

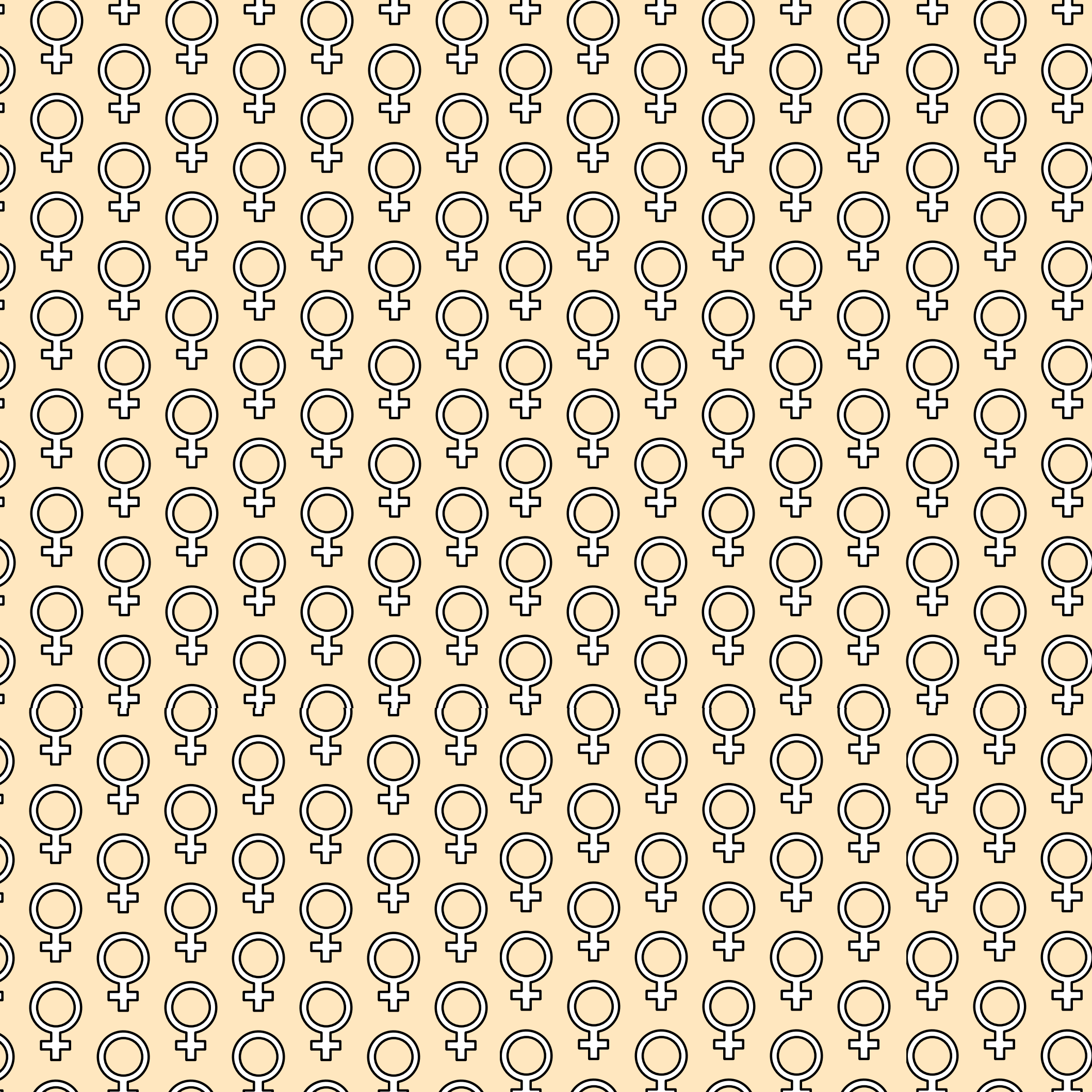


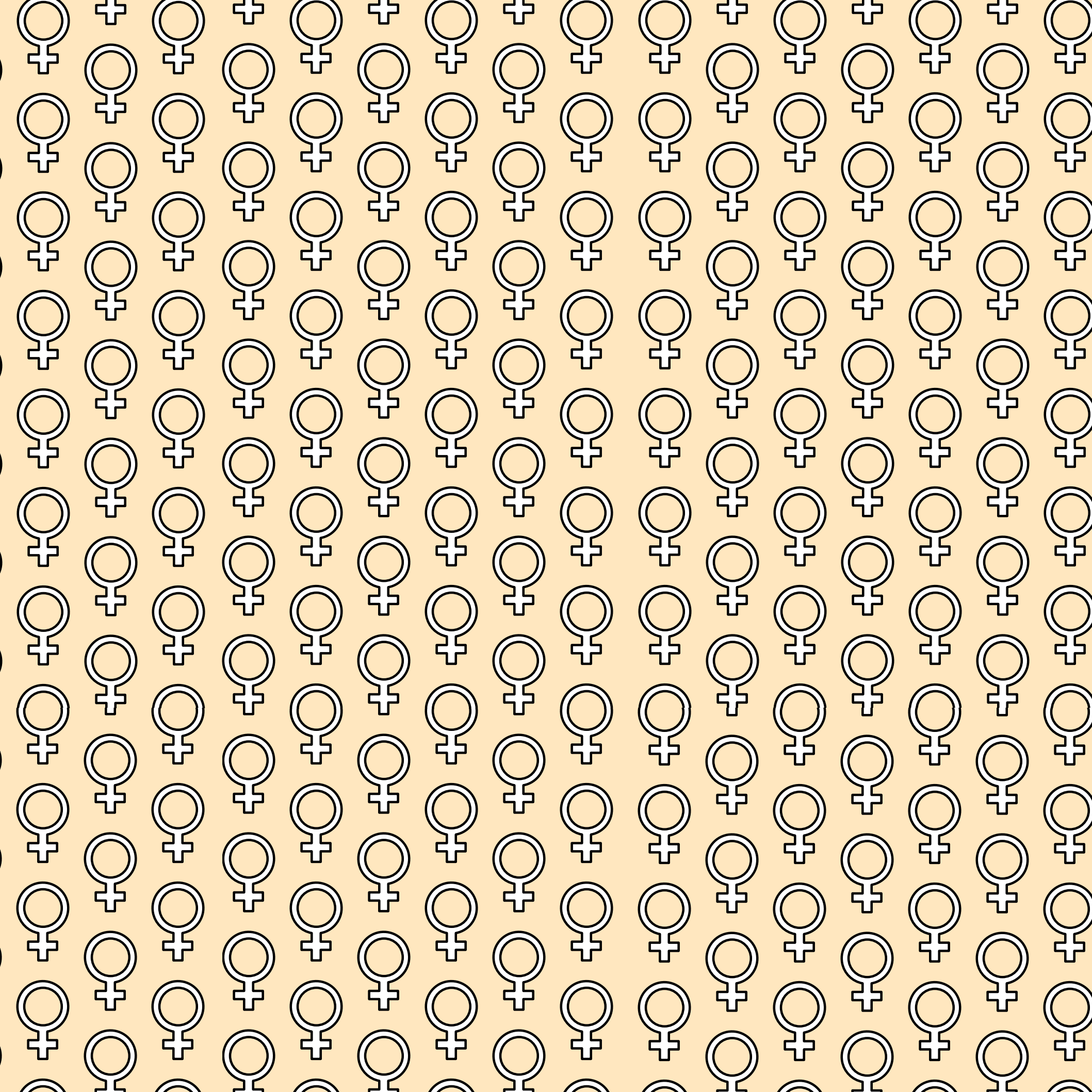
50 JOURNEYS

Stories of courage and transformation from
women political leaders in Kenya

 **UN
WOMEN**

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women





50 JOURNEYS

Stories of courage and transformation from
women political leaders in Kenya

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FOREWORD

On behalf of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), I am pleased to present this collection of transformative stories about Kenyan women's political journeys.

UN Women Kenya supports promoting gender equality in the electoral cycle in Kenya, which is embedded in UN Women's overall strategy to promote women's leadership and participation in politics. Democratic elections are critical to making women's voices heard.

UN Women has been partnering with the Government of Kenya and non-state actors, especially the women's movement, to increase the number of women in political leadership in Kenya.

The Government of Kenya recognizes the importance of the empowerment of women. Though the 2010 Constitution of Kenya is the mainstay towards this goal, Kenya's Vision 2030 and the Third Medium-Term Plan 2018–2022 also commit to gender equality. The

Sustainable Development Goals underscore the value of gender equality in sustainable development.

Though the 2017 General Elections recorded good strides towards electing women to high political positions, the numbers are still way below the minimum constitutional threshold of two-thirds of either gender. For the first time, three women governors and three women senators were elected to office, breaking the glass ceiling for women in such political leadership.

In this book (and in three videos), 50 women political leaders tell their stories—their experiences, challenges, and opportunities. All women and men, whether or not they are involved in politics, will find these personal accounts inspiring and challenging.

This publication focuses on ways to increase women's voices in the political sphere through sharing women's wisdom, their colourful life experiences, and Kenya's complex political and socio-cultural context.

I am celebrating ordinary women doing extraordinary things by going the extra mile to seize what is rightfully theirs!



Zebib Kavuma
UN Women County Director, Kenya



“We need more women in parliaments and as political leaders because, quite simply, **women represent half of the population, and they need to have input into the policies that affect them.** Gender equality is essential to build and strengthen our communities. **When women engage in the political process, societies thrive and prosper.** There is still much work to be done for women to reach full social, political, and legal equality around the world, but having more women in positions of political leadership is a crucial step toward realizing that important goal”.

Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada



BACKGROUND

The 1950s to 2002

For Kenyan women, the journey to political office began in colonial times. Some women held key leadership positions in the freedom struggle, and in 1961 the colonial government nominated Priscilla Ingasiani Abwao as the first and only African woman to sit on the Legislative Council.

Kenyan women began agitating for parliamentary representation before independence. Led by Priscilla Abwao and Phoebe Asiyo, a group visited the late President Jomo Kenyatta, then in detention, to lobby for nominations into the first Parliament (albeit with no success). The first elected female member of Parliament (MP), Grace Onyango, was elected into the second and third parliaments (1969 to 1979).

Though these early milestones were small, they set firm rungs on the ladder for women's steady but slow numerical ascent in the political arena. Since then, women have painstakingly increased their representation.

After the 1992 elections, seven women were present in Kenya's first multi-party Parliament. By 1997, nine women were in Parliament.

Making history that same year, Charity Ngilu and Wangari Maathai stood as Kenya's first female presidential candidates.

By the 2002 elections, which ushered in a hard-fought new era of politics after the retirement of President Daniel arap Moi, there were 18 women parliamentarians.

2002 to 2013

In the 2005 Referendum, Kenyans voted against a draft Constitution that held strong gender equality provisions. In 2006, former President Mwai Kibaki gave a directive that women should hold at least 30 per cent of senior public service positions, a precursor to the upcoming 2010 laws.

The 2007–2008 General Elections related crisis in Kenya had repercussions that continue to be felt in the political and social spheres. The gender-based violence that took place can be traced to the already existent patterns of discrimination against women. Women organized themselves to address and condemn the violence, and women politicians took on a strong peace platform.

Only a couple years later, in 2010, Kenya promulgated a new Constitution. This period

was a landmark in the women's movement. Gender equity and equality in political representation was now Constitutional. Affirmative action principles were clearly stipulated, and the electoral body and Parliament were mandated to enforce these provisions.

The 2013 General Election was a momentous election, with many historical firsts—for example, in addition to being the first election under the new Constitution, it was the first to incorporate elective affirmative action seats in the national assembly.

Despite concerted efforts, however, women went to 2013 and 2017 polls without legislation on the two-thirds gender rule for the National Assembly and Senate. The affirmative action rule was only enforced at devolved levels.

The electoral harvest in 2013 for women was mixed. But there were steps forward: with the two-thirds gender representation rule applied in the county assemblies, the entrance of hundreds of women into the representative political arena was historic.

2013 to 2017

Women in leadership had by now become a Constitutional cornerstone. Politically, socially, and culturally, this was a major disruption to the patriarchal ideation of male power. After all, patriarchy is the systemic edifice of Kenyan society, with its ideas of male supremacy and female subservience.

Though buoyed by the new laws of the land, women in politics still faced huge challenges. The Kenyan electoral system is mainly based on the ‘first-past-the-post’ principle. This means that the person with the most votes is the winner (the approach is supplemented with the proportional representation principle through nominations and reserved seats). This system encourages tactical voting—voters go for the person they think is more likely to win, meaning things are still skewed to men’s advantage.

Political parties, meanwhile, mediate proportional representation and their patriarchal values still come into play to bar women. With reserved seats, the quality of women nominees is compromised because the nominations are linked to favours within the political parties.

As the 2017 General Elections approached, the political polarization along ethnic lines and regional blocs created heightened tension, portending violence.

Overall, only 11 per cent of all candidates in the 2017 General Elections at the party primaries were women, almost similar to 2013. For the first time in history, three women governors and three women senators and 23 women from single constituencies were elected. Eighteen

women were nominated to the Senate, and six to the National Assembly totalling to 97 women out of 416 parliamentarians. At 23.3 per cent, this is way below the constitutional threshold of 34 per cent. Nominations in the county assemblies brought women’s representation up to 34 per cent across the counties.

In 2017, only 9.35 per cent of candidates on the ballot were women. However, more women were elected (as opposed to nominated) compared to the 2013 General Elections. Importantly, women candidates in the 2013 and 2017 elections have had essentially the same success rate as male candidates. Women constitute 27 per cent of cabinet secretaries, below the Constitutional threshold, but they were allocated some powerful ministries.

Beyond 2017: What is success made of?

The lukewarm results notwithstanding, how did the women who were successful do it? Experience and an existing ‘brand’ counted for something. All the women have grit. Financial ability is another success factor, because campaigns are expensive.

Mentorship was important—some have called it the soul of the campaign. And choice of party and constituency were also crucial—most winning women ran in party strongholds of the leading parties.

As politicians, these women have to confront intimidation and propaganda, among other challenges. They juggle family and leadership roles, but male opponents use this issue to discredit women candidates’ appropriateness for politics. The challenge of campaign

financing is made worse by expectations of bribes, vote buying, and informal nomination fees within parties.

Socio-cultural resistance is also a barrier, along with perceptions about politics. Even the strongest women with proven agency in other areas hold back from politics. There is also a mentorship gap, as there are few women political leaders compared to the thousands of potential female aspirants.

As Kenyan women, and indeed Kenyans as a whole, move towards better representation, they face certain realities.

First, numbers are important—quite simply, more women have to be involved, at all levels.

Second, if political parties are the pivot for the Kenyan political arena, then it is in political parties that gender equality has to be realized first.

Third, as Kenyans push for the full implementation of laws such as the two-thirds gender rule, transformative constitutionalism must come into being—the idea that the Constitution is not just about legal/formal rights, but it is also about the transformation of people’s lives.

The personal stories that follow delve into these ideas, within the complicated context of Kenyan politics.

**WOMEN CONSTITUTE 27
PER CENT OF CABINET
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JULIA OJIAMBO BETH MUGO
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CHELEGAT MUTAI ORY OKOLLOH MWANGI
ZIPPORAH JEMINA
JEPCHIRCHIR GECAGA
KITTONY PHOEBE ASIYO
JENNIFER MUTHONI LIKIMANI
RIRIA MARIA NZOMO
ROSE WARUHIU NICE
PHILOMENA NAILANTEI
CHELANGAT LENG'ETE

TABITHA WANGARI MAATHAI
JEPTOO ESTHER MWAURA RUTH HABWE
SEII
RUTH NJIRI JUDITH AYAKO
HILDA GRACE AKINYI OGOT
OTIENO JAEL MBOGO
ORIE ROGO MANDULI
MARERERE MWARPAYO WA MWACHAI
MARGARET KENYATTA
NJOKI SUSANNA PRISCAH
NDUNGU AUMA MISACHI
MARGARET PRISCILLA
KARIUKI GECAU INGASIANI
EDDAH GACHUKIA ABWAO

EFFE
OWTOR

LOROUPE

TEGLA

JUDY THONGORI

INTRODUCTION

Women's struggle for inclusion and equal representation in politics has been difficult and drawn out. But it is an extremely important journey—women's participation in governance is one of the best ways to tackle gender inequality. Half of the global population is female, and better representation is imperative. In Kenya, representation of women in the 12th Parliament stands at 23.3 per cent, the highest since independence...but the lowest in the East Africa region.

Globally, women bring a different perspective to politics based on their social and nurturing roles and their shared experiences. International agreements—which include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action—and national laws recognize the importance of empowering women in all spheres.

Political office is a space of authority and influence, and women's needs, and interests will be prioritized only when women are represented politically in equal numbers.

Part 1 of the book provides a brief background of Kenyan women's political journey, and the current context.

Part 2 consists of the narratives from the 50 women, who delve into their experiences in the political arena and their personal journeys to political office. Three videos were produced alongside this publication.





“We are here because we share a
fundamental belief: that
**poverty, illiteracy, disease
and inequality do not
belong in the twenty-first
century.**

We share a common purpose: to
eradicate these ills for the benefit
of all...”

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

THREE GOVERNORS MAKE HISTORY



Anne Waiguru
Governor of Kirinyaga County



Charity Ngilu
Governor of Kitui County



Joyce Laboso
Governor of Bomet County



“I have
learned that
you can achieve
anything your mind
is set on, if you are
focused, resilient, and
have a sense of
humour,”

ANNE WAIGURU

“I think politics is five or ten times harder for women than for men. Our society is still very patriarchal,...”

When Ms. Anne Waiguru resigned as Cabinet Secretary in the Ministry of Devolution and Planning in 2015, she had never envisioned herself as a politician — until an opportunity presented itself.

“I was approached and advised to run for the Nairobi gubernatorial seat. But another group approached me and advised that I should consider going for the Kirinyaga seat. As a technocrat with a finance background, I am very good with documents, papers, write-ups, but not politics. I could read speeches, but I had never done political speeches.”

With hesitation and caution, she took a leap of faith. She would count on her accomplishments as a Cabinet Secretary and in other portfolios to endear herself to the voters. These included the establishment of the Huduma centres and the implementation of the Integrated Financial Management and Information System.

After securing her nomination, she developed a clear development-oriented agenda and a plan of action. Next, she embarked on a door-to-door campaign to sell her agenda. *“I was on the ground from morning till night, every single*


day, selling my agenda. I don’t think there’s a place in Kirinyaga I did not cover,” she says.

Ms. Waiguru’s well-thought-out media strategy employed mainly vernacular radio stations to popularize her agenda. She also came up with an ingenious strategy to reach voters, which she says was the most rewarding. *“I mapped out all the 650 polling stations in Kirinyaga County. We picked 20 people for each polling station, who then set up a committee.”* The committees transmitted campaign messages, but also provided feedback on activities in the field. Three months to the election date, she started conducting weekly opinion polls to monitor her popularity and then focus on the areas with low ratings.

But the victory did not come easy. Ms. Waiguru bemoans the fact that women have to surmount more challenges than men to win. *“I think that politics is five or ten times harder for women than for men. Our society is still very patriarchal, which poses numerous challenges for women leaders. There were times when opponents got desperate and hired youths to stone my supporters. My security personnel had to shoot in the air to disperse the crowds.”*

However, these experiences only strengthened her resolve: *“I have learned that you can achieve anything your mind is set on if you are focused, resilient, and have a sense of humour.”* She adds, *“Financial support is very critical for women engaging in political competition. There are many women who are good leaders but may not have access to the kind of support I had, and we need to think of how to support them.”*

According to Ms. Waiguru, men and women constantly have to be reminded about the value women bring to leadership. *“As a woman you have to be twice as good to be given half the commendation of men. Make sure you stand out and surround yourself with good mentors, keep the focus and drive and put God first.”*

A close-up portrait of a Black woman with short, dark, wavy hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a bright blue blazer over a white top and a gold chain necklace. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a blue wall and some foliage.

“The politics
of this country
is like rugby,
where stamina and
technique are key to
scoring. One must be
strong to make
it”

CHARITY NGILU

“When I joined politics, the first thing I was confronted with was physical violence meted on women by their male challengers.”

For Ms. Charity Ngilu, the Governor of Kitui County, the journey into politics began in 1992 with a humble water project in her village, for which she was the chairperson.

“At that time, no gathering was allowed without permission from the provincial administration. But we decided to meet,” she says.

This did not go down well with the local leadership: *“Eighty of us were arrested and locked up for organising an illegal assembly. Upon our release, we resolved to vote out our Member of Parliament, who had instigated our arrest, and to replace him with a woman. That is when I made known my intentions to contest the Kitui Central Parliamentary seat and was elected.”*

By the next elections in 1997, Ms. Ngilu dared to do what no Kenyan woman had done: she contested the presidency on the ticket of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). After a gruelling campaign, marred with violent attacks on Ms Ngilu and her supporters, she emerged fourth among ten candidates. With that bold move, Ms. Ngilu acquired the profile of a national leader.

She later quit SDP and registered the National Party of Kenya (NPK). In 2002, NPK dissolved and united with other opposition parties to form the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) with Ms. Ngilu at the helm. She was a member of the NARC Summit that steered the opposition to victory.

In 2013, she lost the race for Kitui Senator after ditching the opposition to align her party to the Jubilee coalition. Following President Uhuru Kenyatta’s victory, Ms. Ngilu was appointed Cabinet Secretary for Lands. However, two years into the job, she was dropped from the Cabinet over corruption allegations. The courts later cleared her.

“I thought my political career was over. But my people welcomed me back, and that is how I managed a resounding victory in 2017,” she says.

Her strategy entails understanding her constituents, responding effectively to their needs, and being with them during bad and good times: *“My biggest asset is being accessible.”* During campaigns, she uses radio, social media, and town hall meetings to reach voters.

Her constituents trusted her to deliver them from poverty. *“I projected myself as the leader who would address the challenges of poverty, water scarcity, and food insecurity.”*

She says women fear getting into politics because of the challenges involved. *“When I joined politics, the first thing I was confronted with was physical violence meted on women by their male challengers. It also happened to my supporters. Women were raped in my constituency for supporting me.”*

Ms Ngilu says women aspirants must be prepared psychologically and ensure that they have family support: *“The politics of this country is like rugby where stamina and technique are key to scoring. One must be strong to make it.”*

As an experienced politician, Ms Ngilu takes it upon herself to mentor fellow women. She says it is the right thing to do, as she too was mentored: *“Prof. Maria Nzomo and Prof. Wanjiku Kabira trained me on how to stand in rallies; how to ask people to vote for me; how to look at the agenda... Many women go for political office without knowing these details.”*



"I focused on...
demystify[ing] the
negative narratives
that defined women
in leadership."

DR. JOYCE LABOSO

“I faced this almost larger-than-life opponent who had made a name for himself as the ‘Father of Devolution’ and the first Chairman of the Council of Governors.”

Dr. Joyce Laboso’s journey is one of political firsts. She was the first female Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and among the three women elected as Kenya’s first female governors. This epochal transformation has been achieved within a decade.

Dr. Laboso was a university lecturer until 2008, when her academic career was jolted by the tragic death of her younger sister, Lorna Laboso, who was the Member of Parliament for Sotik Constituency. Dr. Laboso overcame the tragedy and succeeded her sister, and quickly learned the inner workings of politics.

Dr. Laboso confirmed that she was firmly in control of her own political destiny when she successfully defended the Parliamentary seat in the 2013 General Elections. Having earned her stripes as Temporary Speaker in the previous Parliament, she knew her chance of becoming Deputy Speaker was beckoning.

She lobbied the coalition principals and other legislators, and in 2013 she was elected to the highest position ever held by a woman in the history of the National Assembly. But her toughest political test was yet to come. In 2017, she decided to contest the Bomet

gubernatorial seat against the incumbent, Isaac Ruto, who was already regarded as a national political heavyweight.

Dr. Laboso knew that to triumph over a politician who had become a towering force in Rift Valley politics was not going to be easy. *“I faced this almost larger-than-life opponent who had made a name for himself as the ‘Father of Devolution’ and the first Chairman of the Council of Governors. And here I was, not a very aggressive person by nature. Nobody would have thought I was going to take on this opponent.”*

But she had been sharpening her political strategies to emerge a winner. She capitalized on her impressive development track record and political profile as an effective Parliament leader to market herself.

One big challenge she faced in the wider county was to surmount cultural beliefs and counter propaganda: *“In those constituencies where a woman had never been elected before, I focused on running campaigns to demystify the negative narratives that defined women in leadership.”*

She also worked hard to deflect negative messaging about her marriage. *“She is married to an outsider. If you elect her, she will divert our resources to go and develop her husband’s homeland in Nyanza,”* said her detractors.

Against all these odds, Dr. Laboso triumphed. Reflecting on her political journey, she observes, *“You will start from a very big disadvantage if you do not have finances, even if you have the best policies and manifesto. If you are not visible and able to reach out to people, you are starting on the wrong premise.”*

She adds that more mentorship is needed: *“Start mentoring them [women] to undertake projects that resonate with the people on the ground. Breaking the glass ceiling is not easy. If you want more women to succeed or come on board, then their capacity and visibility must be increased.”*

THREE SENATORS MAKE HISTORY



Fatuma Dhullo
Senator for Isiolo County



Margaret Kamar
Senator for Uasin Gishu County



Susan Kihika
Senator for Nakuru County



"You must be
an eye-catching
leader and
convince people
that you can
deliver."

FATUMA DHULLO

“I told them that women were highly regarded in the community and had always been consulted on important issues.”

Ms. Fatuma Dhullo’s victory as Senator for Isiolo County is a milestone for the women’s empowerment movement in Kenya.

Although she is one of three women elected senator in 2017, her win is notable: until 2017, it was difficult to imagine that the region could elect a woman as senator. Culturally, among the dominant communities in the County—the Borana, Turkana, and Somali—it was almost unheard of to have women in political leadership.

Ms. Dhullo’s work in the community and politics had already won her nomination as Senator in 2013, and during that term she was elected Vice-Chair of the National Security and Foreign Relations Committee. With her lobbying, the Government completed the construction of a 71-kilometre road in Isiolo County. This would become a key campaign point in 2017.

But Ms. Dhullo knew that she needed the elders’ endorsement to win the election. *“Most of them felt that I should contest for the Woman Representative’s seat and leave the other elective seats for men.”*

The elders quoted the Koran and the Bible to dissuade her from competing with men, but Ms. Dhullo stood her ground: *“I told them that women were highly regarded in the community and had always been consulted on important issues.”*

As a lawyer, she explained to them that the Constitution gave women a right to seek political office, and that men were distorting facts and using propaganda to deny women this right. With her county support base growing, the elders relented. Next came the issue of party affiliation: *“I was not sure I would clinch the Jubilee Party ticket. So I decided to go with the Party of Development and Reforms, an affiliate of Jubilee.”*

She articulated the issues affecting the community *“...better than my opponents—this gave me mileage.”* Her impressive academic credentials and experience working with the Government, UNDP, Civil Society, and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights further endeared her to the electorate.

For outreach, she used social media, local radio stations, churches, and women’s and youth groups. These strategies delivered a resounding victory in the elections. In the

Senate, she is the Deputy Majority Leader and sits on the Public Accounts and House Business Committees.

Ms. Dhullo acknowledges the contribution of UN Women to her success. *“I benefited from several trainings organized by UN Women, which were designed to build the capacity of women candidates. The support and encouragement ahead of elections was invaluable.”*

Finances were a major constraint. *“Many women who run for political seats do not have the resources to mount successful campaigns. I was lucky to receive from friends to complement my savings.”* Insecurity and intimidation were other challenges.

Ms. Dhullo believes that establishing a kitty to support women candidates early on is important. She is convinced that women can overcome cultural and traditional biases if they stand firm and challenge them. Women are a powerful voting bloc—tapping into it is key.

Women must also learn to package themselves well to win. *“You must be an eye-catching leader and convince people that you can deliver.”*



“In
politics
nobody teaches
you anything, yet
it’s a journey one
cannot walk
alone.”

PROF. MARGARET KAMAR

“Through my support... I have seen young people... married women return to high school. And in one place I was referred to as professor of professors, simply because I encouraged a culture of people going back to school even if they have children.”

Prof. Margaret Kamar was a career scientist at Moi University when an unexpected invitation came her way in 1995 to join the official delegation to the landmark Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China.

The invitation opened a pathway into activism for women’s rights, and eventually into politics. *“Beijing was a turning point for me because I gained fresh perspectives on women’s issues.”*

Soon after her return, Prof. Kamar was pressured to lead a local branch of Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization, a national women’s movement that had transformed into a political force during the 1980s and 1990s. She was later nominated to the East African Legislative Assembly.

When her term at the assembly ended in 2006, she took a break to start a school in her community. However, the local community again pressured her to return to political leadership.

She accepted to vie for the Eldoret East Constituency seat only six months before the 2007 General Elections. *“As a result, I had the shortest and cheapest campaign.”* She won the

election easily. After one and a half years, she was nominated Assistant Minister.

Prof. Kamar says the immense interest of the community to get her into local politics was informed by the support she offered them when she was at the university—advising them on their farming ventures and being a guarantor so that their children were not sent home from school for not paying fees.

Her political mentoring happened on the job: *“When I went to Parliament, I was nominated to the Speaker’s Panel. Kenneth Marende, who was then Speaker, became my first mentor.”*

In 2013, she vied for Governor, but did not win. In 2017, the community asked her to vie again. *“But I told them I wanted to be the governor’s supervisor and decided to go for senatorial position.”*

This time around, she changed strategy. She decided to go with the Jubilee Party, which was popular in her region.

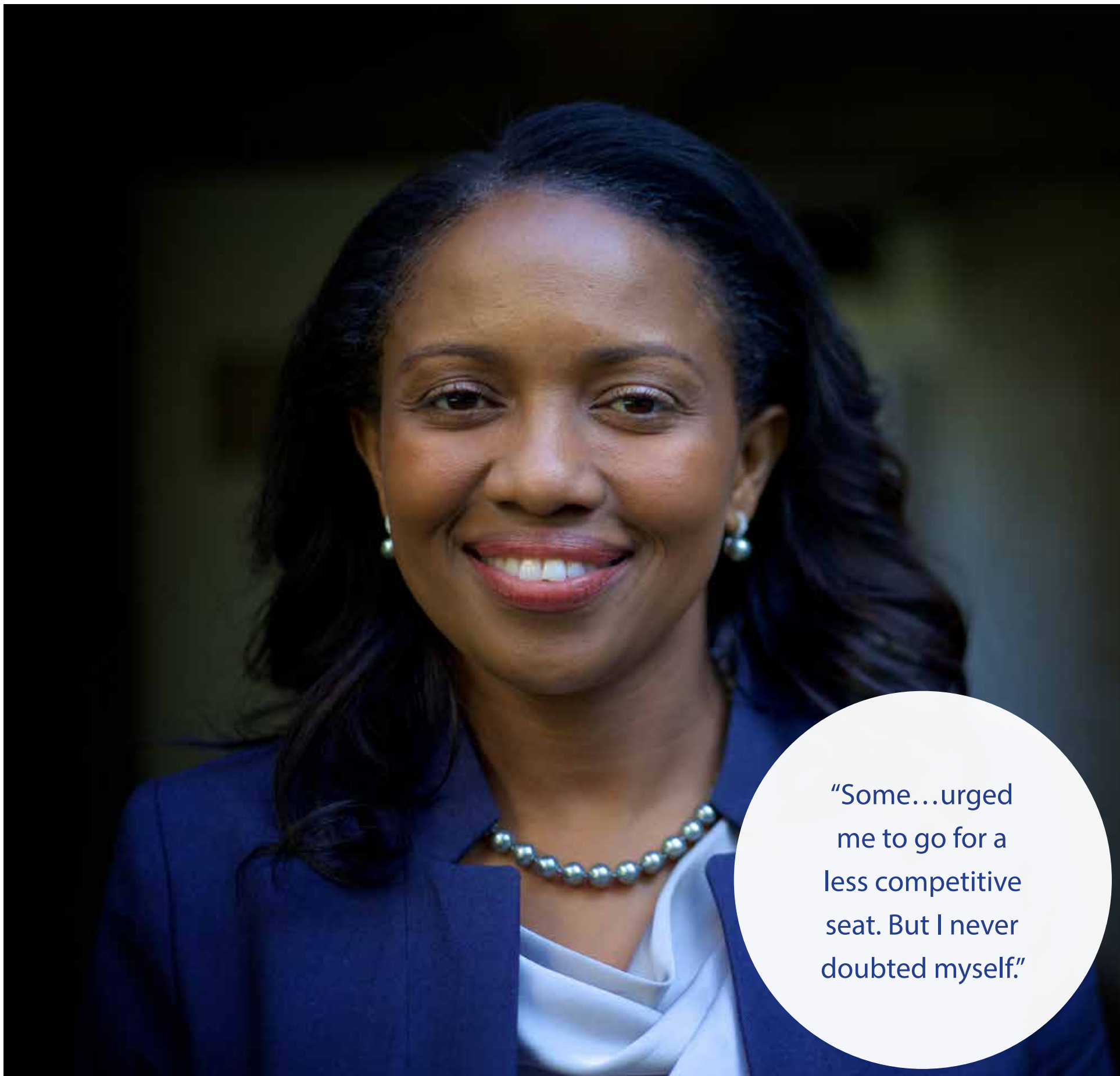
Social media-savvy young people, ran her media strategy. *“Occasionally, I allowed mainstream media into my meetings. I also used a lot of vernacular radio, and the call-ins were*

the best moments because they enabled me to interact with voters,” she says.

Her messaging was strategic: *“During UN Women trainings I learnt how to craft a winning message.”* Prof. Kamar is also thankful to UN Women for providing her with critical campaign materials such as flyers, T-shirts, banners, and calendars.

And she won the Uasin Gishu County senatorial seat: *“Through my support, I have seen young people go back to school. I have also witnessed married women return to high school. And in one place I was referred to as professor of professors, simply because I encouraged a culture of people going back to school even if they have children.”*

Prof. Kamar says women leaders need to learn from each other to succeed. She has learned to listen more, especially to what the people want. *“In politics nobody teaches you anything, yet it’s a journey one cannot walk alone.”*



“Some...urged me to go for a less competitive seat. But I never doubted myself.”

SUSAN KIHKA

“I really worked hard to change the narrative that I was just the privileged daughter of a politician, and to get people to see me as my own person, capable and up to the task.”

Ms. Susan Kihika had planned to enter politics after retirement, but following the enactment of the new Constitution—and the excitement and opportunities it created—she decided to vie for the Bahati Parliamentary seat in 2013.

When she failed to clinch the seat, she vied for the Nakuru County Assembly Speaker’s seat. She won, and distinguished herself in that role. Next, she sized up the senatorial seat.

Ms. Kihika was inspired to join politics by her father, the late Nakuru politician Kihika Kimani. *“Nobody today has a bigger influence on me than him. He is my greatest mentor and legend,”* she says. She also admires the political style of Martha Karua.

But even with the Kihika name, she needed a winning strategy. *“During the campaigns, I quickly realized that I was not resonating with the older men, who thought a young woman would not be able to handle this position. Most of them came to support me only after I won the [Jubilee] nomination.”*

She was, however, able to connect with the youth and women. *“I really worked hard to change the narrative that I was just the*

privileged daughter of a politician, and to get people to see me as my own person, capable and up to the task.”

Social media and outdoor marketing worked well for her. Her Facebook page alone has over 100,000 followers from Nakuru County and she was interviewed several times on vernacular radio stations. *“I seized all the television moments that came my way.”*

Her campaign assistants received communication training from UN Women, while the National Democratic Institute trained her agents.

Still, the campaign period was challenging. *“It was tough being away for so many months from my family. We had to talk about it and agree as a family,”* says the lawyer, who gave up a successful practice in the United States to seek political leadership at home.

She also had to deal with hooliganism and negative press. Funding the campaign was a challenge, especially as her opponents were moneyed. Regarding finances, she says, *“I hope we get to a point where you get votes on the basis of what you stand for and not how much you can give.”*

She learned that a candidate must have a political strategy in place very early. *“I visited churches in remote areas and attended functions three years before the elections. My brand was slowly but surely getting recognized. Women are disadvantaged when they begin campaigns late.”*

Ms. Kihika has also learned to be daring. *“When I decided to go for the senatorial position, some friends thought it was impossible and urged me to go for a less competitive seat. But I never doubted myself. The only fear at the back of my mind was: what if everybody else was right and my gender worked against me? But I said to myself, I will never know unless I try.”*

Not only did she become a Senator, she went on to become the Chief Whip of the Majority Party in the Senate.

WOMEN TRANSFORMING NATIONAL POLITICS



Alice Wahome



Agnes Zani



Beatrice Elachi



Cecily Mbarire



Godliver Omondi



Janet Ongeru



Linah Jebii Kilimo



Martha Karua



Millie Odhiambo



Mishi Mboko



Naisula Lesuuda



Naomi Shaban



Peris Tobiko



Rachel Shebesh



Rozaah Akinyi Buyu



Sabina Chege



Sophia Abdi Noor



Wavinya Ndeti



Zuleikha Juma Hassan



"Society
says women
are making
noise...but I say
no, women are
speaking
sense"

ALICE WAHOME

“You must also follow and secure your vote from the point of voter mobilisation to registration. Check the voter register once complete, and ensure that your voters stay with you through nominations and the final elections...”

Her unassuming nature belies her political prowess in a county and country where men rule politics. In 2013, Ms. Alice Wahome confounded friend and foe when she became the first woman to be elected Member of Parliament (MP) for Kandara Constituency in Murang’a County. She won again in 2017.

Ms. Wahome was politically involved in the 1990s. But it was not until 2002 that she threw her hat in the ring for Kandara Constituency. She lost the election, as well as the subsequent one in 2007. *“I had both the courage and will to try again, regardless of how gruesome the campaigns were.”*

How did she go from two defeats to victory in 2013? *“I have always worked very hard to remain relevant,”* she says. Her overwhelming win (73 per cent) shook the patriarchal structure in Murang’a County and paved the way for two other women to be elected in the 2017 elections.

Once she got into Parliament, Ms Wahome hinged her strategy on the constituency’s priorities—improved infrastructure to enable farmers to access markets; improved electricity and water supplies; and improved standards of education.

In five years, Kandara sub-County moved from last position to number three in the County in the national primary examinations and to number four in the secondary schools ranking. Ms. Wahome notes that this was one of her best moments.

As the 2017 General Elections beckoned, one strategy Ms. Wahome employed was to speak to her mainly rural constituents in a language they understood best. Using her fluent Kikuyu, she avoided propaganda and mudslinging and focused on the real issues affecting the voters.

Ms. Wahome acknowledges the support she received from UN Women and the National Democratic Institute in the form of information, education, and communication materials. But her political journey has not been without challenges.

One of her worst moments was when she was involved in a public scuffle with a returning officer during the 2017 repeat presidential elections. Clips of the incident—which showed verbal attacks and insults—circulated on social media and television screens.

“While I take no pride or joy in what happened, my constituents thought that I was very brave,”

she notes. Ms. Wahome dismisses claims that she is too vocal: *“Society says women are making noise. But I say no, women are speaking sense. We are having democratic conversations about the future of this country.”*

Her role models in politics are Ms. Martha Karua and the late Prof. Wangari Maathai. *“They inspire me to keep going, as politics is difficult for women.”*

Ms. Wahome says that men in authority will never agree to create space for women to lead. *“And that is why I tell women, no one will move for you. Go and take it.”*

She offers some practical advice for women politicians, pointing out that agents must be well trained and the voter registration process thoroughly checked. She adds, *“Women lose in nominations often because we do not prepare well... Figure out what your primary barriers are before plunging into the contest.”*



“In
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it”

DR. AGNES ZANI

“I have been in meetings where I have been denied the microphone. Sometimes I have had to stand up and grab it.”

A nominated Senator and the Deputy Secretary General of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), Dr. Agnes Zani says that her recognition in national and party politics is a result of her work in the community, where she did a lot to improve the livelihoods of her constituents.

At the political party level, she worked hard to win the hearts and minds of the leaders. *“Once I set my mind on something, I just want it to happen. I remember juggling between the Senate and the political party to make sure everything was running well ahead of the 2017 General Elections. My party realized that I brought value to the table. That is why I was nominated as a Senator.”*

In the Senate, she was listed among the best-performing senators for her remarkable debates in the House and her introduction of the Natural Resources Bill and other motions.

She then got a second nomination to the Senate, a feat few politicians have achieved. Dr. Zani credits this success to her hard work, oratory skills, and firmness.

As Deputy Secretary General (and erstwhile Secretary General) of ODM, Dr. Zani, who

studied Sociology for her PhD, has been influential and visible. *“As a key party member, I made sure that we always had running activities and programmes and the Party was functioning well.”*

Dr. Zani says that her rating in the Party is good because of her steadfast loyalty and support. *“Unlike most people who appear during an electioneering period, I have been a great asset to the party, writing proposals, negotiating on behalf of the Party, and bringing new ideas when needed.”*

These successes have not come easy in a patriarchal world. *“Women have to fight twice as hard to be heard... I have been in meetings where I have been denied the microphone. Sometimes I have had to stand up and grab it.”*

Though the media often ignore women leaders, when Dr. Zani and other women in the Senate table bills and motions, their visibility increases. *“You should always have an agenda, talk about it, push that agenda and get the much-needed visibility.”*

Before the 2017 General Elections, she and other women aspirants received UN Women support through the Kenya Women

Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA). This support allowed her to enhance her legislative capacity and convene women from Kwale County to encourage them to vie for elective seats.

Vital on her journey is the support of her parents, whom she terms as her greatest inspiration. She also cites Prof. Wangari Maathai, Charity Ngilu, Phoebe Asiyo, and Grace Ogot as mentors. Others are Winnie Mandela and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. She found Mother Theresa’s humility deeply inspiring.

Women politicians ‘must be vocal, get heard, be articulate, and keep talking all the time’. At the party level, she advises women to ‘be in the meetings, offer your ideas, and make everybody understands what you are saying’.

“When an opportunity comes, take it. Vie for leadership positions in your respective political parties... I also realized that if you are already at the table, you are much better than when you are outside.”



“Across the country, women made it because parties supported them.”

BEATRICE ELACHI

“Using the women tag does not help a lot with the voters. What they want to hear is what you can do for them,”

Ms. Beatrice Elachi’s political ambitions existed long before her nomination to the Senate, where she was elected to the powerful position of Chief Whip and was on the powerful Finance and Devolution committees.

Before this, Ms. Elachi served as Executive Director of the League of Kenyan Women Voters and as a strategist for political parties. She also served as the Secretary General of the Alliance Party of Kenya.

Her strategy is to be an asset to her political party and her constituents. Ms. Elachi says that her tenure in the Senate was both colourful and remarkable. *“One of the things I did was to push for gender-sensitive budgeting.”*

This was not by default. She had worked with various partners, including UN Women, and appreciated the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment. She had learned to look at politics, leadership, and governance through gender lens.

After an unsuccessful run for member of Parliament she was elected Speaker of the Nairobi County Assembly. Using her Senate experience, she plays the dual role of advising

the County Assembly on possible legislative barriers and encouraging the Senate to make laws that can improve the county’s delivery.

Members of the County Assembly from both sides are supportive of her work: *“They do not see me as the Speaker for the ruling party. I was elected in the first round with 90 votes out of 124.”*

Ms. Elachi has received several awards for outstanding leadership, as well as invitations to speak on women, power, and leadership. She credits her growth to the support she received from organizations such as UN Women and the National Democratic Institute.

“These organizations can have a bigger impact if they work with fewer strong women at the grass-roots and in political parties,” she says. “Across the country, women made it because parties supported them. Homa Bay County, for instance, reached its one-third gender representation only because ODM supported women.”

But she adds that her political journey and push for the women empowerment has not been a smooth one. *“I have a strong personality. You learn to manage it and to manage the*

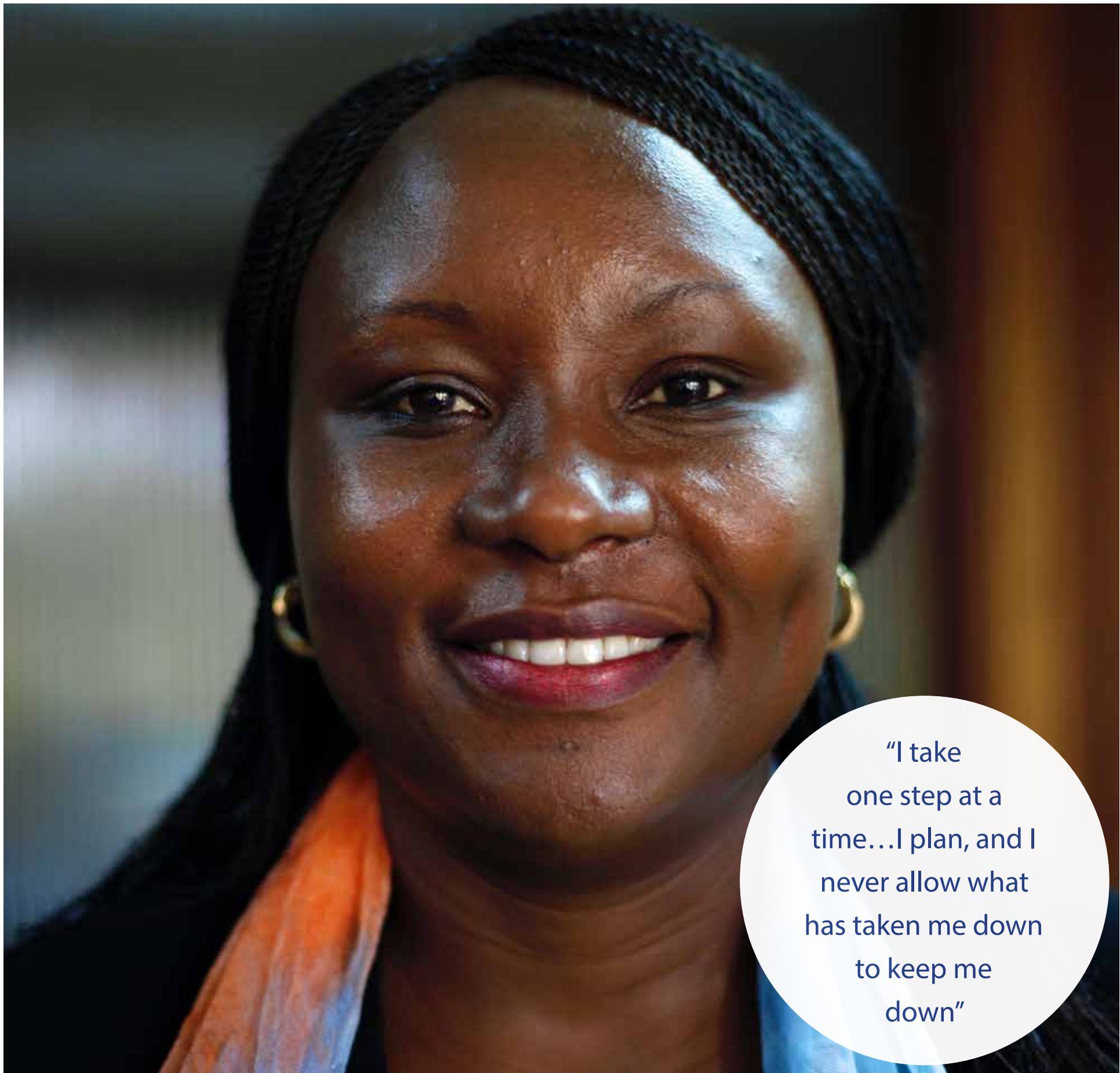
male ego.” She also finds the sexist jokes that men make about ‘how women have made it’ offensive. *“But I have managed to work around these issues.”*

One of the lessons she has learned is that, *“... using the woman tag does not help to win over voters. What they want to hear is what you can do for them.”*

It is also important for aspiring politicians to understand the psyche of the voters and whether they are likely to vote for a certain party or candidate, and then make a decision on where to contest.

Ms. Elachi advises running violence-free campaigns and choosing political partners wisely. During campaigns, she formed small but effective teams: *“I had a team of ten in every ward, and in one minute we could mobilize 10,000 people.”*

She has also learned the important role the media can play in a politician’s life: *“The media gave me significant mileage and made a positive impact on my political journey.”*



"I take
one step at a
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down"

CECILY MBARIRE

“Campaigns for women are extremely rough. The emotional, psychological, and physical abuses are too much. If you are weak, you will give up.”

Cecily Mbarire’s life as a politician was nurtured in the 1990s when she was studying for her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science at Egerton University. Sure of her career path, Ms. Mbarire went into national politics as soon as she graduated.

She is now in her fourth term as a member of Parliament (MP) and is the current Deputy Majority Whip in the 12th Parliament.

Ms. Mbarire says she does it by ensuring that her constituents and party see her as an asset: *“My commitment and leadership in the party are unwavering. I always come out strongly in support of the President, his Deputy and my party.”*

After 15 years as an MP, Ms. Mbarire decided to go for the Embu gubernatorial seat in 2017. Although she lost in the primaries, she says the experience made her realize that women must work extra hard and surmount many challenges before winning influential positions.

She credits God, hard work, resilience, networking skills, and mentorship for her success in politics. *“I met Hon. Charity Ngilu when I was a student leader at the university. She*

took a keen interest in me and has consistently mentored, inspired, and guided me.”

A clear development agenda that resonates with her constituents and the right political strategies have also played a major role: *“I identified key issues that resonated with the people and delivered on my promises.”*

However, she says, you must also have a well-structured campaign and a strong team: *“I established campaign committees in all the 38 sub-locations in the constituency and made sure people were aware of the issues I was championing...I identified easy zones, swing areas, the undecided voters, and the hostile zones.”*

Her competitors found her strategies too good to beat and instead resorted to using culture to malign her. *“I am not married in Embu and thus my critics have always used this to demean my candidature. But...I have demonstrated to them that women too can lead.”*

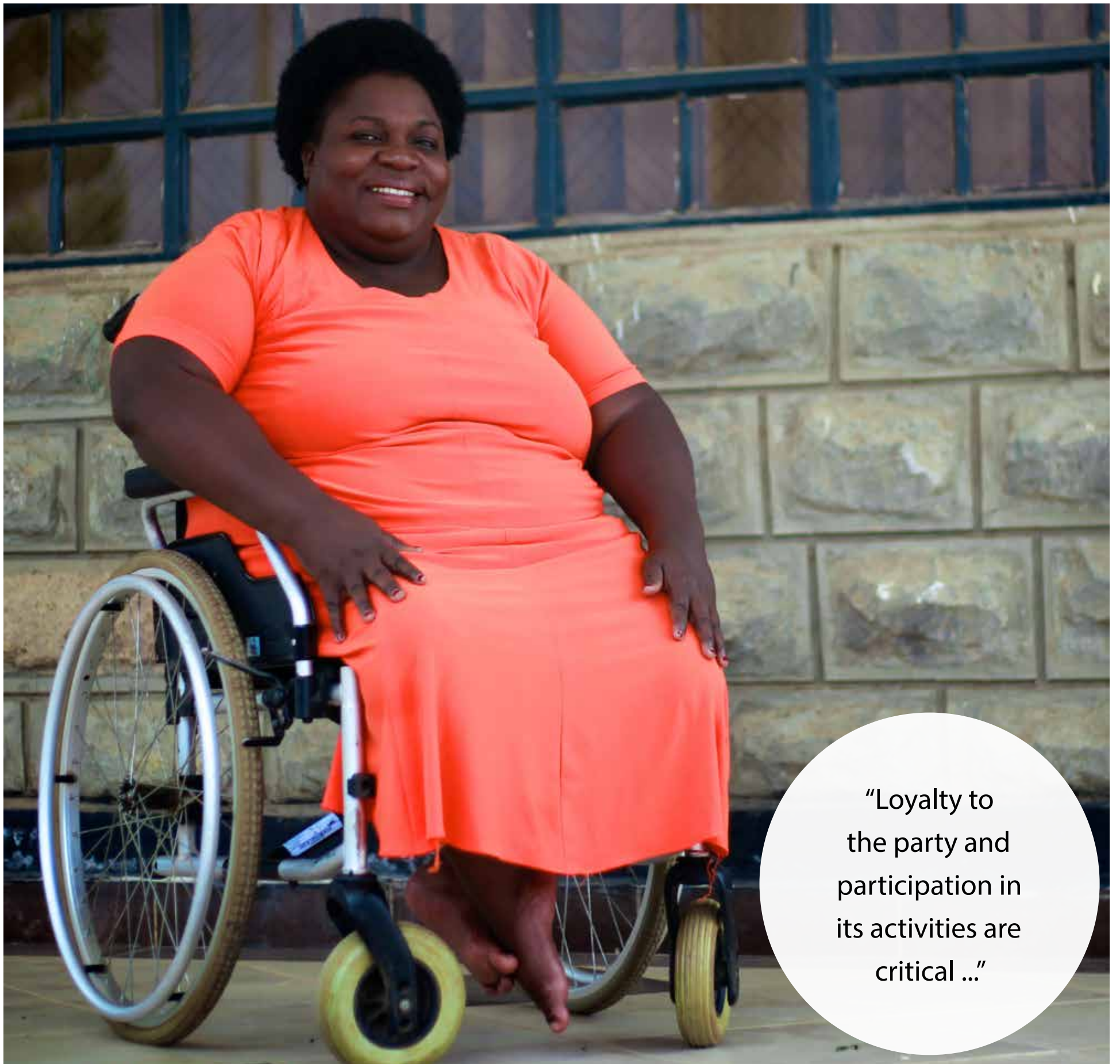
Ms. Mbarire is especially grateful for the support she received from UN Women for her gubernatorial campaign: *“UN Women helped us coin powerful messages, access media, and monitor campaigns to make sure women*

politicians were not harassed.” But she notes that such support must not come ‘at the tail end’.

Her advice to aspirants is that they must believe in themselves. *“Women must be courageous and stand up for themselves... Campaigns for women are extremely rough. The emotional, psychological, and physical abuses are too much. If you are weak, you will give up.”*

She says that people initially resist the leadership of women: *“When you run as a woman, most people just ignore you. And as a young woman, it is double jeopardy. But when they see you are confident, they begin to develop confidence in you.”*

Ms. Mbarire looks at the future with great hope and expectation. *“Politics is a career in progression. You could be up today and down tomorrow. I take one step at a time. I plan, and I never allow what has taken me down to keep me down.”*



“Loyalty to
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GODLIVER OMONDI

For Ms. Godliver Omondi, the 2010 Constitution of Kenya created opportunities that propelled her straight into politics.

Ms. Omondi, a former nominated Senator who is physically challenged, used effective strategies to emerge the winner for the Kholera Ward seat.

Her resource mobilization strategy worked well. She held numerous in-house meetings, and changed tactic whenever necessary.

One resounding lesson she has learned in politics: *“For one to be nominated or elected, loyalty to the party and participation in its activities are critical. If you are a person living with disability, movement and finances can be a constraint, and hence the need to support the party from positions within your reach.”*

Ms. Omondi has also learned that one must always be visible and aware of cutthroat political processes. *“You sit in a meeting with men, planning and agreeing on certain issues, but when you disperse they reconvene and change everything.”*

Her mentors are Josephine Sinyo and Kakamega Governor Wycliffe Oparanya. *“I asked myself: if Sinyo, who is blind, could make it as a member of Parliament and Chair of United Disabled Persons of Kenya, what stops me, yet I have eyes? Oparanya inspired me because he came from a poor background like me, but made it.”*

Ms. Omondi’s biggest challenge during the electioneering period was mobility. *“Mobility is a challenge, and yet one is expected to reach people everywhere. [Politicians] conduct campaigns at night by using boda bodas [motorcycle taxis] or walking. But as a woman with a disability, I had to use a car and a wheelchair, both of which left me exposed and vulnerable.”*

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“Always
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JANET ONGERA

“I did not face much opposition for the ODM ticket nominations. Most of my opponents decamped to other parties when I declared my candidature.”

After her career in the public service—culminating in the position of Deputy Managing Director at the Kenya Airports Authority, Ms. Janet Ongera was approached by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) to chair the campaigns for the ‘NO’ side in the national constitutional Referendum of 2005.

Ms. Ongera took charge of things and was at the forefront in brokering a political deal that saw KANU merge with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to form the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

KANU soon broke away from ODM, but Ms. Ongera stayed on. She was later appointed Executive Director of ODM. Her service to the Party paid off: she was nominated to the Senate in 2013 and was soon elected Deputy Minority Whip.

While serving as Senator, she began investing in her county (Kisii)—and her future. She started the Kisii County Women’s Agri-Business and Empowerment Sacco, which served close to 45 wards in the county. *“I taught the members how to build modern poultry houses and then gave them free chicks to breed... The initiative*

yielded high returns, and the women were able to diversify to other ventures.”

In 2017, she launched her bid for the Woman Representative seat. *“I did not face much opposition for the ODM ticket nominations. Most of my opponents decamped to other parties when I declared my candidature.”*

But her winning formula was to have joint campaigns with the party’s gubernatorial and senatorial candidates. In addition, she visited all the 1,300 polling stations in Kisii County to get voters to ‘buy into my development plan.’

Ms. Ongera notes that women seeking elective seats face enormous challenges, including stereotypes. For example, voters thought a Woman Representative should be a married woman and a mother. *“I was not married, and I did not have children. I was vilified and subjected to ridicule,”* she says.

But she devised a way around it: *“My campaign slogan, Ngina Banto (mother of the people) resonated with the voters. I found great support from men and the youth who saw a mother in me.”*

The youth played a critical role in her online campaign. Her website was managed by young women who called themselves ‘Divas for Mama J’. *“They mobilized over 5,000 girls who mounted a door-to-door campaign.”*

Ms. Ongera also enjoyed enviable support from elderly women, something she deeply appreciates. Her messages clearly resonated with them and other groups. Through radio, she intensified her messaging to more constituents.

But she is convinced that once women get the backing of the political party, especially the popular ones, then half of the job is done. She is full of praise for her party leader, former Prime Minister Raila Odinga.

“I have learned that you should not leave anything to chance. Always make sure you do everything right. Above all, you must make God your priority. Ask Him to lead and guide you in what you do.”

For now, Ms. Ongera is working hard to deliver on her mandate: *“I want to ensure all the affirmative action groups in the county are supported to enjoy their full rights.”*



“The
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LINAH JEBII KILIMO

“The campaigns were tough and violent, especially for me as an independent candidate. A 15-year-old girl succumbed to bullet wounds in a shoot-out where I was the target. My car was sprayed with bullets.”

At the national level, Ms. Linah Jebii Kilimo is known for her relentless campaign against female genital mutilation, which culminated in the enactment of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Act of 2011.

Back home in Marakwet East Constituency, where she did not shy away from confronting this entrenched cultural rite, she is simply referred to as *Eyiaa Kalia*, Mother of Peace. It is a title she earned after years of working for peace between her Marakwet Community and their Pokot neighbours.

In 1997, she contested the Marakwet East Parliamentary seat, but lost. In her 2002 comeback, she campaigned on a platform of restoring peace in the area, which was still marred by violent clashes, cattle raids, and revenge attacks.

Leketio is a revered item among the Marakwet and Pokot communities. It is a belt worn by a woman to support her pregnancy—hence life. When the community is at war and a woman removes her belt and places it between the men, the fighting must stop. Ms. Kilimo adopted ‘*Leketio*’ as her campaign slogan.

As her popularity rose, her anti-FGM (female genital mutilation) work was used against her, with opponents accusing her of undermining the community’s cultural practices and values. But the electorate thought otherwise. Ms. Kilimo cruised to victory, becoming the first female Member of Parliament (MP) in the constituency.

With this win, she realised her development record was going to be her weapon to retain the seat in 2007. *“With support from the Kenya Red Cross Society, I initiated an irrigation scheme at Tot Kolowa which benefitted both the Pokot and the Marakwet.”* The Kenya Charity Sweepstake supported her to build more schools and to offer scholarships.

Her push for the landmark anti-FGM Law came to fruition in 2011: *“Every girl in this country can walk freely knowing that there is a Law that protects them from FGM.”*

In 2013, Ms. Kilimo lost her seat and was appointed to serve as the Chair of the Anti-FGM Board. In 2017, she contested for the Marakwet East Parliamentary seat, but as an independent candidate.

“The campaigns were tough and violent, especially for me as an independent. A 15-year-old girl succumbed to bullet wounds in a shoot-out where I was the target. My car was sprayed with bullets.”

Going against established political parties proved a nightmare, not only because of the limited funding. When the votes were finally in, she had lost to her opponent by 913 votes. The electorate refused to accept this, and a voter filed a petition that resulted in the results being nullified by the High Court in February 2018.

Ms. Kilimo observes that elective politics are difficult for women. *“The threshold for women is still very high. People and communities still expect more from women. The terrain is not so friendly.”*

She says that for women to perform better in politics, a complete overhaul of the political party nomination processes is required. *“They are never free and fair. If I go back to Parliament, I will find out how best we can address the issue of political party nominations.”*



“The sky is the limit... Any job I am given, I don’t know how to hold back”

MARTHA KARUA

“It is not enough to have numbers. We can have numbers but if the women operate at the mercy of their political parties, most of which are led by men, then we won’t have the passion to drive women’s issues.”

Twenty-six years after first being elected as a member of Parliament, Ms. Martha Karua is still going strong in politics.

“The sky is the limit. I am not done with any seat yet: not the presidency, not governorship. As long as I have strength in me, I will keep doing what I have to do for the country.”

Ms. Karua was among the young political leaders and professionals who, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, spearheaded the campaign for the reintroduction of multiparty politics. An established lawyer, she represented a number of opposition politicians in court.

Ms. Karua threw her hat in the ring for the Gichugu Parliamentary seat in the 1992 General Elections, where she trounced former Chief Secretary Geoffrey Kareithi, and served the people of Gichugu in that role for 20 years.

She contested the Presidency in 2013, earning praise for her courage. Her 2017 bid for the Kirinyaga gubernatorial seat was not successful, but she has challenged it in court.

Ms. Karua has a brilliant track record as a Cabinet Minister in the ministries of Water, and Justice and Constitutional Affairs.

In Parliament, she was among the early champions of gender balance.

What is her secret? *“It boils down to commitment, tenacity, and persistence. Any job I am given, I don’t know how to hold back. I apply myself to it fully, and I believe this is what has helped me to succeed.”*

In terms of political strategy, she says: *“Being authentic and guided by the courage of my convictions has always earned me big in politics.”*

Patriarchy tops the list of hurdles Ms. Karua has had to surmount. *“When I first announced my bid for the Gichugu Parliamentary seat, I was told to go and get married.”*

“I asked them: Since when have you asked all the men representing you since independence who their wives are? You just look at their credentials and elect them. Why should it matter to you whether I have a spouse?”

She recalls her 2007 fight as Minister of Justice to give women 50 seats in Parliament. *“Two elderly cabinet colleagues backed by youthful males asked me what sort of women would come. They were not asking about their*

education or ability to contribute to the nation, but about the morality of the women who would come. I told them Parliament was full of men, and we never asked what sort of men they were. We let the electorate filter them.”

Ms. Karua advises women politicians to avoid irrelevancies. *“Do not agree to be distracted to discuss yourself instead of discussing your qualifications.”*

Women must also believe in themselves. *“We can have the numbers, but if women operate at the mercy of their political parties, most of which are led by men, then we won’t have the passion to drive women’s issues.”*

Her time in politics has taught her that leadership spaces are never given. *“You have to take your space.”* Ms. Karua, the undisputed ‘Iron Lady’ of Kenyan politics, has claimed her space.



“When I am
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mountain”

MILLIE ODHIAMBO

“Many people don’t understand my kind of politics at the national level, but I’m not bothered, as long as it makes sense to my constituents.”

If there’s a politician who took full advantage of the opportunity accorded to her as a nominated member of Parliament to lay a strong foundation for elective politics, it is Ms. Millie Odhiambo.

“When I was nominated to the National Assembly, I used the national platform to speak on issues that directly affected the people and became a household name.”

Before her nomination, Ms. Odhiambo, then a young lawyer, was known as a defender of women and children’s rights. She founded The Cradle, a children’s foundation and served as its Executive Director.

In 2013, Ms. Odhiambo made history as the first woman to be elected to Parliament representing the then Mbita Constituency. She was one of only 16 women elected to Parliament in the first elections under the new Constitution.

Ms. Odhiambo attributes her success in politics to personal will and socialization, excellent communication skills, and an impeccable development record. *“I am a fighter for things I believe in. I don’t get intimidated easily. When I am passionate and committed to something,*

trying to stop me is tantamount to trying to move a mountain.”

She started the Women and Girls Education and Development Initiative (Wagedi) and a fisheries initiative that entailed construction of a model fishing banda with storage and cooling facilities.

When her opponents made unkind remarks, she would simply ‘fight back’ in a tactical way: *“I would tell the voters that the only difference between us was that, whereas they (the opponents) were good, I was excellent, ‘So do not go for good—go for the excellent’.”*

A smart politician, she says, must know the bedrock of their support and invest their efforts in such areas. Women have powered, supported, and sustained her political journey: *“Women are very loyal, faithful, and consistent.”*

At the national level, she is an eloquent contributor in the House; she sponsored the In-Vitro Fertilization Bill and was instrumental in the formulation and adoption of the Counter Trafficking in Person Act, among other laws.

Her work has earned her accolades at home and abroad. But she has been subjected to harassment, including verbal abuse and physical violence. In the last campaign period, her bodyguard was shot and killed. Her house in Urianda Village was torched. She has also been roughed up inside Parliament.

Despite these tough times, Ms. Odhiambo says that she has benefitted from the support of friends and development partners, including UN Women, which provided her with campaign materials.

She hopes that in future, support will come in early. *“If you look at the current political set-up, men are already campaigning. But women wait until the last minute. We need to start early.”*

“Women leaders need to listen to their constituents and to invest in what people want,” she advises. “I have learned to feel the pulse of the people... Many people don’t understand my kind of politics at the national level, but I’m not bothered, as long as it makes sense to my constituents.”



“Always be
focused and
stand up for
what you believe
in”

MISHI MBOKO

“During Friday prayers some religious leaders would vow before the worshippers that a woman would not lead men.”

Mishi Juma Khamisi Mboko went against the grain when she decided to contest the Likoni Parliamentary seat in 2017. She had to confront religion, culture, and political party hierarchy, in addition to eight male competitors.

It was generally expected that Ms. Mboko would defend her seat as the Woman Representative for Mombasa County, not go for a constituency seat.

“The men, from my governor to religious leaders and elders in my community, sent emissaries to persuade me not to go for a member of Parliament seat,” she recalls.

But Ms. Mboko refused to succumb to pressure. She was confident and nothing was going to stop her from getting a leadership position that would help her tackle the land and transport challenges at the Coast. *“I was ahead of them in many ways. I ensured a presence in all functions in my Constituency, including funerals. When I could not attend, I sent representatives.”*

“I also had a team of gender warriors—men advocating for women’s leadership—

crisscrossing Likoni and telling voters about the advantages of having women in leadership.”

The community became receptive to her candidature. *“When I won the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) nomination, the governor and other party candidates in the County supported me.”* The icing on the cake was the unwavering support she got from women and young people.

For Ms. Mboko, the eventual hard-earned victory in 2017 had taken years of investment in politics. Although she began engaging in politics in 1995, she spent many years campaigning for political bigwigs. In 2003, she became a member of the National Executive Committee of ODM.

In 2007, Ms. Mboko vied for the Likoni seat but lost. Come 2013, she successfully contested the Mombasa County Woman Representative position.

Reflecting on the hard-won battle, Ms. Mboko says she faced numerous challenges, from limited funding to propaganda from her rivals to being trolled on social media. *“Some men told voters to reject me because no traditional*

shrine (Kaya) is headed by a woman, and there was even a group of bloggers insulting me on social media.”

Religious leaders too campaigned against her: *“During Friday prayers some religious leaders would vow before the worshippers that a woman would not lead men.”* They even sent delegations to convince her to give up. *“Any time I got an opportunity on a media platform, I would speak about issues that affect the coastal people... Women should seize opportunities to be on radio and television to address issues that are in the interest of the public.”*

Ms. Mboko says that any woman seeking election must start early and should forge alliances with the few women in party leadership because they are supportive of fellow women. *“You must relate well with the party leadership and participate in party activities... You must always defend the party and its leadership.”*

Above all, she says: *“You should never fear. One has to be courageous, assertive and at times aggressive. Always be focused and stand up for what you believe in. Don’t keep on changing because people will see you as a joker.”*



“I was not just doing it for myself, but for the girls, the women, and the young men who had been told that it is not possible for them to lead”

NAISULA LESUUDA

“We asked the community: you gave birth to a boy and a girl and you took both of us to school, here we are now. You have been giving the boy the opportunity. We are now humbly requesting that this time around you do so to your daughter so that you can see kind of leadership,”

Naisula Lesuuda is living proof that a woman can overcome cultural stereotypes about age and gender to assume political leadership.

She is among the few leaders in Kenya's history to have served in both the Senate and the National Assembly: first as a nominated Senator and now as the first female legislator for Samburu West Constituency.

The youthful Ms. Lesuuda entered public life through her work as a journalist and peace activist. In 2010, while still in her twenties, she received a presidential honour for her efforts to reconcile warring pastoralists in northern Kenya.

Ms. Lesuuda was later drawn into the political fold through her peace initiatives under the Naisula Lesuuda Peace Foundation. Through the Samburu Girls Foundation, Ms. Lesuuda also engaged in a relentless struggle to rescue girls from early marriage and female genital mutilation and promote education.

This development track record and dalliance with politics caught the attention of The National Alliance Party, which sponsored her nomination in 2013.

Despite being the youngest female Senator, she served on three committees, including as chair and vice-chair. She was also Vice-Chair of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association.

Ms. Lesuuda's foray into elective politics in 2017 was a bold move: *“No woman had ever dared contest the seat.”*

Winning the Samburu West Constituency seat required shifting community attitudes about women's leadership. But this was not achieved easily. Ms Lesuuda credits her electoral win to strategy, consistency, honesty, and hard work.

“My slogan, Ntitonaibornagol, meaning ‘a young, strong girl’, resonated well with the electorate. We spoke to the community: You sired both boys and girls, took both of us to school, and here we are now. You have been giving opportunities to boys; we now humbly request you to give girls a chance, so you can see what we can turn out to be.”

This powerful message resonated with the community, especially with young people. *“I was not just doing it for myself, but for the girls, the women, and the young men who had been told that it is not possible for them to lead.”*

Ms. Lesuuda carried out opinion surveys to gauge support for her campaign and made use of social media. She believes her ability to run a well-rounded campaign enabled her to garner support across the different clans and communities in the constituency.

She had to deal with insults and stereotypes directed at her as a woman. In addition, *“Traversing the constituency was a logistical and financial nightmare.”* Ms. Lesuuda believes that some of the challenges facing women politicians can be minimized if strategic support is provided. She is grateful for UN Women's support, but says the conversation on the nature of support a woman leader needs should start early.

Her advice to upcoming women politicians: *“Individual passion and drive are crucial for success.”*



"I always
strive to tell
my constituents
the truth
about what is
achievable"

DR. NAOMI SHABAN

“I approach my people as their mother and they refer to me as ‘acheko’ which means your mother.”

In Taveta, there is one politician whose footprints can be seen in every corner of the constituency. At the national level, she has left an indelible mark on the country’s development agenda.

This is Dr. Naomi Shaban, the soft-spoken Member of Parliament (MP) for Taveta Constituency and the Vice-Chairperson of the Parliamentary Service Commission. In the 11th Parliament, she served as the Deputy Majority Leader.

Dr. Shaban, a dental surgeon by profession, never nursed political ambitions when growing up. Her entrance into politics came with a 2001 by-election. *“The women in my constituency urged me to vie for a political seat. For a while I was not convinced, but after consulting my family members, I eventually agreed.”*

But, she says, *“I received threats from elders who opposed a woman being in charge of the constituency.”* She refused to back down. Hoping to frighten her into backing out, they pelted her mother and grandmother with stones. *“They took my three-year-old son and threatened to throw him into a pit latrine.”*

This violence triggered women leaders to rush to her side with moral and financial support.

“Beth Mugo wrote me a cheque to help pay my agents during the by-elections. Martha Karua came all the way to Taveta to support me instead of her party candidate. She said she could not campaign against a woman. Zipporah Kittony sent some kangas [shawls] to give out to women. Phoebe Asiyo got me materials such as T-shirts and posters, as well as some financial assistance.”

The grass-roots women in the constituency worked hard to see her win, aiming to leave nothing to chance. Sadly, the well-organized political class rigged her out.

Fresh from that loss, she was invited to a training forum by the Caucus for Women’s Leadership in collaboration with UNIFEM, the predecessor to UN Women.

The training offered useful insights. *“I wear African attire because I was told it is important to identify oneself with a certain mode of dressing. I also learned that my message should come out clearly when I am talking to the community, and I should not engage in sideshows.”*

After the meeting, she started campaigning, one and half years before the 2002 General Elections. She won.

Since then, Dr. Shaban has never lost the seat. Her winning strategy? *“I approach my people as their mother and they refer to me as ‘acheko’ [mother].”*

She has invested heavily in education in Taveta. *“I’m a hands-on person, so development is top of my agenda. I always strive to tell my constituents the truth about what is achievable and that which cannot be done.”*

In the run-up to the 2017 General Elections, she benefited from UN Women support. *“We received plenty of support in terms of materials with words encouraging people to vote for a woman.”*

As she looks into the future, Dr. Shaban has these words of wisdom for women leaders: *“Start selling your agenda early enough so that the voters can know you and what you stand for.”*



“When you
walk your
journey with
your people, you
are safe”

PERIS TOBIKO

“I campaigned on a platform of inclusivity, assuring the electorate that I would serve them equally regardless of political affiliations.”

Peris Tobiko always wanted to be a politician. But as a woman from the patriarchal Maasai Society, Ms. Tobiko knew it would be a daunting task to beat the cultural odds.

From her early life, Ms. Tobiko set out to challenge traditional thinking. Her defiant stance saved her from early marriage and enabled her to complete a university education in a community where few girls went beyond primary school.

In 2007, Ms. Tobiko stunned the community when she entered the political fray to contest the Kajiado Central seat. She lost the election, and her challenge did not impress the community elders.

But they were incensed in 2013 after she trounced seven male aspirants to win the party primaries for the Kajiado East seat. They demanded that she yield the seat to their preferred male candidate. Her defiance resulted in the elders threatening to curse anyone who supported her election bid. Fortunately, she had a solid support base among the youth and women: *“I was able to sell my leadership credentials through my work*

in the community and development agenda for the region.”

Ms. Tobiko’s historic win in the 2013 elections sent shock waves through the community. She had surmounted long, entrenched perceptions about women’s leadership, and had opened the gates for other women.

“During my first term in Parliament, I was able to deliver results.” However, reclaiming the seat in 2017 was more difficult than she anticipated. *“I had the misconception that it was going to be easy in the second term.”*

The political landscape proved different. *“There were many intrigues in my political party. I was made to go through unnecessary repeat nominations even after winning... This was my lowest moment... It was very expensive, unfair, and traumatizing.”*

Ms. Tobiko says that she had to defend her space in the Party, and a new strategy was needed. *“I campaigned on a platform of inclusivity, assuring the electorate that I would serve them equally regardless of political affiliations.”*

Her electioneering tactics eventually paid off and she won with a landslide. Ms. Tobiko is grateful to her supporters for financial and moral support. She also appreciates the role of UN Women through KEWOPA for providing campaign materials and facilitating strategic engagement with her supporters.

Constant visibility for the woman politician is one of her most important lessons. *“When you walk your journey with your people, you are safe. You will be in trouble if you do not do that. There is no time I am missing in action.”*

Ms. Tobiko strongly believes that women are electable. *“I find it difficult to believe that Kenyans will not elect us. However, only a few of us present ourselves to the electorate. We need to take on the challenge.”*

She says attitudes are changing about women’s leadership: *“The increased numbers of women elected as governors and senators attests to this.”*

Ms. Tobiko has set her sights on the gubernatorial seat in 2020: *“It is commonly known in Kajiado County that I am the governor-in-waiting. I will definitely go for it.”*



RACHEL SHEBESH

“The choice of the political party is what will win or lose you a seat.”

When many young women ran away from the murky politics of Nairobi County in 2002, Ms. Rachel Shebesh decided to jump in. *“Initially I had a lot of fear, but I did not let it control my decisions.”*

Though she lost when she contested for the Kasarani Constituency seat in 2007, her Party nominated her as a Member of Parliament (MP). By 2013, her visibility allowed her to easily win the Nairobi County Woman Representative seat.

But in 2017, she failed to retain the seat. *“I thought, it is okay: if one door closes, another one will open. Indeed, some months after the loss, the President appointed me to this position.”*

She is now the Chief Administrative Secretary, serving the Cabinet Secretary, Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs. Being rewarded twice by her party leaders is recognition of Ms. Shebesh’s ability to campaign effectively and deliver votes.

“The choice of the political party is what will win or lose you a seat. I also believe that loyalty in politics is the biggest asset one can have.”

The ability to understand and respond effectively to the needs of constituents is important. This includes initiating development projects.

“Fifteen years ago, I started the Vision Sisters Group with 15 women from Eastleigh. Now there are 22 groups in Nairobi with a membership of probably 3,000 women. My biggest pride is that these women are now able to plan their lives around table banking and do things that have secured their future, such as owning land.”

Despite these successes, she has had her bad days. *“I know that everybody thinks the slap by [then Governor Dr Evans Kidero] was my worst moment. It is not. What puts me down is when the tribal card is thrown at me during political campaigns.”*

These good and bad times have taught her a lesson: *“One must never be absent because it will cost you your seat. I believe that presence and consistency on the ground with the voters is the key strategy.”*

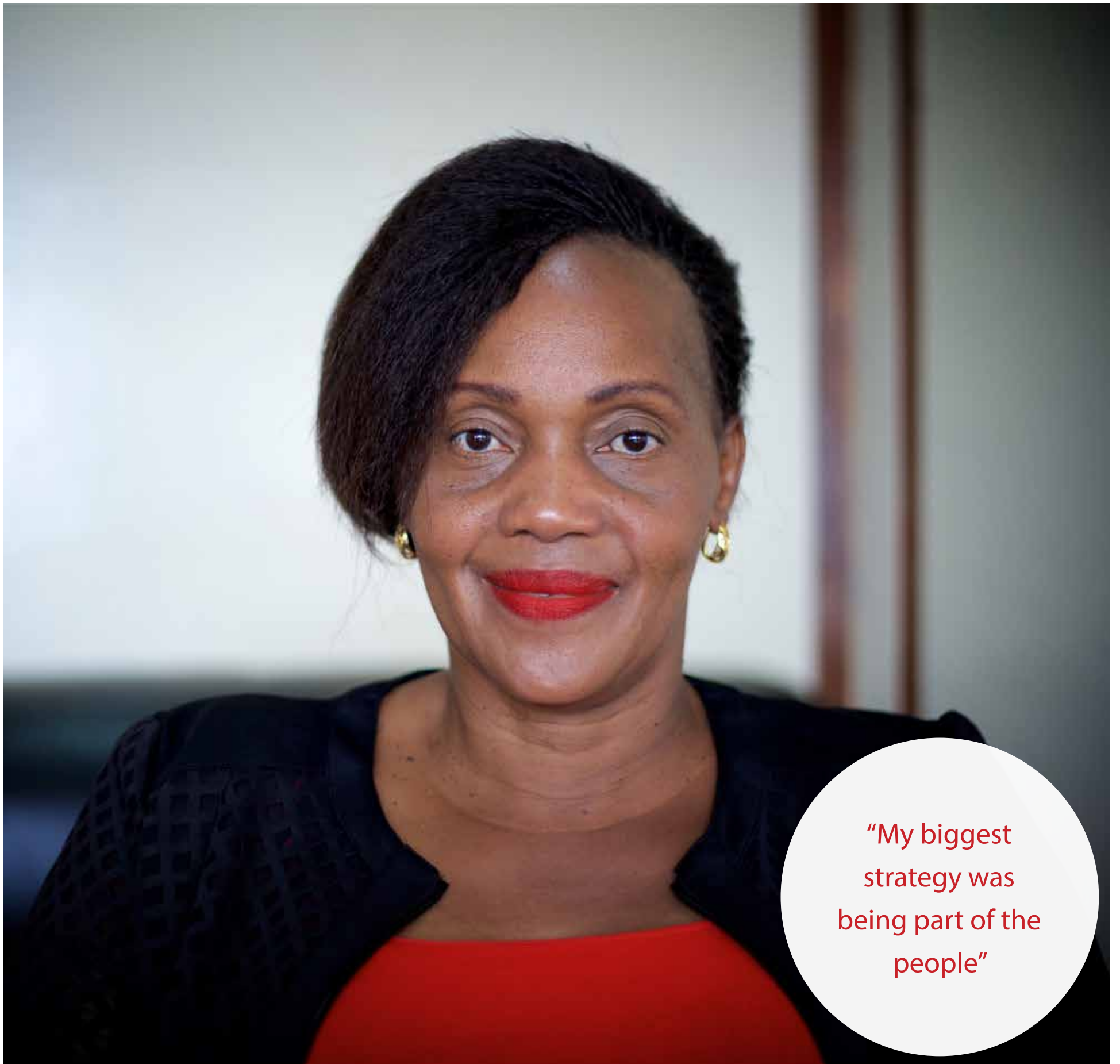
Family support is central to her work. *“My husband is my number one fan. Both my parents and in-laws also support me. One cannot avoid pressure, because at times it is the children*

saying, ‘Mum, we need to see you more’. I have had to listen to that concern and make decisions based on them.”

Ms. Shebesh says that women should not approach politics like men. *“You will disappoint a whole constituency that thought they needed to have a woman to bring in a different style of leadership.”*

Charity Ngilu, Linah Jebii Kilimo, and Martha Karua were her mentors. *“I believe that mentoring is crucial, and I’ve made it my business to mentor those who are coming into the space.”*

Her biggest challenge as a politician has been finances and violent behaviour. *“Violence is something I abhor. Some people even advised me to have goons around me to win. I took the risk of not embracing either of the two and still won... If you can make people elect you on the basis of understanding their needs, then you will not need resources or violence.”*



“My biggest
strategy was
being part of the
people”

ROZAAH AKINYI BUYU

Rozaah Akinyi Buyu did everything to win a political seat for close to 12 years, but without much success. Then in 2017 her dream turned into reality when she won the Woman Representative seat for Kisumu County.

Despite her unsuccessful bids, Ms. Buyu says she stuck to two key strategies: staying close to the electorate and to the political party.

She built her profile as Deputy Organizing Secretary of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Party, while at the same time marketing herself and listening to what the voters were telling her.

“My biggest strategy was being part of the people. In a county where almost 80 per cent of the voters are rural folk, the best strategy is to keep close to them, and that is what I have always done. As a result, the voters developed trust in me, a relationship I capitalized on.”

These experiences have helped her learn positive lessons. *“In politics you must give your best shot. If you don’t win people will still know you are a force to reckon with. People always translate perseverance to mean determination*

and will want to support you because they think you have something to offer.”

Her mentors are Grace Onyango, the first female parliamentarian and mayor in Kenya, as well as Phoebe Asiyo and Grace Ogot, who have had a lasting impact on her.

Like other women, Ms. Buyu’s biggest challenges in politics have been financial support, insults, and intimidation by male competitors.

She explains, *“Finances are a big challenge for women because we don’t have much money. Vying for a single constituency is easier than a county position. Going throughout the seven constituencies of Kisumu County to endear myself to voters was not easy.”*

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“I have
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SABINA CHEGE

“I feel... that women are subjected to a higher standard; they are expected to be more moral and more virtuous than the men.”

For a woman with many talents, Ms. Sabina Chege has a simple philosophy: touch many lives, one at a time.

The two-time legislator from Murang’a County has served in various roles: thespian, radio presenter, TV personality, commercial manager, community mobilizer, women’s and children’s rights champion, philanthropist, and politician.

But what propelled her into the political limelight was her philanthropic work. She set up the Sabina Wanjiru Chege Foundation, which has so far provided educational support to more than 450 needy students in Murang’a County.

With this background, Ms. Chege was the frontrunner when she contested the Woman Representative seat for Murang’a County in 2013. She won the seat by a landslide.

Once in Parliament, Ms. Chege proved to be an astute and knowledgeable contributor in education-related debates. She was soon picked to chair the Parliamentary Committee on Education, Science, and Technology where she championed improved menstrual health for girls.

She also sponsored the 2017 Breastfeeding Mothers Bill, which requires businesses to provide convenient spaces for mothers to breastfeed their babies.

In her County, Ms. Chege spearheaded numerous grass-roots development projects, including a revolving fund born out of a table banking initiative. *“Today, the capital has grown to a staggering 120 million shillings and has helped to empower women, youth, and people living with disability.”*

By the close of the 11th Parliament, Ms. Chege was rated among the best-performing female legislators. She is now Chair of the Committee on Health in the 12th Parliament, where she is a champion for universal health care for all Kenyan households by 2022.

Ms. Chege thanks UN Women for the support accorded to her through KEWOPA, and urges more: *“Donors should support women candidates to accomplish development projects because the biggest challenge... is visibility. You cannot just come and tell people to elect you when you have nothing to show on the ground.”*

She notes that slogans and images are important for women politicians: *“I packaged myself as a mother, which appealed to voters*

across both genders and all age groups.” Her campaign slogan was ‘Maitũ ndacejagio’, a Kikuyu phrase meaning ‘you cannot change your mother regardless of her flaws’.

Ms. Chege says women have what it takes, but harassment on social media is a major challenge. *“The attack I faced on social media was designed to throw me off balance, but over time I have gained political shock absorbers and cannot be shaken easily.”* She is hopeful that a recently enacted law on cyber-crime will help to curb online bullying.

“I feel... that women are subjected to a higher standard; they are expected to be more moral and more virtuous than the men.”

Ms. Chege learned not to take anyone for granted: *“I have learned to listen to anybody who walks into my office or I meet on the street or in the village. That person you ignore may be your best ally.”*

She draws inspiration from the late Prof. Wangari Maathai. *“If we can touch one person at a time, then we will be able to transform communities.”*



“Young women must participate, either as candidates or influencers of the political process”

SOPHIA ABDI NOOR

“...My supporters and especially women were marked and attacked during the election-day. Some women were beaten and subjected to sexual harassment; others lost their teeth or suffered broken limbs.”

Sophia Abdi Noor’s political journey is a story of resilience, determination, and success against all odds. For more than two decades, Sophia has fought for political space even when women’s leadership was intensely frowned upon in her community.

Her determination paid off in 2017 when she was elected the first female member of Parliament (MP) not only in her home Constituency, Ijara, but also in the larger northern Kenya region. Her win was a major inspiration for the many women politicians who continue to battle cultural and religious barriers.

Ms. Noor first contested a Parliamentary position in 1997 but was denied the KANU ticket even after she had won the party primaries—simply because she is a woman.

She refused to accept that verdict and decamped to Ford-Asili. She lost the seat by 100 votes. Failing by such few votes emboldened her. She knew what to do.

Her ongoing work with her organization Womankind Kenya, which advocates for female education, increased her visibility in the community. By 2007, she had played a

pivotal role helping the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) strengthen its political base in Garissa County. Her efforts resulted in her nomination to Parliament.

This position increased her visibility, and in 2013 she ran for MP, but lost. She rethought her strategy: *“I roped in respected religious leaders from outside my county who explained the position and role of a woman in Islam... About six of the religious leaders endorsed my candidature.”*

It has not been an easy ride. At one point in 2013, the elders declined to approve her candidature for the MP seat and directed her to contest the Woman Representative seat instead. She refused. *“Imams and elders denounced my candidature saying that it was against Islam for a woman to compete with men and anyone who votes for me will go to hell. My supporters and especially women were marked and attacked on Election Day. Some women were beaten and subjected to sexual harassment; others lost their teeth or suffered broken limbs.”*

In 2017, it got worse. *“While in Jubilee, I was denied the party ticket because of my gender even after my investment in the party.”* She

decided that she had had enough; she shifted her base to a smaller party and it paid off. She was elected.

She praises UN Women and other actors for helping to make this possible. *“I not only received campaign materials from UN Women, but also benefitted from capacity-building workshops and visibility initiatives.”*

She says women political leaders have to build their reputation at the community level. She further believes that women leaders have to be cautious: *“People working for your opponent can infiltrate your campaign team... they then use your resources to destabilize you from within, as happened to me in 2013.”*

Even with such challenges, Ms. Noor believes that women cannot run away from politics. *“Young women must participate, either as candidates or influencers of the political process. If you shy away as a woman, then you are leaving a vacuum for other people to influence the process. Participate to ensure that your county and country make the right decisions.”*



“If you fail the
first time, learn
from your mistakes
and try again”

WAVINYA NDETI

Wanyinya Ndeti's footprints on the political scene are huge. She was first elected to Parliament in 2007 to represent Kathiani Constituency.

The win was not an easy one. One of the strategies she employed was working with the community at the grass-roots level and starting her push two years before her opponents. But she got the shock of her life when she was denied the nomination certificate after winning.

"I went for the Wiper Democratic Movement Party, but despite winning the nomination the certificate was given to someone else." She decided to join Chama Cha Mapinduzi, with which she went ahead to win the seat.

One of the challenges she faced during her campaigns was her marriage to a non-Kenyan. Though her opponents would use this against her, the electorate was steadfast in their support for Ms. Ndeti.

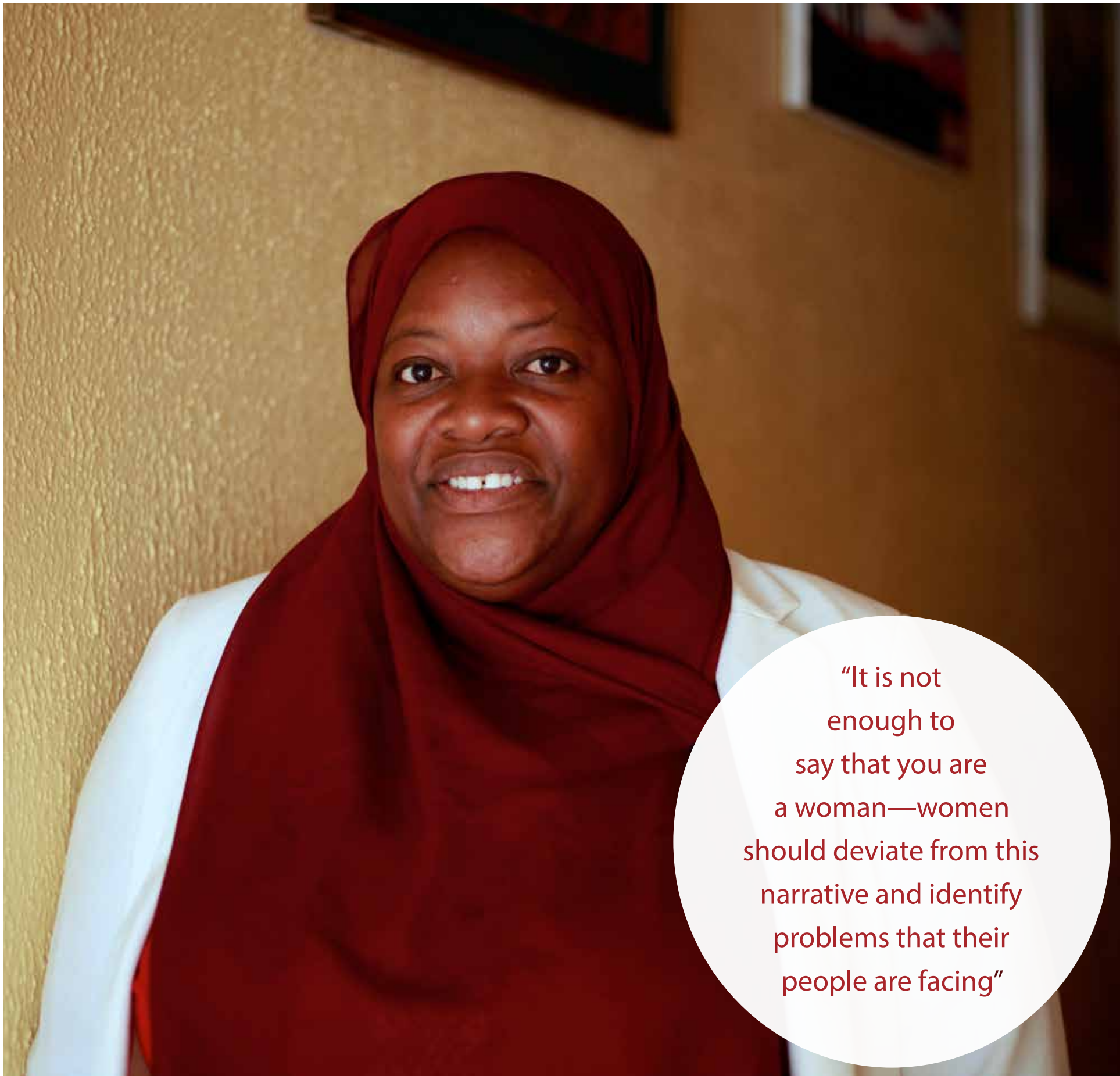
She also had financial and cultural challenges, which she terms as major obstacles to women's ascendancy to political leadership.

Her many years in politics have taught her powerful lessons. *"A woman in politics must not only get good people to work with her, but also ensure that they have the support of their family, including their spouse."* She advises women to work with men to ensure they believe in women's leadership.

She notes: *"As a woman in politics, you cannot succeed unless you are strong and believe in yourself. If you fail the first time, learn from your mistakes and try again."*

Ms. Ndeti receives much inspiration from the legacy of Margaret Thatcher. *"The 'Iron Lady' made a huge impression on me when she was the Prime Minister of Great Britain. Thatcher remains my role model as an intelligent and smart political leader."*

**"AS A WOMAN
IN POLITICS, YOU
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ZULEIKHA JUMA HASSAN

Zuleikha Juma Hassan is one of the few youthful women leaders who have managed to be elected to Parliament. She is serving her second term in the National Assembly after using her previous nomination to the 11th Parliament to plan for an elective post.

To win as the Kwale County Woman Representative in the 12th Parliament, Ms. Zuleikha had to be strategic.

“I listened to the people and let them tell me the seat to go for. It is wise to listen to what people on the ground are saying, because they will vote to put you in a leadership position.”

“I have learned to leverage on what I already know, to use my voice in Parliament to push for the priority needs of my people. I have moved motions and proposed bills aimed at transforming lives.”

This performance, she says, endeared her to voters. Ms. Zuleikha says that to get voted in with ease, women must demonstrate their leadership qualities. They must ensure that once elected they will change the lives of the people.

“It is not enough to say that you are a woman. Women should deviate from this narrative and identify problems that their people are facing. That should be the agenda.”

Her mentor in politics is Raila Odinga, whose style of leadership and focal issues she greatly admires. Ms. Zuleikha believes that her position in Parliament as a member of the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee and Parliamentary Broadcasting Committee will help her transform lives.

“As an elected leader, I am motivated to remain in leadership and to contribute towards improving the quality of life of the people who have given me this mandate. This is what will make me remain relevant to them.”

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“African women, in
general, need to know that
it’s ok for them to be the way they
are – to see the way they
are as a strength, and to
be liberated from fear
and from silence”

Wangari Maathai
Kenyan political activist and Nobel Laureate

TRANSFORMING THE COUNTIES AND
BEYOND



Caroline Agwanda



Cynthia J. Muge



Dennitah Ghati



Elina Mbaru



Esther Passaris



Eve Akinyi Obara



Fatuma Ibrahim



Florence C. Kosgey



Florence Mutua



Gladys Wanga



Jayne Kihara



Kawira Mwangaza



Leah Nachere



Lilian Gogo



Liza Chelule



Maison Leshoomo



Martha Wangari



Mary Emase



Mercy Gakuya



Purity Ngirici



Rachael Nyamai



Sally Okudo



Sarah Korere



Uqa Qabale



Wanjiku Kibe



“As we speak, 23 women with disabilities are serving in different positions in the County Government”

CAROLINE AGWANDA

“In some cases I was asked to leave without selling my agenda.”

Caroline Agwanda exuded confidence in the countdown to the 2017 General Elections. After all, she was a clear frontrunner for the Migosi Ward seat after a successful term as a nominated Member of the Kisumu County Assembly, during which she had emerged tops for contributing the highest number of motions and bills in the county.

In her nearly five years in the assembly—representing people with disability—Ms. Agwanda tabled 17 motions. She also initiated the County Disability Act, which not only became a model for other countries, but has also been adopted by the Kenya Disability Parliamentary Association in all 47 counties.

“This was my highest moment and a big plus for our movement. The Act now provides for a County Disability Development kitty and protects the rights of persons with disabilities,” she says.

Outside the assembly, Ms. Agwanda started a programme to mentor fellow women with disability to become leaders: *“As we speak, 23 women with disabilities are serving in different positions in the county government.”*

Ms. Agwanda had been among the first beneficiaries of a programme organized by the United Disabled Persons of Kenya to sensitize women with disability on their rights as voters and candidates, and was immediately recruited as a trainer.

So profound was the effect of the programme that in 2013 she offered herself for an elective position. But she pulled out of the race just before the primaries because she could not raise the KShs 250,000 nomination fee.

To keep her political ambition alive, Ms. Agwanda joined the presidential campaign team of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) candidate, Mr. Raila Odinga. This eventually led to the formation of the ODM Disability League.

“I was the coordinator for Nyanza Region, and we mobilized persons with disabilities to register as voters and rally support for the party during the elections.” She was rewarded with a nomination to the Kisumu County Assembly to represent people with disability.

Fast-forward to 2017: her attempt to win the Migosi Ward seat did not come to pass. She lost at the primaries, managing only 500 votes against tens of thousands by her opponents.

“I realized that most voters focused on my disability and not my qualities as a leader. I was told to wait for another nomination.” But has she refused to be put down, saying she will vie again.

Her campaign was not easy: whenever she mentioned that she had no money, but was full of ideas, the youth turned violent. ***“In some cases, I was asked to leave without selling my agenda.”***

Ms. Agwanda says that she has learned that one must always identify with the party leadership and initiate projects that resonate with the people.

Once again, her loyalty to the party has been rewarded. In 2018, the Governor of Kisumu, Prof. Anyang’ Nyong’o, appointed her Chairperson of the County Government of Kisumu’s County Disability Development Forum.

Ms. Agwanda hopes that special elective seats for women will be created at the county level, to give more women a chance in political leadership.



"I
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CYNTHIA JEPKOSGEY MUGE

At just 24 and a greenhorn in politics, Ms. Cynthia Jepkosgey Muge was dismissed by some people as having no chance when she announced her candidature for the Kilibwoni Ward in Nandi County as an independent candidate.

But what many people did not know was that the electorate had decided to give a chance to someone new with fresh ideas to turnaround their lives. *“As a graduate in physical planning, I understood what needed to be done to fix Kilibwoni Ward.”*

The voters saw her as an alternative to the leadership choices they were presented with. With no friends in high places and having to deal with huge financial challenges, Ms. Muge resorted to door-to-door campaigns and selling her agenda in local markets, churches, and whenever she met people.

As she went around the ward, some people dismissed her decision to vie as a joke that had gone too far. Besides, a young woman vying for a rural ward seat exposed herself to risks. But her passion to make a difference touched the hearts of many.

“I engaged the locals in one-on-one conversations and let them ask me questions. I wanted them to see my vision more than my age, gender and marital status.”

Finally, her determination paid off. She beat her opponents with a handsome margin to win the seat. Ms. Muge says that this political encounter offered her many lessons. She learnt to be resilient, patient and to manage her emotions: *“Women do not attract the same fear and respect as men. People can tell you anything. You must hold your tongue.”*

Inspired by Sally Kosgei and the late Chelagat Mutai, Ms. Muge says that her victory has made her think and dream big about what politics holds for her in future.

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DENNITAH GHATI

“Women must get involved in party affairs to know what is happening around them and in the political space”

Ms. Dennitah Ghati’s political journey is one of triumph. After a grisly road accident in March 2014 that almost killed her and her political career, Ghati has fought hard to reclaim her political space.

“As early as 2014, my political detractors started pushing for a by-election, because to them I had become incapacitated and thus could not effectively execute my mandate.”

She knew that she had to be strategic to overcome this setback. Development became her buzzword.

She initiated several projects in Migori County, among them a Gender-based Violence Recovery Centre in Kuria that offers comprehensive services to survivors of violence. She supported over 80 per cent of persons with disability in her county through the provision of wheelchairs.

Still, in the 2017 General Elections, she confronted one major challenge: her

competitors told voters not to vote for her because a ‘disabled person could not lead’.

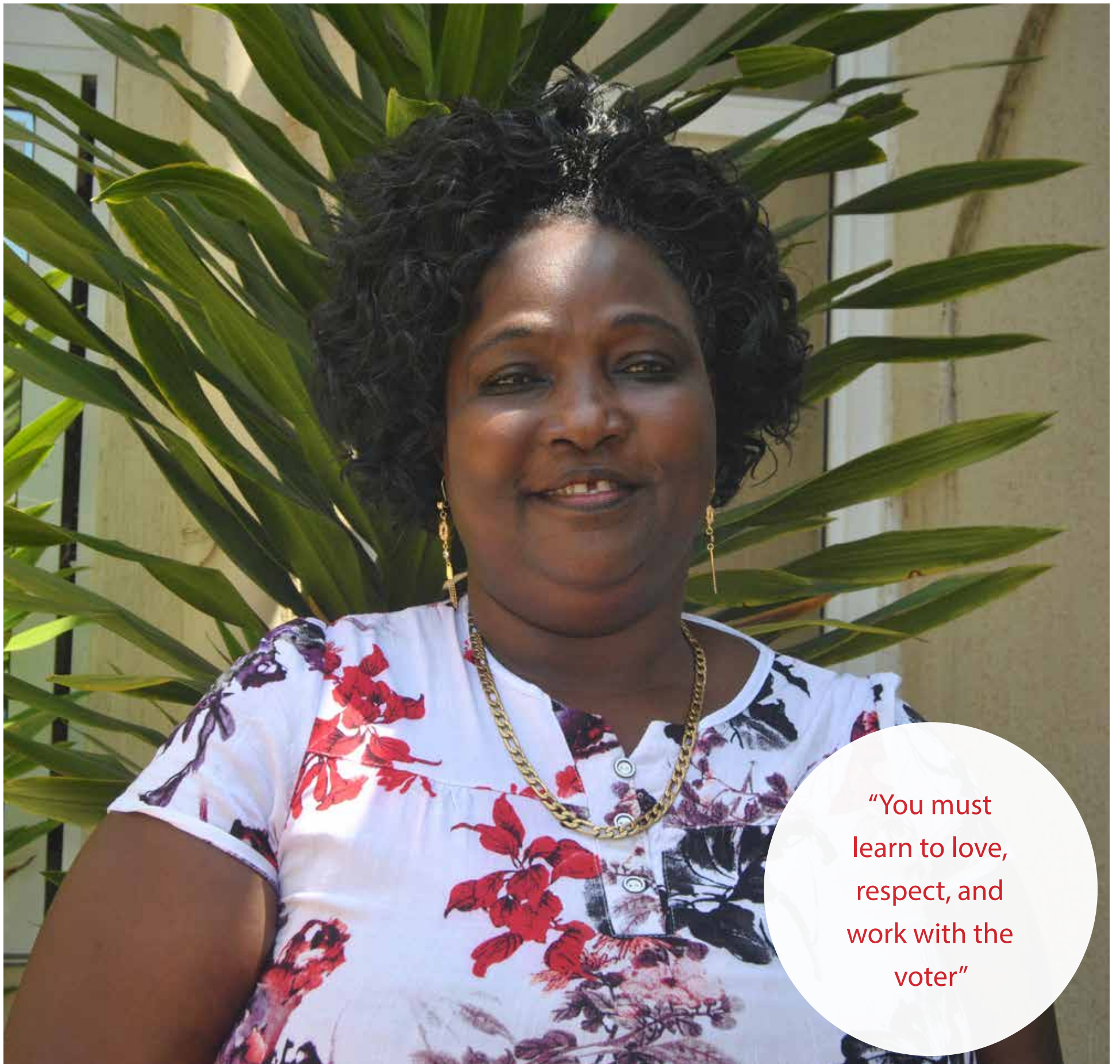
“I was told to focus on getting a nomination slot.” But she was smart. Ahead of these elections, Ghati co-founded the Kuria Women for Raila Lobby Group. *“I was involved in mobilizing and organizing women to vote for Raila. Besides winning a significant number of seats for the party, the coalition Presidential candidate received the highest number of votes.”*

This earned her a nomination to the National Assembly to represent persons with disability. She now serves in the Special Funds Accounts Committee and is the Kenyan representative of persons with disability in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in the UK.

Ms. Ghati points to Ida Odinga as a main inspiration among her political mentors.

One key lesson she has learned: *“Women must get involved in party affairs to know what is happening around them and in the political space.”*

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“You must
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ELINA MBARU

Elina Mbaru's political performance is one that generates envy among politicians; she has been elected five times in competitive politics.

Ms. Mbaru's political journey started in 1988, when she was elected councillor for Magarini Ward on a KANU ticket.

"I was breastfeeding the first time I contested. My constituents insisted that I vie because they were impressed by my development record and transformative agenda that improved performance at Kagombani Primary School during my nine years as chairperson of the school management."

But this election came with its share of trouble at the family level—some people felt that her position in politics was making her too powerful. This forced her to forego seeking re-election in 1992, but her supporters were disappointed.

In 1997, Shirikisho Party nominated her as a Councillor, a seat that she contested and won in 2002. Since then, she has never lost an election.

Ms. Mbaru believes that her sterling performance can be attributed to three things: humility, being close to the community, and showing the results of her work.

"I engage them at social events, including funerals. You must learn to love, respect, and work with the voter." She says that her support for and initiation of sustainable projects for women and youth has also ensured unwavering support for her.

This track record paid off in 2017. *"I didn't see myself winning, because there were 12 contestants and I was the only woman. But I won, indicating the huge faith the community has in me."* The person who influenced her to join politics is former President Daniel arap Moi. *"His politics was attractive because he had a heart for helping people. He loved everyone."*

In 2022, Ms. Mbaru will be marking 25 years in political leadership, and her supporters want her to crown it by vying for the member of Parliament (MP) seat. *"If my people want me to serve them as MP, I will heed that call."*

"I WAS BREASTFEEDING
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“Start
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ESTHER PASSARIS

Before she declared her interest in politics, Ms. Esther Passaris was one of the few successful women entrepreneurs in Kenya. In fact, many wondered why she was going into politics.

But Ms. Passaris saw her foray into the political arena as the best decision possible, as it was going to give her the chance to fight corruption from an influential position.

“I ran for Mayor of Nairobi in 2010 because I was fed up with the City Council and what they did to Adopt-a-Light, a project that I had started to light up the City.”

Her attempts to win political recognition were frustrated over the years, and at one point in 2017 she decided to form her own party—the Harambee Party.

But registering the party was unsuccessful. The Registrar of Political Parties rejected the name ‘Harambee’, which is the national motto.

“I then re-joined the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) when I realized that, as an independent candidate, I could not afford agents all over the county,” says Ms. Passaris, who is the CEO of the One in a Million charity.

The move was a masterstroke. She won the Nairobi County Woman Representative seat in the 2017 General Elections, defeating the incumbent Rachel Shebesh of the ruling party.

But how has she managed to remain loved by the voters? It boils down to effective branding, she says. Her brand and nickname, ‘Mama Taa’ (the Swahili word taa means ‘lamp’ or ‘light’, derived from her Adopt-a-Light venture), endeared her to voters who believed that she had the skills to transform their lives. Her charity has also enabled her to reach many people at the grass-roots level.

Her biggest challenge in every election has been finances and the expectations of the voters. *“Women lack financial resources, yet money is given to political parties, which does not get to them.”*

People who have defined and inspired Ms. Passaris’ political journey include the late Prof. Wangari Maathai, Rachel Shebesh, and Raila Odinga.

She advises women who want to vie in Nairobi to join the strongest party of the day and work hard to get its ticket.

“Start engaging the party and voters early enough, because that is what will make a difference.”

“WOMEN LACK
FINANCIAL
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"I did
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to be like a
man to win—I
am a strong
woman"

EVE AKINYI OBARA

“*I don't talk about my opponents in my politics, and they did not exist in my campaign. I focused on my agenda, which was about transforming the lives of my people,”* says Ms. Eve Obara about her success in politics.

A former Managing Director of the Kenya Literature Bureau, Ms. Obara says that establishing the right agenda and coining messages and slogans that resonated with the voters enabled her to overcome a major challenge from her opponents and win.

“I vied against eight men on the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Party ticket to capture the Kabondo Kasipul Parliamentary Seat. I did not have to be like a man to win. I am a strong woman.”

She also had to fight cultural challenges, which were stacked against her. *“I wasn't born in Kabondo Kasipul, but was married into the community. My husband is deceased, but I still dared to try.”*

Her campaign slogan, ‘Somoko ddongruok’ (Dholuo for ‘education and development’), was in accord with the expectations of


voters, who believed that her background in educational publishing was good enough for her to deliver on this promise. Using a phrase that spoke to her expertise was effective.

“I understood education issues well. People want their children to access quality and affordable education. I want to do things that people can see, projects like building classrooms, providing water, and improving roads.”

Ms. Obara believes that her constituents will respect such a legacy. She adds that her mentors Phoebe Asiyo and Grace Ogot inspired her to keep fighting and make a difference in the lives of the people she is serving.

“I want to be remembered for doing something that people can see.”

**“I WASN'T BORN
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“The law
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FATUMA IBRAHIM

If the elders of Tarbaj Constituency had not stood in the way of Ms. Fatuma Ibrahim's attempt to become a member of Parliament, we would probably be telling a different story. The elders rejected her application to contest for the seat, and instead cleared three male competitors to do so.

Ms. Ibrahim was incensed. She vowed to challenge the oppressive cultural and traditional practices that denied women ascendancy to leadership positions.

"The law of the land is clear that all persons, including women, must participate in decision-making processes, and therefore any other law that appears to undermine the enjoyment of these values as set out in the Constitution is null and void."

With this clear in her mind, Ms. Ibrahim went against the elders and contested for the seat on an Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) ticket.

She lost this contest, but won another: a nomination to the East African Legislative Assembly. Interestingly, when she vied in 2013

for the Wajir County Woman Representative seat, the men who had previously discouraged her now applauded her for the move, happy that she was not encroaching on their space.

A year before this election, she had resigned from the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights to contest for the seat.

Ms. Ibrahim says that the traditional system of vetting candidates is the biggest challenge to her and other women. Since 2007, when she became active in politics and campaigned for ODM candidates in Wajir County, Ibrahim has fought hard for her political space.

She says that while this fight has been tough, it has taught her important lessons: confidence and loyalty to one's political party opens doors. *"I remained loyal to the Party and championed its agenda even after I lost in the elections. This earned me a seat in the East African Legislative Assembly."*

"I REMAINED LOYAL
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“Focus on
what you
want, go for it,
and you will
get it”

FLORENCE CHEPNG'ETICH KOSKEY

When Ms. Florence Chepngetich Koskey entered active politics in 2013, she had no idea how to play the political game. She made costly mistakes—one of the most glaring was not having the money to pay her agents. She lost.

But in 2017, she was smarter. *“I set aside some money for nominations to pay the agents, cautious not to depend on the party for such support.”* She had learned her lesson the hard way.

Her visibility in the county had also increased tremendously, something that worked in her favour.

Ms. Koskey says that her motivation to go into politics was triggered by the suffering of the students she was teaching. Many of them would be absent from school for extended periods because of their inability to pay school fees.

She paid school fees for some of the students, but this was not sustainable. She decided to vie for a leadership position to help address the problem in a more meaningful way.

When she declared her candidature in 2017, her agenda resonated well with the locals, who believed that she would bring change to their lives. She won the Woman Representative slot for Kericho County on a Jubilee Party ticket.

Her mentor and role model in politics is Dr. Joyce Laboso, the Bomet County Governor. *“I learned the art of politics from Dr. Laboso, who has really mentored me. She always encouraged me to attend her political functions.”*

Ms. Koskey says that to succeed in politics, you must believe in yourself. *“Focus on what you want, go for it, and you will get it.”*

She explains, *“As women candidates, we are often intimidated and insulted. But we have to be focused and not be derailed.”* Ms. Koskey is popularly known as *Tapnyole*, meaning ‘a good woman’.

Her biggest challenges in her political journey have been inadequate financial resources and propaganda peddled by her opponents. *“I had to rely on my resources and those of my husband to pay for fuel, posters, and agents.”*

“I SET ASIDE SOME
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FOR SUCH SUPPORT.”



“Survival
will depend
on your
resilience”

FLORENCE MUTUA

Florence Mutua's entry into politics was by chance. A conversation between her husband and his friends resulted in her name being floated for the Woman Representative seat for Busia County.

At the time Ms. Mutua had been employed by the United Nations for 13 years and was comfortable. She was not planning to make any drastic changes in her life. But when her nephew also encouraged her to run, she gave the idea more serious thought.

She resigned and went for the seat. It was a big gamble, but it paid off: she made it in 2013 and again in 2017.

"Being new in politics I had to do a quick study of what the people on the ground would want if I won. Understanding their needs was critical, and I had to focus on at least five key things that I would be able to achieve."

When she joined politics in 2013, she realized the importance of being at the decision-making table within one's political party. She managed to join the party's National Executive Council as the Deputy Organizing Secretary, a seat she won during party elections.

"When at the table, one gets to know what the party believes in." As a newcomer in Parliament, Ms. Mutua reached out to Cecily Mbarire, who had been around longer, and she guided her on how Parliament works.

In Parliament, she and other women experienced various challenges, including ridicule. *"We were called all sorts of names. Some thought our role was just to dress up and serve tea at committee meetings."*

But they fought for their space and finally received recognition. *"I have learned that once you make the first bold step into politics, you must be ready for all sorts of things that will be thrown at you. Survival will depend on your resilience."*

**"WHEN ON THE TABLE
ONE GETS TO KNOW
WHAT THE PARTY
BELIEVES IN."**



GLADYS WANGA

Gladys Wanga's interest in leadership roles started taking shape when she was at Kenyatta University, where she made her mark by becoming the first female to be elected secretary general of the student union.

Ms. Wanga, who is in her second term as the Homa Bay County Woman Representative, says, *"Politics is natural to me."*

She recently vied to become the Chairperson of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Party in Homa Bay County. She was successful, joining only a handful of women who have achieved a similar feat.

She attributes her success in politics to three strategies: focusing on women and youth in her development agenda; identifying a flagship project whose objective is to emancipate women from poverty; and remaining visible in conversations around topical and national issues.

"One of the key developments that got me re-elected is my star project, known as the Homa Bay County Women Sacco. Through this, the women felt I was doing something sustainable for them."


Ms. Wanga says that she has gained useful lessons during her political journey. One of them is resilience: *"Never give up; people will try and run you over, but do not at any one time give up because of what people are saying."*

Unsurprisingly, she has had to deal with her share of abuse and insults. *"You have to respond to questions around your birthplace, your marriage, and your reasons for vying."*

Personalities such as Angela Merkel, Martha Karua, Charity Ngilu, and Phoebe Asiyo have inspired Ms. Wanga to stand strong even in times of difficulty.

Her advice to young women interested in politics: *"The sky is the lower limit, but there is need to push on and identify people who can hold your hand."*

**"NEVER GIVE UP,
PEOPLE WILL TRY AND
RUN YOU OVER BUT
DO NOT AT ANY ONE
TIME GIVE UP..."**

A portrait of a woman with short, dark, curly hair, wearing glasses and a patterned jacket over a dark top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and some purple flowers.

"I am in
politics to
serve; I want to
make a difference
and I want to be
remembered for
something"

JAYNE KIHARA

After not holding a political position from 2007 to 2017, Ms. Jayne Kihara remerged to clinch the Naivasha Constituency Member of Parliament (MP) seat, recording one of the most emphatic wins of that year.

“Ten years out of active politics and I was elected with 84,000 votes, an overwhelmingly high number of people. This means that I have remained popular all these years.”

Ms. Kihara says that this performance boils down to strategy. *“You need to be in the right party. In our communities, the party matters. In 2013, I vied for the Naivasha Senate seat, which has 11 constituencies, but I was in the wrong party and lost.”*

She says her other strategy was to identify the needs of her cosmopolitan residents and design messages and a development agenda for them.

What might have maintained Ms. Kihara’s popularity even after being out of active politics for so long are the projects she started while she was MP between 2004 and 2007.

They remain symbols of development in Naivasha all these years later.

The long political path she has travelled has also left her with many practical lessons. But a few stand out: *“I have learned that a leader must be accountable to the people. Understand your people. Speak to their hearts by addressing their most pressing problems. I am proof that they will not forget you.”*

Her mentor is her late husband, Paul Kihara, former Naivasha MP, who she says taught her to be close to people and offer them servant leadership.

“I am in politics to serve; I want to make a difference and I want to be remembered for something.”

“TEN YEARS OUT OF
ACTIVE POLITICS AND
I WAS ELECTED WITH
84,000 VOTES...”



“I delivered the
right messages
to the voters”

KAWIRA MWANGAZA

‘Defeat’ does not exist in Ms. Kawira Mwangaza’s vocabulary. When she lost during the Jubilee Party primaries, she did not surrender. She immediately moved to contest the Meru County Woman Representative seat as an independent candidate, winning with a comfortable margin.

“I intensified my campaigns and delivered the right messages to the voters.” According to Ms. Mwangaza, who owns Baite TV, the victory was a vote of confidence in her and in the development projects she had initiated in the county.

Her win was also a statement by the community about its satisfaction with the Kawira Mwangaza Foundation’s initiatives to empower widows, orphans, and other disadvantaged groups since 2008.

One such initiative, dubbed ‘Okolea’, identified needy residents and (through her TV station) mobilized the community to raise funds for them. The initiative also helped fight the jigger menace.

“This initiative helped people, especially the women who had lost spouses, to rebuild their

lives.” Indeed, it is such work that led her constituents to push her to contest for a leadership position. The Njuri Ncheke Council of Elders then endorsed her bid, expressing their satisfaction with Ms. Mwangaza’s humanitarian work in the community.

Even with this support, contesting as an independent candidate proved tough for her. *“My opponent would sponsor fake opinion polls to sway voters. I was told nobody has ever gone against the Jubilee wave and won a political seat.”*

Ms. Mwangaza, who draws inspiration from the late Prof. Wangari Maathai, says violence and lack of finances posed major challenges to her campaign. *“I remember one incident where my son escaped death when a violent group confronted us during my campaigns.”*

Though inadequate funds made it near impossible for her to have agents in all 1,500 polling centres, community members volunteered to help.

“My opponent would sponsor fake opinion polls to sway voters. I was told nobody has ever gone against the Jubilee wave and won a political seat.”



“I told my voters the truth about not being educated, but highlighted my passion and desire to solve their problems”

LEAH NACHERE IDEYA

The declaration by Ms. Leah Nachere Ideya that she was going to contest the member of County Assembly (MCA) seat for the Turkana Lake Ward left her competitors rubbing their hands with glee. They were sure that her not-so-impressive academic background would hinder her.

They were wrong. The voters were looking for a different kind of leader: someone who understood them and was development conscious. *“I told my voters the truth about not being educated, but highlighted my passion and desire to solve their problems, which I knew better than my competitors.”*

Ms. Ideya says that one of her winning strategies was to understand the community’s needs and constituting an all-inclusive campaign team, whose members had unquestionable integrity.

“I advised them to ignore any insults and not get intimidated. Instead they were to be friendly to everyone and focus on selling our manifesto.”

This political journey has helped her learn many lessons. She now believes that trust, respect, and willingness to help are virtues that pull a candidate closer to the voters.

Ms. Ideya says that there is power in believing in yourself and exploiting your competitors’ weaknesses. *“I took advantage of the fact that men did not have time for people, which I did... and it worked for me.”*

She adds that the suffering of her people under poor leadership motivated her to go into politics. Her political mentor is John Munyes, the current Cabinet Secretary for Petroleum and Mining. *“I admire his humility and good heart.”*

Like every woman leader, Ms. Ideya had to deal with insults and propaganda by her competitors during campaigns. *“I took them in stride and focused on my development agenda.”*

Her biggest challenge is fulfilling the promises she made to the voters. And since the promises are many, sometimes she is forced to dig deeper into her pockets to respond to their needs.

“I hope to get partners to help me implement my manifesto. This will send a strong message that women leaders can make a difference.”

“I advised them to ignore any insults and not get intimidated. Instead they were to be friendly to everyone and focus on selling our manifesto.”



“My
strategy
was not to be
fierce, but rather
tactful and
smart”

DR. LILIAN GOGO

Dr. Lilian Gogo was the most unlikely candidate to win the Rangwe Constituency seat. But she pulled a major surprise by beating veteran politicians both in the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party nominations and in the General Elections.

Being her first time in politics, Dr. Gogo credits the effective strategies she employed for her win. *“I took the position of the underdog as a female candidate, but this gave me a lot of time to concentrate on my campaign, as opponents underrated me. My strategy was not to be fierce, but rather tactful and smart.”*

Phoebe Asiyo, Martha Karua, Gladys Wanga, and Rachel Shebesh are women leaders who inspired Dr. Gogo and made her believe that it can be done.

“Mama Phoebe Asiyo, the one-time Member of Parliament (MP) for Karachuonyo, walked with me all the way. Ida Odinga worked with women who were vying through the ODM party and has been a source of inspiration to me.”

Dr. Gogo says that her path to winning faced challenges—abuses by competitors and limited financing were some of the key ones.

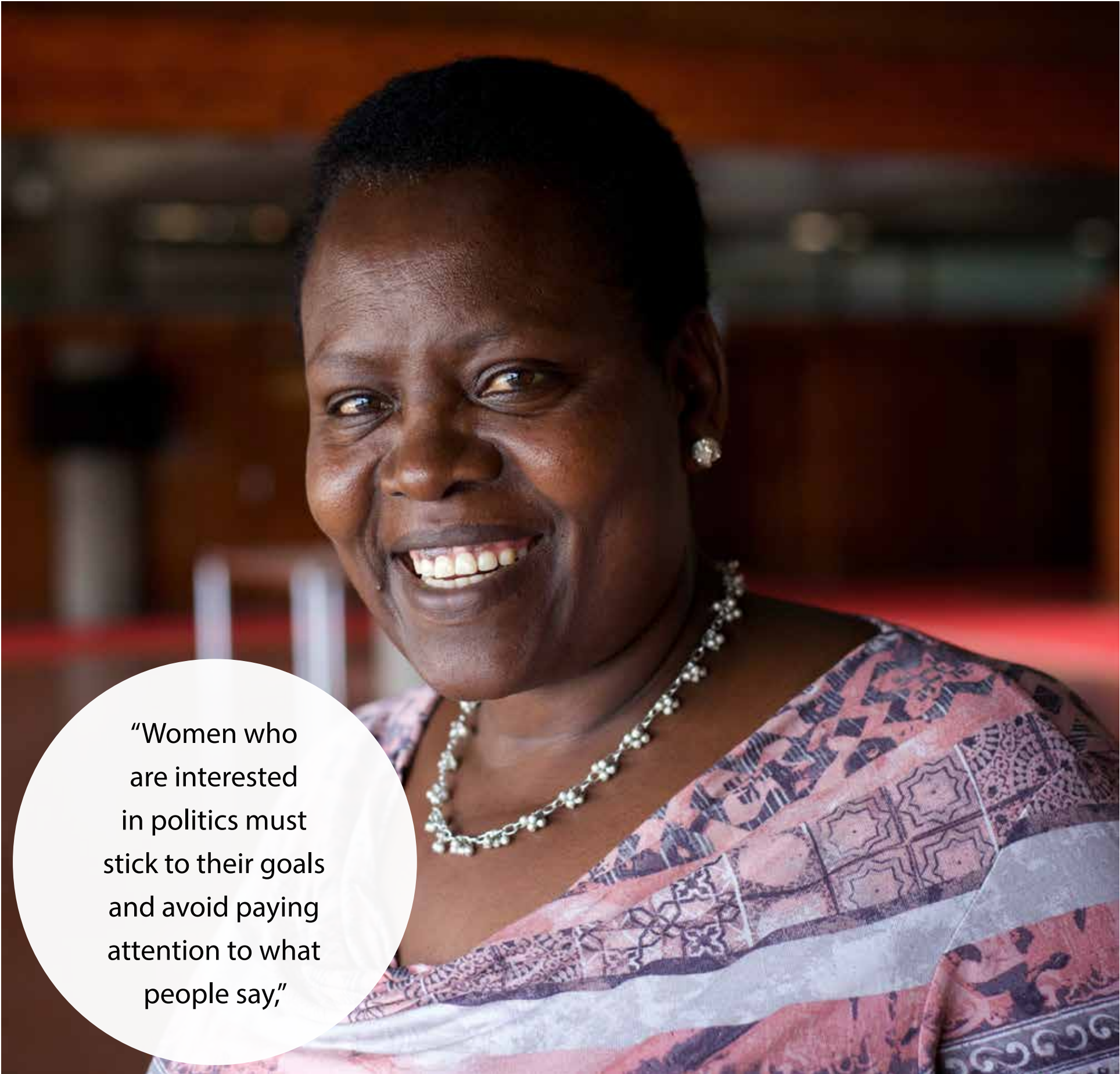
“Campaign financing was a big issue too. I didn’t have the money to do everything I wanted.”

Nevertheless, her focus now is to conduct the ‘politics of development’ to enable her remain relevant to her constituents for the next five years.

“Even though my work as an MP is representation, oversight, and legislation, I want to go out of my way to work with other stakeholders to make sure that my constituency has running water and my constituents have a better life.”

“I want to see an empowered girl in Rangwe, one who will be a doctor like me.” Dr. Gogo concludes.

“I TOOK THE POSITION
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AS OPPONENTS
UNDERRATED ME.”

A portrait of a smiling woman with short dark hair, wearing a patterned sari and a pearl necklace. A white circular overlay on the left contains a quote.

“Women who
are interested
in politics must
stick to their goals
and avoid paying
attention to what
people say,”

LIZA CHELULE

“I strongly felt that the constituency needed a person who listened to the people and helped them deal with issues affecting them.”

In 2002, Ms. Liza Chelule was an angry pyrethrum farmer. Her member of Parliament (MP) had failed, after many months, to tackle the tribulations her fellow farmers were going through. He did not even bother to attend their meetings.

One morning, she reached the end of her rope. *“I strongly felt that the constituency needed a person who listened to the people and helped them deal with the issues affecting them.”*

Although she had been interested in politics before, Ms. Chelule was wary. She faced two big obstacles: a culture that did not embrace women’s leadership, and a lack of finances.

As she nursed her dream, she continued to support her husband to win two consecutive terms as a councillor. Her mobilization skills were key to his success.

In 2002, she decided to contest. *“I did not fear the challenge, although I knew financial resources determined political success.”*

Ms. Chelule did not win that election. But she was appointed Director of the Pyrethrum Board of Kenya. In 2003, she was nominated to represent Nakuru District in the constitutional

review process at the Bomas of Kenya, a position that further boosted her standing in the community.

Her rating would go up in 2008 when she was asked to be a peacemaker following the post-election violence. By 2013, Ms. Chelule was ripe for another political contest. She vied for the Woman Representative seat, but finished second. Again, luck was on her side. She was nominated Senator.

Ms. Chelule believes that closeness to the community is important: *“I fit snugly when I am with people in the village because I understand how they operate. Politics is about taking the message of development to the people, and if you are free with them, they will be very comfortable being with you.”*

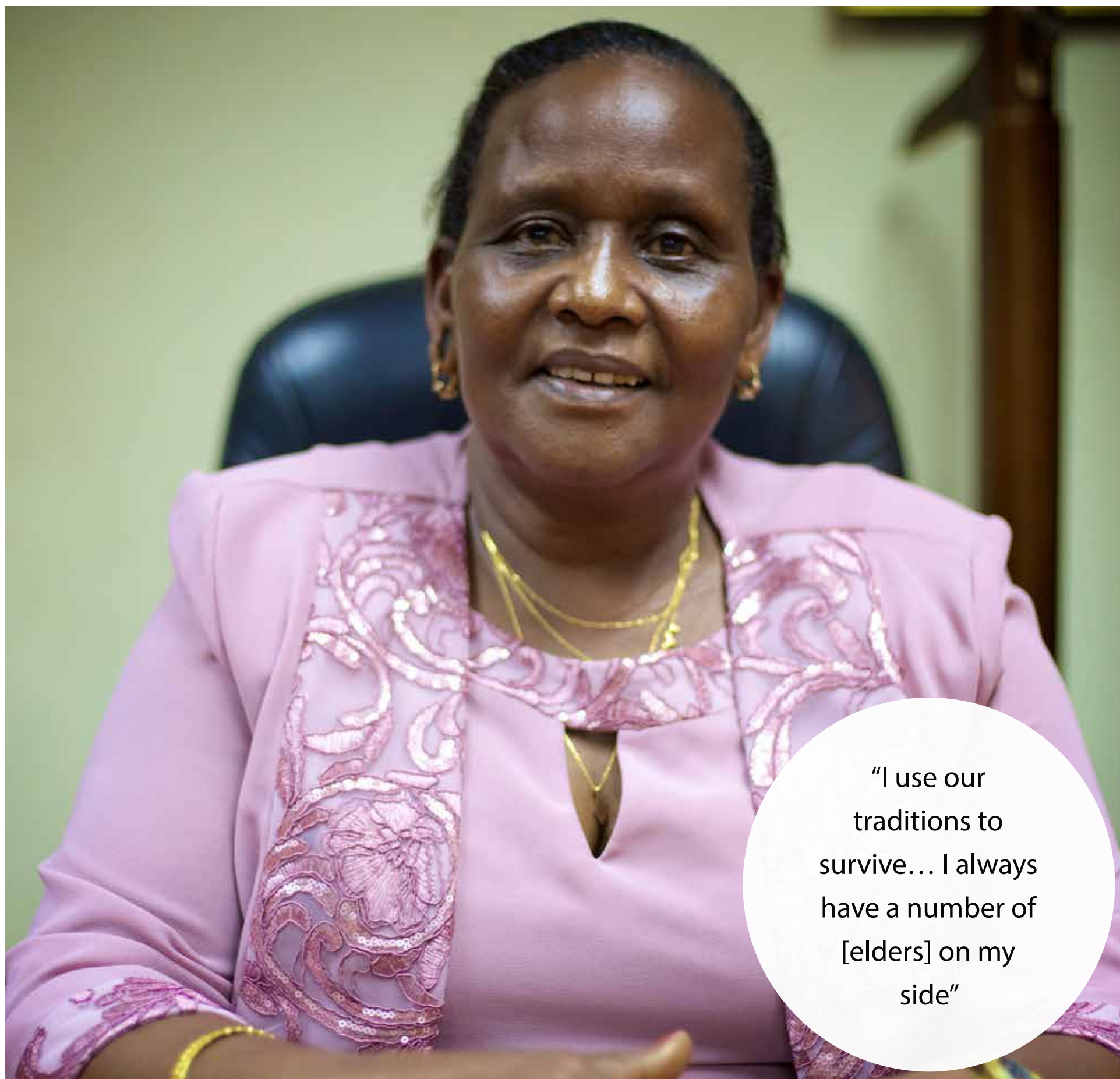
She has assisted women to form groups and access government funding. Their support for her is unwavering. As a peacemaker, especially in Nakuru County, which is an ethnically volatile region, she found herself referred to as a unifying factor.

These investments in people proved valuable in 2017 when she won the Woman Representative seat for Nakuru County.

But even this win did not come on a silver platter. Ms. Chelule’s husband had decided to vie for member of County Assembly (MCA) for Keringet Ward after she had declared her interest in the Woman Representative contest.

This did not sit well with voters, who felt they could not elect a husband and wife to key political positions. *“People said that we had not agreed as a family, and since I am a woman, they concluded that I was the problem. Yet I had asked for his permission, and he even gave me money and a car to use in my campaigns.”*

Ms. Chelule admires politicians such as former Mayor and MP Alicen Chelaite. She says that a female candidate has to confront her fears. *“The minute a woman’s privacy is invaded, she recoils from political competition... Women who are interested in politics must stick to their goals and avoid paying attention to what people say.”*



"I use our traditions to survive... I always have a number of [elders] on my side"

MAISON LESHOOMO

“We circumcise our sons based on age groups; my sons belong to two different age groups, which culturally makes all men in the two age groups my sons. Their support and that of the age group of my husband have been valuable.”

Winning a political seat in the intensely patriarchal Samburu Community is one of Ms. Maison Leshoomo’s biggest achievements. For more than 20 years, she has fought to prove that women too can lead.

As the Woman Representative for Samburu County, she is known for her boldness and audacity. Ms. Leshoomo plunged into the political arena in the 1990s at a time when women from the Maa Community (Samburu, Maasai, and Njemps) were not allowed to speak publicly before men.

The legislator says it took a lot of courage to go against the norm. *“I had to endure many insults and great resistance from men, who felt that I should not speak about community issues in public. This was even after I was nominated twice as a councillor in the then Maralal County Council.”*

Ms. Leshoomo championed people’s rights: *“I openly spoke out against early marriages, recurrent conflicts, female genital mutilation, hunger, and poverty.”* Her boldness paid off when she was nominated to Parliament by the Party of National Unity in 2008. She credits the late First Lady Lucy Kibaki, her mentor, for her role in getting her the nomination.

In Parliament, she learned much from close allies such as Amina Abdalla, Naomi Shaban, and Martha Karua. She won the Woman Representative seat in 2013, a position she retained in the 2017 General Elections.

Ms. Leshoomo is one of the few women who has used culture to her advantage. *“I use our traditions to survive. Village elders are very influential in pastoralist communities. I always have a number of them on my side.”*

She adds, *“We circumcise our sons based on age groups; my sons belong to two different age groups, which culturally makes all men in the two age groups my sons. Their support and that of the age group of my husband have been valuable.”*

Having been the Chair of Maendeleo ya Wanawake in the former Maralal District for 15 years, she has helped women and the youth exploit opportunities and access government support, something that has made her popular in the community.

Her generosity in paying school fees for children from disadvantaged families pursuing secondary and university education has also endeared her to many.

Ms. Leshoomo also believes that her door-to-door campaign strategy played a key role in her win. *“I did my campaigns in a hostile environment. I was called names... most leaders ganged up with my opponents to make sure I lost the seat. But I defeated them. In politics you must be tactical and always ahead of your opponents.”*

But she believes that strong women who face cultural, financial, and other challenges need to be supported. She is full of praise for the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association, which did just that for her.

But for women to win political contests, Ms. Leshoomo notes that, they need to get involved with the grass-roots women and youth long before they think of vying for elective seats.

“One needs to be strategic, demonstrate honesty and relevance, and commit only to what one can manage. Leadership is not about deception and lies.”



“You
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campaign team that
will articulate your
vision and mission
and deliver on
your campaign
objectives”

MARTHA WANGARI

Martha Wangari made her debut in politics at the University of Nairobi as a Vice-Chair of the Students Organization of Nairobi University. But her entrance into politics proper came when she led the Waremba na Kibaki (Beauties for Kibaki) group to mobilize the youth to vote for former President Mwai Kibaki.

Ms. Wangari would later join forces with Musalia Mudavadi to form the United Democratic Front party. The party nominated her to the Senate in 2013.

While at the Senate, Ms. Wangari started thinking of how to win an elective seat and not a nomination. *“By the time the 2017 General Elections were called, I had weighed my options carefully and settled for the Gilgil Parliamentary seat.”*

Ms. Wangari says that her winning strategy involved branding and marketing herself as a servant leader and putting together a credible team to support her bid.

“Having worked with Mwai Kibaki, who was my greatest mentor in politics, I learned that you have to hand-pick a campaign team that will

articulate your vision and mission and deliver on your campaign objectives.”

One of the greatest challenges she faced was propaganda by her opponents. Some even went as far as questioning the paternity of her children.

But she refused to break down. *“I beat them at the nomination level even after they made me go through the same process five times.”* And she won the election, becoming the first woman to be elected Member of Parliament (MP) for Gilgil Constituency.

Ms. Wangari’s experiences are a source of useful lessons for her and other women leaders. She has learned that tenacity and honesty pays off. *“In addition, affirmative action seats are only supposed to give you a head start, and thereafter you bid for elective seats. If you do not do that, then the seats will not have any meaningful impact.”*

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“My most powerful strategy that helped me win was my philanthropic and development work...”

MARY EMASE

Mary Emase's role in transforming lives through her Mary Emase Foundation, which supports community projects and students from disadvantaged families, played a major role in her becoming a politician.

The community decided that she would do better in improving their livelihoods if she had a leadership position. In 2013, Ms. Emase vied for the Teso South Parliamentary seat. She lost in the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party primaries, but decamped to the United Republican Party and went on to make history by becoming the first woman to be elected in Teso South Constituency.

"My most powerful strategy that helped me win was my philanthropic and development work that resonated with the communities in Teso. The other was establishing a structure at the village level that focused on the individual voter."

She notes that, *"By the time we went to the election, my candidature had garnered unanimous support across the constituency."*

Ms. Emase's biggest challenge came in the 2017 General Elections when her chief agent

deserted her on the eve of the elections, switched off his phones, and could not be reached.

To make matters worse, her agents did not get letters to allow them into the polling stations, and were locked out as a result.

"My worst moment came when the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) announced that I had lost the seat by a mere 300 votes. I could not believe it. Things had changed overnight, and I wondered whether our democracy is real."

Her experience taught her a few lessons. She points out that it is not enough to look for votes—it is critical to have a plan on how to protect the votes that have been mobilized. In addition, it is vital to have as much media visibility as possible on the capacity and accomplishments of women leaders.

"Things had changed overnight, and I wondered whether our democracy is real."



“I focused on
a community-
based campaign
and interacted with
everyone, regardless
of their status”

MERCY WANJIKU GAKUYA

In 2006, Ms. Mercy Wanjiku Gakuya made her presence felt when she was elected the National Youth Secretary of the Democratic Party of Kenya. Her political journey had begun in earnest.

Come 2013, she was ready for a political contest. She vied for the Kasarani Parliamentary seat on a Democratic Party ticket after losing The National Alliance party nominations. Again, she lost in the General Elections.

Ms. Gakuya did not give up. She went back to the drawing board and started to position herself for the next election. Her strategy entailed working on and initiating projects that were beneficial to her constituents. Her resilience and hard work paid off in the 2017 General Elections when she won the Kasarani Parliamentary seat.

Ms. Gakuya believes that her success was because of putting in place strong campaign machinery that roped in everyone—men, women, and the youth. *“I focused on a community-based campaign and interacted with everyone, regardless of their status, a trait that endeared me to the electorate.”*

Her promise to embrace servant leadership, her open-door policy, and packaging herself as a mother with a listening ear impressed the voters.

Ms. Gakuya, who draws much inspiration from the late Prof. Wangari Maathai, says that security was a major issue during her campaigns and cites an incident where police had to shoot in the air to disperse goons. After this incident, she had to rely on police protection in her campaign rallies.

The other challenge was a lack of finances, which forced her to rely heavily on volunteers. *“I found people who were ready to walk with me. They did not have money but were willing to volunteer their time.”*

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PURITY NGIRICI

In 2015, a conversation between Ms. Purity Wangui Ngirici's husband and his friends about her making a good member of Parliament (MP) made her think seriously about politics. By then, she was serving in various leadership roles in the church and was engaged in the philanthropic work of providing educational support to poor children.

Her declaration to vie for the Kirinyaga County Woman Representative position was welcomed with excitement in the church and the community. Her development record prior to this announcement had made her a household name. One such accomplishment was her family repairing some of the roads in the county.

"The voters knew I was not pretending, because I had done so much before I indicated my political interest. This is what made them support me."

In her short political journey, Ms. Ngirici has picked up useful lessons. *"I've learned that men use women to fight other women, and if women could refuse this and use their massive numbers to elect one of their own, we would not even need laws to put us in leadership positions."*

One thing that concerns Ms. Ngirici is the perception that there is a correlation between a woman entering competitive politics and difficulties in her marriage. *"This is a notion I want to change because it scares away married women who want to get into politics."*

The women who have inspired her on this political journey include Michelle Obama, Martha Karua, Wangari Maathai, and Charity Ngilu. She admires them for standing up for their values, their families, and their communities during their political life.

Ms. Ngirici, who is educating 260 children from poor families using her own funds and 360 others through the Affirmative Action Fund, says that what drives her every day is the opportunity to touch lives and prove that women's leadership does bring change.

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DR. RACHAEL NYAMAI

In 2017, Dr. Rachael Nyamai defied the Wiper Democratic Movement popularity wave, and the party's call to voters for a 'six-piece' vote in Ukambani Region, to reclaim her Kitui South Parliamentary seat. And this, she did with Jubilee, a political party that was finding it tough to make headway in the region.

Dr. Nyamai attributes her good performance in politics for over six years to consistency, hard work, and a positive development record. She is credited with the construction of Kitui-Kibwezi Road, the establishment of a campus of the Kenya Medical Training College, and helping the electorate acquire title deeds.

"I campaigned on the strength of my track record in development." Besides development, her strategy of starting her 2017 campaigns early and consolidating her support, especially in areas where she had a huge following, worked well for her.

Her two biggest challenges on the path to winning the seat were the vastness of Kitui South Constituency, which made it difficult for her to reach all 234 polling stations during the campaigns. The other was security—her opponents kept sending hooligans to attack and intimidate her.

But Dr. Nyamai is happy that her experience in politics has taught her valuable lessons. One of them is that a woman leader must scan the environment for opportunities and then seize them.

"In 2013, I knew that walking with Kitui Governor Charity Ngilu would give me a head start in politics, because she was a powerful force in Ukambani politics."

However, in 2017, she decided to stick with Jubilee, since this was the Party she had identified with during her first term in Parliament. She succeeded.

"...I knew that walking with Kitui Governor Charity Ngilu would give me a head start in politics, because she was a powerful force in Ukambani politics."



“If an
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SALLY OKUDO

In 2017, Ms. Sally Okudo became the first woman elected member of County Assembly (MCA) in the Central Seme Ward.

Having been born and bred in the United States, her first challenge was fitting into this rural setting. She started by rebranding herself. She changed how she dressed, shaved her hair, and did other things that helped her fit in and be accepted by the community.

Having done this, Ms. Okudo went flat out to contest for the MCA post. She used several strategies in her campaign, but the key one was branding herself as a performer who would deliver as per the expectations of the community.

"I came up with a slogan, 'Sally nyalo', meaning 'Sally can do it'. This resonated extremely well with the voters."

She says that, *"On this journey, one of the lessons I have learned is that if an opportunity comes your way, go for it. If you fail, you will have failed not because you didn't take it, but because you tried and your best may not have been good enough."*

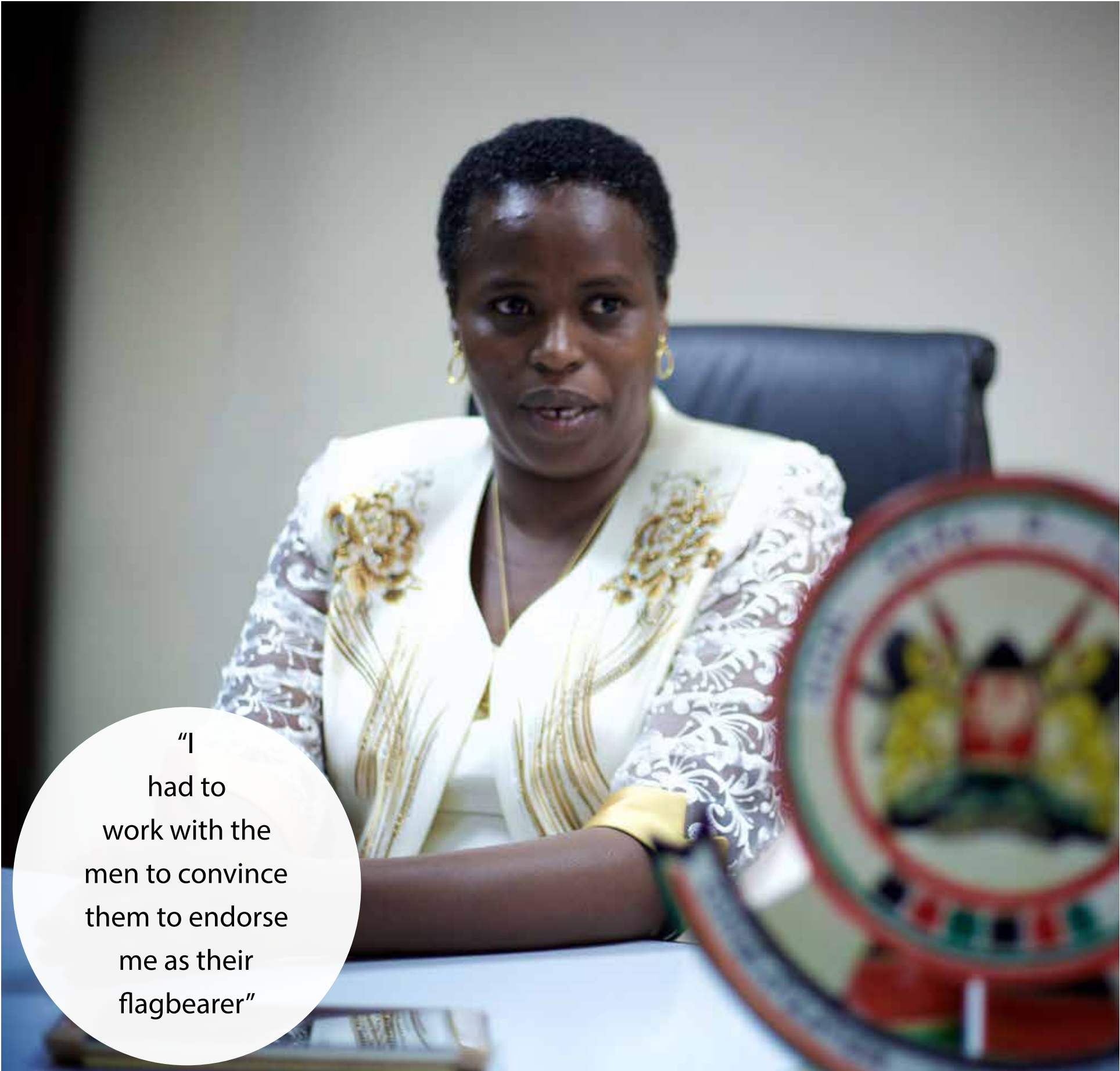
She adds, "You also have to be focused. I told myself not to get distracted by any sideshows. I remained focused. All the things that people said about me were inconsequential."

Ms. Okudo explains her outlook: *"It is a tough world, but every morning I am inspired to go on when I think about the expectations the community has bestowed on me to help them make their lives better."*

Her daily life inspires her to do better as an MCA. *"Any time I drive or walk on bad roads, I am reminded that I need to work. Every time I am home and I don't have electricity, I remember I promised these people electricity."*

"...I told myself not to get distracted by any sideshows. I remained focused.

All the things that people said about me were inconsequential."

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a white blazer with gold and grey floral patterns, is seated at a desk. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. In the foreground, on the right, is a large, circular, colorful seal, likely the official emblem of a government or organization. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“I
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me as their
flagbearer”

SARAH KORERE

Sarah Korere astounded many when she won her electoral contest with a landslide to become the first woman Member of Parliament (MP) for Laikipia North Constituency.

But this did not come easy. She had a tough race against her opponents.

There were threats and curses from Maasai elders who saw her candidature as going against the traditions of the Maa people.

“I was branded a traitor and cursed in a ceremony that was attended by elders, governors, senators, and members of County Assembly (MCAs) from Laikipia and the neighbouring Kajiado and Narok counties.”

The Ms. Korere also encountered a lot of verbal abuse and propaganda about her character. Running against such a tide of negativity meant that she had to have a winning strategy.

She settled on meeting people face to face. *“I conducted door-to-door campaigns, which entailed talking to the elders, men and women. I had to work with the men to convince them to endorse me as their flagbearer.”*

Ms. Korere eventually prevailed: *“My highest moment came when some elders realized that the curse was uncalled for and, alongside some pastors, organized an official ceremony to declare me their sole flagbearer for the seat.”*

This boosted the campaign immensely. *“My candidature received unanimous support from the community. Thereafter, I was able to partner with many people, including religious leaders, the council of elders, and women’s groups.”*

Her mentor is Charity Ngilu, who gave her wise counsel and encouraged her to vie for the MP seat.

Ms. Korere says that her political journey has taught her one key lesson: *“... to win, you must have a sound work plan, do the groundwork, and continuously interact with the people to have them know and believe in you.”*

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“I have
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UQA QABALE

Uqa Qabale plunged into competitive politics as a direct result of the enactment of the 2010 Constitution of Kenya.

“This law encouraged us women to come out and fight for our rights, including political leadership.” Charity Ngilu and Martha Karua were among those who inspired Qabale to get involved—they had proved to her that women too could lead.

Ms. Qabale’s win for Member of County Assembly (MCA), Marsabit County, was not an easy one. She had to overcome cultural and religious obstacles—and five male opponents—to win. *“Being the only woman, I had to use extra effort to succeed.”*

She says that her most rewarding strategy was her door-to-door campaign: *“People appreciated that I went to them. It helped me to sell my agenda and explain to men and women why each one of them must elect a woman leader.”*

Ms. Qabale adds, *“I realized that when you meet men during door-to-door campaigns, you are able to convince them to overlook certain*

beliefs so as to benefit from the great leadership offered by women.”

For women, she used the one-on-one encounters to convince them that they needed to elect one of their own. But the strong cultural taboo against women addressing public gatherings limited her ability to use public platforms.

Inadequate financial resources and the traditional beliefs that women should not be in politics were her main challenges.

“When you come to the community, they feel that you should not compete against men. There is a lot of negativity, which can kill your dream.”

Ms. Qabale says that the expectations the community has placed on her are very high. *“The community is looking at me to see if women can indeed lead like men. If I don’t perform, it will be very difficult for other women to get into power or decision-making positions. I have to prove that we are worthy leaders.”*

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“People
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WANJIKU KIBE

When the renowned radio presenter at Kameme FM, Ms. Wanjiku Kibe, was nominated in 2013 as Member of Kiambu County Assembly, many people did not think she would scale even higher political heights as fast as she has.

In 2017, she won the Gatundu North Parliamentary seat with a landslide to become the first woman ever, to be elected in the Constituency. Ms. Kibe says that her winning strategy entailed coming up with a winning slogan and conducting door-to-door campaigns.

My slogan, ‘Roundi hii ni Mama na maendeleo’ (‘It is time for a woman and development’), resonated well with the electorate.’ Being a media personality was also an added advantage. *“I did not need an introduction. People recognized the name Wanjiku wa Kibe, which I had used on radio. I had an instant connection with them through the many radio programmes I did to inspire them and mentor their children.”*

Ms. Kibe notes that, *“By the time we went to the election, my candidature had garnered massive support across the constituency.”*

Her major challenge was dealing with malicious rumours and propaganda fuelled by her opponents. *“I did not allow myself to be intimidated.”*

These experiences have taught her that politics is not for the faint-hearted. *“I have also learned to listen, because people want someone who can listen to them.”*

Ms. Kibe draws her inspiration from women who have made their mark in politics. *“I have learned from the women who have set the pace for us. From those who have made mistakes, I have learned what not to be, while from those who have excelled, I have learned what to be.”*

“...I HAD AN INSTANT CONNECTION WITH THEM THROUGH THE MANY RADIO PROGRAMS I DID TO INSPIRE THEM AND MENTOR THEIR CHILDREN.”

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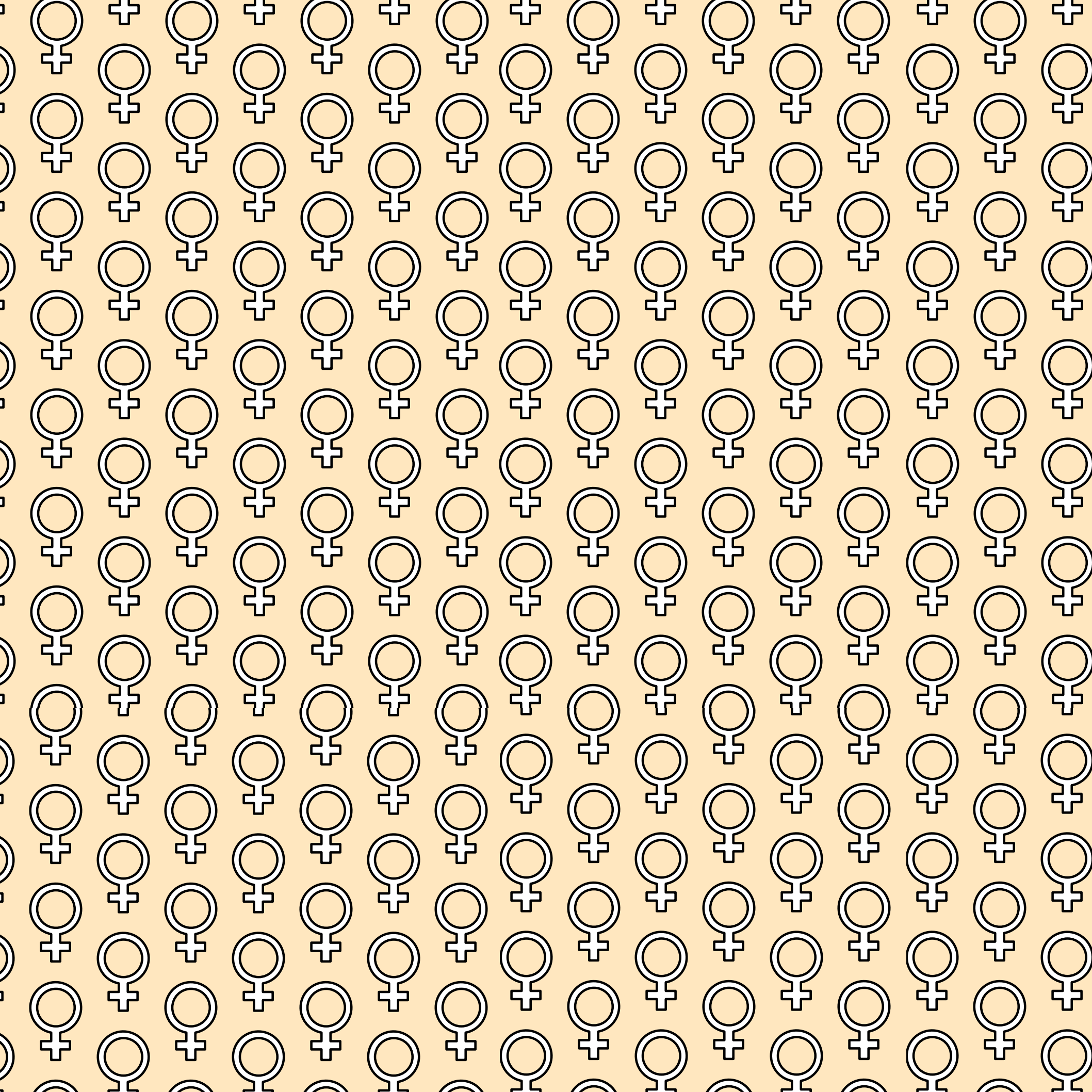


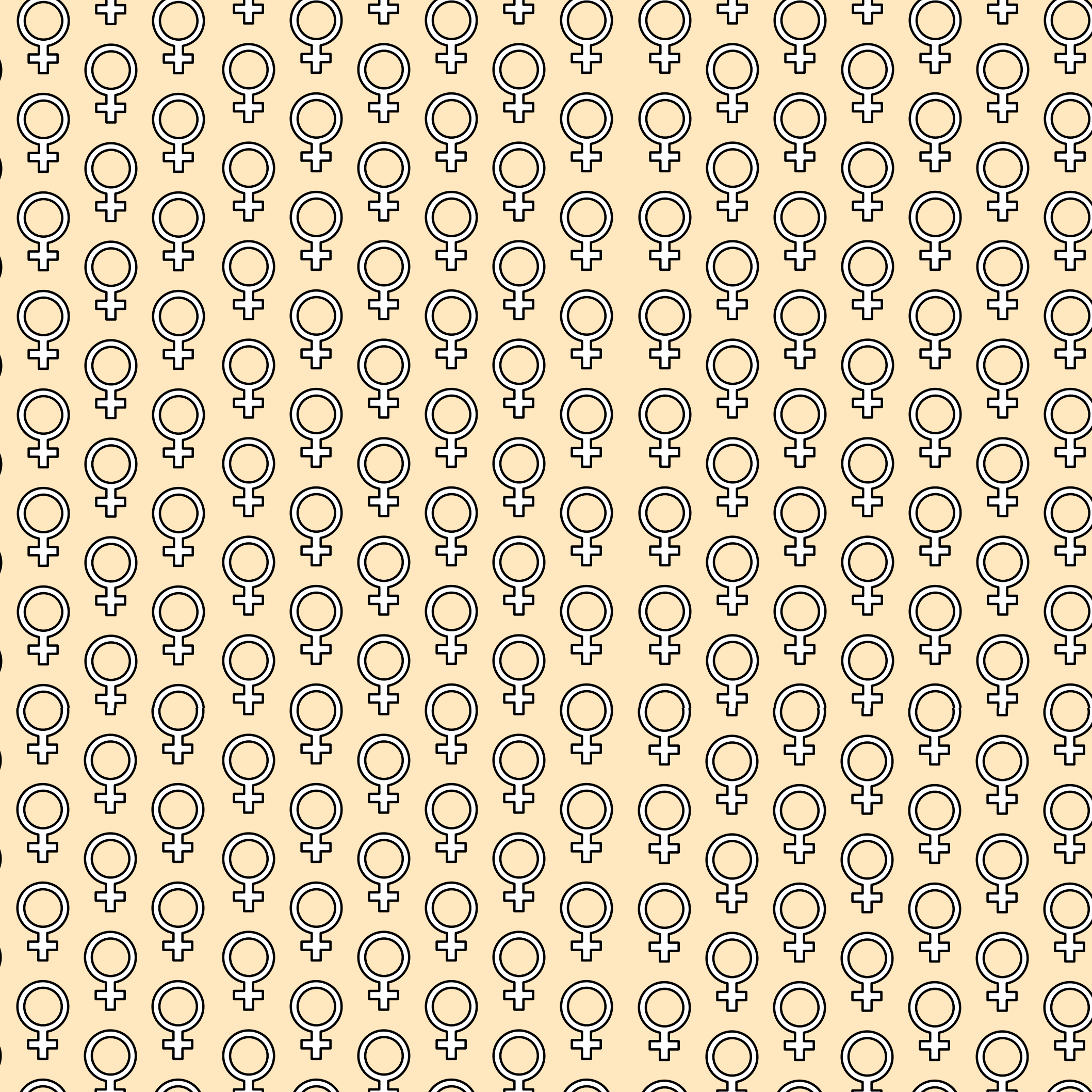
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