts from their leaders."

In her work ethics, Wavinya disagrees with many of her colleagues who did not want their salaries taxed. She was among the few who supported the call to have MPs pay their tax to government.

One of the things she expects to achieve in Kathiani before the end of her five-year term is to get the private sector in Athi River to become active in supporting community projects like schools and hospitals in the constituency.

She would want her development agenda to win her the trust of the people she represents so that they will elect her back to Parliament for another term. However, that was the dream she had before the new Constitution. With the devolved system of government, she wants to manage the larger Ukambani in the name of Machakos County. Hopefully the whole region will appreciate what she has done in Kathiani and pick her as their governor.



*"In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now."*

**Wangari Maathai**





*"Women have tried to enter politics trying to look like men. This will not work. We have to bring our differences, our emotions, our ways of seeing things, even our tears to the process."*

**Prof Anna Tibaijuka**





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