

Women as Ambassadors of Peace in Times of Political Mayhems in Kenya

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The article sets out to show that women are critical players in peace building in Kenya, especially in times of political turmoil. Certainly, several African countries have experienced bouts of violence that are always caused by divergent political ideologies amongst its leadership. In most African countries where there is violence, male politicians are always seen as its key promoters; even though it remains an irony that it is women and children who bear the brunt. UNSCR 1325 affirms that peace and security efforts are sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict and the forging of lasting peace. To control political violence reasonably, it is advisable to encourage the society to put more women political leaderships. In this, the article argues, it will promote good governance and good stewardship of our resources. Curiously, women have not been able to occupy key political positions in Kenya, and face a lot of male-engineered frustrations that are meant to discourage them from electoral politics. To this end, this article will examine the factors that hinder women from securing key positions in the governance of the country such as those of the president, the deputy president, the prime minister, speaker of the national assembly and of the senate, and so on. The article will also discuss how women can overcome the factors that hinder them from taking over political leaderships, and how they can use their skills to usher in peace and prosperity. The methodology will include critical analysis of the state of the nation, and attempt to deconstruct the status quo.

Keywords: governance, peace, violence, women, African politics

Introduction

Despite women accounting for over 50% of the world's population, only 20% occupy political seats in the world (Wickham, 2013). In the Kenyan context, only a very tiny percentage of women represent the political class. Prior to the 2017 general elections in Kenya, 47% of the 9.4 million registered voters were women¹. This figure was enough to change the political matrix in the Kenyan state, including the presidency. Nevertheless, Kenyan presidents, since 1963 when Kenya became independent from the British colonialism, have always been men. That is, Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978), Daniel arap Moi (1978-2002), Mwai Kibaki (2002-2012), and Uhuru Kenyatta (2013-). It was not until, 1997, when for the first time in Kenyan history that two women Charity Ngilu and the late Prof Wangari Maathai vied for the presidential elections. Ngilu emerged fifth with 7.8% and Prof Wangari garnered 0.007% of the votes and eventually clinched the 13th position out of the 15

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¹ <http://pz.com/africa/Kenyas-female-voters>.

contestants. This was followed by another woman Nazlin Omar who in 2007 vied for presidency and emerged sixth in a field of nine candidates, representing 0.09% of the votes cast. In 2013 Martha Karua contested for the presidency but emerged sixth out of the eight candidates, and represented 0.36% of the votes cast. Characteristically, sidelining of women, in several African countries, is just 'good' and/or accepted political norm, a phenomenon that has been there since pre-colonial, and then colonial and post-colonial times. The colonial government created an environment that forced women to live in the villages, as men went out to look for jobs in the emerging urban areas, and eventually afford to pay the punitive hut tax and poll tax. This elevated patriarchy, as it created men as the sole bread winners, as women were psychologically converted as the powerless receivers of the largesse from their male counterparts. This further created dependency syndrome among women, and perpetual reliance on men. The ripple effect, this has strongly affected women and negatively weakened their participation in public discourses to date (Onsongo, 2005).

Another observable inclination in Africa is that most African governments have ridden on the state power and allowed men to oppress women (Parpart & Staudt, 1989). Undoubtedly, the Kenyan men have been part of the global patriarchy that suppresses women (Aubrey, 1997). Coupled with this, the late President Jomo Kenyatta's government did not stop the oppression of women after taking over power from the British colonizers. However, due to the Affirmative Action, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the first elected female president in Africa, while in Mauritius, Monique Ohsan Bellepeau and Malawi's Joyce Hilda Banda took over as presidents due to the resignation and death of the sitting male presidents respectively. Kenya's eleventh parliament, 2013-2017, had 16 women seats out of the available 290 positions that were available then. Further, no woman was elected a governor or senator in 2013. In 2017 general elections however, more women were elected at all levels except the presidency which has been male dominated since Kenyan independence. There were 23 women members of the National Assembly compared to 16 in 2013, three elected senators compared to one in 2013 and 96 members of County Assembly compared to 82 in 2013. Out of the 349 seats in the Kenyan parliament in 2020, there are 76 female members signifying 1/5 of the total. In the Senate, there are 21 women senators rather than 23, as stated in the law. From the statistics, Kenya's political system seems oppressive to women in comparison to other countries such as Rwanda, which have achieved the African Union gender parity rule of 50/50².

In the 2010 constitution, women had every reason to smile, when the constitution provided that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies would be of the same gender. The drafters of the 2010 constitution had in mind, that once promulgated, inequality that discriminates women will end. The 2/3 gender rule that seeks to empower women has on several occasions failed in parliament which is majorly male dominated against 47% women electorate. This goes against the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security, and Kenya Action Plan, which also calls for active women's representation and participation in decision-making and political processes.

Women have for several decades pushed for the implementation of gender equality. In 1997, Phoebe Asiyio, the then Karachuonyo MP to push Affirmative Action Motion was shot down by majority male MPs in vote. Several years later despite the Kenyan constitution 2010, giving guideline on 2/3 gender equality, attempts to fully implement the bill have failed. Although progress has been made in ensuring women to get more elective positions, there is more to be done to ensure that women do not suffer violence and

² <http://womendeliver.org/2018>.

marginalization when fighting for elective seats. Women through various organs such as the Common Women Agenda want 50:50 representations in all governance structure where for instance a formula is entrenched in law whereby the governor is a man, the deputy governor should be a woman. This article will discuss selected women politicians in contemporary and historical context factors that hinder women to occupy political seats such as president, deputy president, members of national assembly, senate, county assembly and other elective positions as compared to their male counterparts in the past and to date. The article will also discuss on what can be done to achieve gender parity in the country.

Evaluation of Elected Women Leaders in Historical and Contemporary Context

Kenyan first parliament assembled after independence in 1963, did not have many women MPs until the general elections of 1974 (Alidou, 2013). Women have contested elections both at national and local government levels. Against all the odds, some of the women have beaten men to become members of parliament, senators, governors, mayors and councilors in the defunct municipalities. Among the women politicians of high ranking at national and local level since independence include Grace Onyango, who became first female mayor after she replaced Mathias Ondiek as Kisumu mayor in 1965 (Sheldon, 2005). She was also the first female member of parliament in post-independence Kenya after being elected to represent Kisumu Town Constituency in 1969, but lost the seat in 1984. At one time, it was quite a huge challenge for her being a minority; she was minority in parliament standing against 158 male MPs. Despite the male dominance, she was known for her debates at one time questioning then powerful Minister of State, Mbiyu Koinange on why the government had arrested witchdoctor named “Kajiwe” for oathing people at the coast and not arrested those who had organized oathing in central province the year before (*Standard* newspaper, July 2018). Margaret Kenyatta was first elected deputy mayor of Nairobi in 1969 and mayor of Nairobi for two terms from 1970 to 1976, thus becoming the first African woman to become the mayor of Kenya’s capital city and the second African woman mayor in Kenya. Prior to that she had been elected councilor for Dagoretti ward in Nairobi in 1963 (Akyeampong & Gates, 2012). Julia Ojiambo was the first female assistant minister appointed in 1974-1979. She was elected as Member of Parliament for Funyula in 1974 after winning the general election. She became the second woman to be elected after Mrs. Grace Onyango of Kisumu Town. Phoebe Asiyo was elected to the Kenyan parliament for the Karachuonyo seat in 1980 and held the seat until 1983 when parliament was dissolved. She was reelected again to parliament in 1992 to 1997 during the multi-party era. She would be arguably one of the longest-serving women parliamentarians in Kenya (Asiyo, 2018). The late Chelagat Mutai contested the Eldoret North Parliamentary seat in 1973 at the age of 24. She defeated male opponents to become the youngest Member of Parliament at that time. She was jailed in 1976 for two and half years for charges of inciting squatters to invade sisal farm in Ziwa, Eldoret therefore losing her parliamentary seat. After release from prison in 1978, she served her second time in 1979, criticizing the government on her slow response to the famine Kenya was facing at that time. She fled from Kenya to Tanzania in 1981 after threats of being detained of allegation of false mileage claims which was part of the state to silence her. She returned back to Kenya after three years, but kept away from politics.

Martha Karua is former Member of Parliament of Gichugu Constituency, chairperson of NARC Kenya and also a 2013 Kenya presidential election contender. Martha Karua contested the Kirinyaga Gubernatorial elections against Anne Waiguru, who emerged the winner to become among the first ever three women governors. Martha did the unthinkable when she walked out of meeting in Kirinyaga as President Moi

addressed the gathering. This was a rare display of courage from woman when the late Moi was feared and none dared to cross his paths during the single party governance. Any defiance of Moi would lead to detention without trial or mysterious disappearance orchestrated by state operatives (Bosire, 2001). This plus many other political encounters with male counterparts within and outside parliament earned her the tag of the “only man” in the PNU government in 2008. Charity Ngilu was elected to represent Kitui Central Constituency seat in 1992 on a Democratic Party ticket. She ran for the presidency in the 1997 general election on a Social Democratic Party, finishing fifth behind the late Daniel arap Moi. In 2003 she was appointed Minister of Health. She was reelected a Member of Parliament for Kitui Central Constituency on 2008 and made Minister for Lands in 2013 by President Uhuru Kenyatta but later resigned on allegations of corruption. She vied for the Kitui governor’s seat and defeated a male contestant in 2017.

Why Gender Inequality in Women Representation

Legislation

Women have faced several hurdles as they fight for their space in the political scene. Although the 2017 general elections were a milestone in women representation, a lot needs to be done.

Three women were elected governors and seven others became deputy governors as result of being running mate to men candidates. In the Senate and National Assembly, women hold few leadership positions in committees, given assignments or other powerful positions. For instance, out of 27 committees in the National Assembly women chair only three and none in the Senate. The most senior position for women in the Senate is the majority whip.

In her contributions to the adoption of session paper No. 2 of 2006 on gender, equality and development, the then MP for Rongai and Assistant Minister of Gender and Social Services (2003-2007), Mrs. Alice Chelaite said that women account for more than half the population and comprise a large voting population yet they are under-represented in politics and other management positions (Hansard, October 19, 2006). Despite their numbers women face obstacles in ascending to political leadership in equal measures as their male counterparts. With the acknowledgement that women face challenges in ascending to political power, the constitution of Kenya adopted in 2010 that in part stated that no elective body should have more than two thirds of its members from the same gender. However, no mechanism was set for effecting the two thirds gender rule implementation. Several court rulings from 2012 have directed parliament to pass legislation to effect the gender rule.

Unfortunately, the push to have the gender equality met has not been realized with the male dominated national assembly on several occasions shooting down the constitution “two thirds rule”. Despite the court ruling that if it fails to pass the gender rule, parliament risks dissolution, the majority male members of parliament have successive shot down the two thirds gender motion. One of the main strategies used by male members of parliament is to abstain from parliament when the motion voting day comes, hence leading to lack of quorum. For bill to pass in Kenyan parliament there should be 233 members to vote in favor. In November 2018, attempting to pass the gender rule motion, the speaker of the Kenya National Assembly, Justin Muturi bowed in to pressure by the government to defer the vote since there were only 212 MPs out of the total 349. The majority male MPs have failed to vote for the bill despite spirited campaigns by their party leaders who include the President of Kenya and opposition leader Raila Odinga. The failure to pass for the gender bill motion despite the threat of parliament dissolution shows male defiance. Kenyan MPs enjoy good pay and

other benefits which should stir them to fight parliament dissolution. However fear of losing their perks the MPs have always put up a spirited force to shoot the motion down³.

Litany of Violence

Gender based election violence is key hindrance to women participation in leadership and politics. From the early 1960 to date majority women are kept off politics by violence orchestrated by men (Ayot, 1995). In shocking statistics, five in every 10 women in Kenya in the age bracket 15-49 have suffered one or another form of violence. Five in every 10 women of age bracket 15-24 believe and accept that men have a right to beat up a woman for one reason or the other⁴. Violence is meted on women by men who want to exercise dominance. Women are very vulnerable to physical harassment, insults and economic slavery from the male opponents, supporters and agents during the electioneering period. Threats discourage many women who would like to vie for different political seats in the country.

In a detailed analysis that appeared in the *Sunday Nation* newspaper, January 18, 1998, it was reported that women who vie for political seats were exposed to violence and ridicule for their gender and that the Kenyan political arena has some unseen signs that state thus: “men only”. As a consequence, women who have tended to overlook the sign have always paid a heavy price. It is not just the women contestants who have always been attacked; women voters too have constantly faced the music. During the post-election violence in early 2008, over 900 cases of sexual violence were meted on women on the basis of their ethnicity⁵. In 1978, the then MP for Funyula and the Assistant Minister, Julia Ojiambo, had a man grab her microphone from her hand while she was addressing a political rally. The man screamed at the top of his voice that a woman cannot lead men. If the assistant minister was a man, the story would have been different because the attacker would have been arrested and jailed (*Sunday Nation* newspaper, January 18, 1998). Julia Ojiambo almost lost her life in another political campaign violence when her opponent’s campaigners attacked her (Evelyn Kwamboka, *Kenya Times*, 1999).

Eunice Wambui, who was an aspirant in 2017 Embakasi South Constituency in Nairobi was attacked at the Mukuru kwa Reuben as she sensitized voters on the need to register as they awaited the general election. As she addressed in a women’s welfare conference at the University of Nairobi, the Nairobi women representative, Esther Passaris, was also harassed by male university students who were demanding her to give them Ksh 100,000. Reported cases rarely get the proper response from concerned authorities, mainly the police. The women candidates suffered emotional distress with false accusations of sexual immorality. This is witnessed on social media. In patriarchal society, any accused woman, whether true or false, of immorality is deemed not fit for leadership whereas men who are accused of the same are heroes and gain popularity. During the requiem mass of the late Kibra MP Ken Okoth, the Nairobi governor publicly said it is not evil for a man to have mistresses, and many politicians fail in that category. The largely male crowd cheered loudly and the story would be different if it was women politicians who were reported to be keeping misters. Former Nyeri County women representative (2013-2017) Priscilla Nyokabi said that women who try to climb the political ladder face violence and gender abuse⁶. Also a woman candidate’s mother was harassed in her business and her clients were chased away from her business. This harassment normally is to persuade the woman candidate to step down in favor of a man candidature. In some communities where woman’s female genital mutilation is rife, the

³ <https://fr.reuters.com/article/idUSKCNINX21A>.

⁴ <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/>.

⁵ <http://www.newsdeeply.com/womenandgirls/articles>.

⁶ <http://www.newdeely.com/womenandgirls/articles>.

woman candidate who are believed that they have not undergone the cut are called names and threatened to be cut. In general, women have been belittled by leading politicians on the biases of their gender.

Former Kenyan Prime Minister during his 2017 presidential elections was complaining women and asking them to abstain from having sex with their husbands to ensure their men vote⁷. This might seem to be a joke too far, but it reduces women to sexual objects and that they have power only through their sexuality, rather than using other means to convince their men to vote.

Political parties are the best foundation for women succeeding in getting into political leaders.

The violence is normally meted during party primaries where winning the primaries is a sure ticket to parliament. Prior to the August 2017 general elections, while fighting for the Orange Democratic Party (ODM) ticket, the current MP for Mbita Millie had her house razed down by fire by suspected arsonist due to her win at the primaries. She was lucky enough to survive death but her bodyguard was ran over and killed by a man driving the opponent's car. Women too have been reduced to cheerleaders and flower girls for leading male politicians in the country. As Kenyans approach 2020 elections women are reduced into cheerleaders and have grouped themselves into groups "Inua Mama"—Swahili meaning "uplift the woman". This team is supporting Deputy President William Ruto. While the other team embraces which seems to drift towards the former Prime Minister Raila Odinga and President of Kenya. It is unfortunate that these two women groups cannot be united for the sake of women. Men politicians know very well that united you stand, divided you fall. This puts women in a delicate situation in succeeding in grabbing the most senior political seats in the country.

High poverty levels in Kenya, makes it easy to bribe women especially in slums and rural areas by buying food and lesos for them to vote for male candidates. While men are given huge sums of money, women are enticed to vote for men through culture of handouts. Though not all women can agree to this, the old saying that women are their worst enemies comes to play in Kenya. Njoki Chege, director of Innovation Center at Aga Khan University, Graduate School of Media and Communications, writing in the *Daily Nation* newspaper, quotes a research in the 2018 issue of *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, which highlights that women experience incivility from fellow women than men. This reinforces the notion that women are their worst enemies. She explains the "queen bee syndrome" a derogatory term which was first coined by scholars G. L. Staines and C. Tavis in 1974 to refer women in senior positions dissociating themselves from their gender and undermining the rise of younger females⁸. In normal business environment this "queen bee syndrome" views the young women as rivals and does not help them climb the ladder in the company instead preferring male over female employee. It hinders career growth in companies for women. In Kenyan political scene it is witnessed when women voters prefer male candidates than female.

Culture

In most African traditions men are the head and women are expected to be housewives taking care of the children and husband. Whereas the constitution has continued to give women leadership roles, the mindset of both women and most men is not transformed. Some women have accepted that men have superior role over them. In his study Kuria (2003) interrogated several women on equality issues and the general consensus was that it would be quite impossible to achieve gender equality. One of the interviewees said:

⁷ <https://qz.com/africa/kenyas-female-voters-could-sway-the-pre>.

⁸ <https://www.nation.co.ke/oped/opinion/>.

In the African context and I think it is also biblical, a man is always the head of the family ...I have never believed that I could be equal to a man just because of my qualifications. In an ideal biblical setting, I think this can be a case of a man being paid more even if we are doing the same job. Spiritually it goes back to the Bible... man is supposed to be the head of the family. (Kuria, 2003, p. 153)

Though not all women have resorted to fate that men are the head of the family hence political leadership, culture takes precedence during general election. Women have never had it easy in political representation throughout Kenyan history. Isaiah Gwengi (*Standard* newspaper, 2013) stated that it is almost impossible to win confidence of men electorate to vote for women in a community where it is believed it is only men who were born to lead. Asiyu (2018) commented that she had to get a boost from the influential Luo Council of Elders, who deliberated on her vying for the parliamentary seat for two days with the backing of the late Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. She had to overcome various forms of devastating despair. In 1960, Asiyu together with Priscilla Abwao was nominated MP, having pushed for 50-50 representation in parliament.

Many Kenyan men and some women cannot imagine being led by a woman as president. In 2012 when Kenyans were interviewed on their choice of a president a woman candidate Martha Karua, most men and some women confidently said they cannot imagine Kenya having a woman President. Karua, came distant last after other male presidential contenders, Raila Odinga, Uhuru Kenyatta, Musalia Mudavadi, William Ruto and Peter Keneth (*Daily Nation*, October 1, 2012). The late Bomet County governor Joyce Laboso indicated that insults have been thrown at her especially that she is Kipsigis, but married to Luo, Edwin Abonyo. These are two different ethnic neighbor communities which on several occasions have had hostilities and fights along the borders. Prior to the 2017 general elections, majority Kipsigis and the larger Rift Valley were supporting Jubilee political party, while Luos were in the National Super Alliance (NASA) coalition. The story would be different if Edwin was vying governor seat in his native Kisumu home. There would be no insults on the pretext that he is married to a woman from different ethnic community. Women face insults during political campaign period and also within the precincts of parliament where laws are made. In case a woman is single and has children she is baptized as prostitute (Bellamy, 2015). During campaigns to become MP for the then larger Kathiani Constituency, which comprised Athi River Town, Wavinya Ndeti had endured barrage of criticism from male candidates and supporters on why she married a Nigerian man. To appease the male supporters and opponents she knowingly answered she was available but no local man approached her. Braden (1996) explained that, if you are married and in politics the culture accused the woman of neglecting the husband, if you are widowed, you killed him, if you are divorced you did not keep him, if you are single you couldn't get a husband anyway.

The male chauvinists have also criticized women politicians' appearance and body sizes. In December 2016, in a response to MP for Mbita, Millie Odhiambo had allegedly abused President Uhuru; Gatundu MP Moses Kuria is reported to have abused the Mbita MP on social media that went viral. Moses Kuria threatened to insert broken glass in her private parts if she set foot in parliament. Sullivan and Meek (2012) pointed out those women are viewed in terms of their physical and personality traits which are not the case with men candidates. Again male dominance was at play because it makes no sense to issue threats concerning one's gender.

Women find it hard to balance between their political and family responsibilities because in African context they are the homemakers. House-Midamba (1990b) pointed that the society views that women are unable to reconcile the responsibilities of being a mother, wife and politician. It's either you choose to be a

mother not a politician. In August 2019, A Kenyan Member of Parliament, Zuleikha Hassan who had brought her five-month-old baby to parliament due to emergencies at home was forced to leave parliament and told to come back to parliament without the baby. Parliament session was cut short for 15 minutes as the sergeant at arms escorted the MP out of parliament. The acting speaker of parliament agreed it is good to take care of the baby, but parliament was not the place for it. This incident happening coincided with the World Breastfeeding Week. Other male MPs termed the Zuleikha's action gross misconduct since the baby was a stranger in parliament⁹. This is in sharp contrast to both Australian Senator Larissa Waters who become the first politician to breastfeed her two-month-old daughter Alia Joy in the nation's parliament and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern who made history being the first female world leader to bring an infant to the united meeting in New York. Such ugly incidents as those witnessed in Kenyan parliament scare off women to go for political seats. Women are disadvantaged because at times political meetings and timing can be done at odd hours which can be inconveniencing between family and political roles. Some women political aspirants have to get blessings to vie for the political seat from male elders or family members. They have to seek permission because women once married according to many African traditions, once dowry is paid, are property of the husband.

Some religious organizations have contributed to women discrimination for political leadership. Some African instituted churches and main stream churches do not allow women into top church leadership. For instance, the Anglican church in Kenya and the African inland church among many others have not put mechanism that can allow women become bishops. The Roman Catholic church has gone to the extra for not even allowing women to serve as priests. This serves further to add to the already perceived patriarchal outlook on women in Kenya. Women being locked out of church leadership cement men chauvinism in the political arena. Some early church fathers openly showed the hatred and discrimination of women in their statements that demean women leadership abilities. St. Augustine comments:

Woman does not possess the image of God in herself but only when taken together with the male who is her head, so that the whole substance is one image. But when she is assigned the role as helpmate, a function that pertains to her alone, then she is not the image of God. But as far as the man is concerned, he is by himself alone the image of God just as fully and completely as when he and the woman are joined together into one. [Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo Regius (354-430), *On the Trinity*]

St. Augustine did not value women and to him they are insubordinate to men. Removing the *Imago Dei* (image of God) from women means they are less intelligent, and cannot think on their own. It locks out women for leadership position because they can't think and influence the electorate. For Origen, another church father, he believed that what women speak in public is of no value. He dismisses the believe that women can do good things on their own¹⁰.

Response to Women Political Representation

Akawa and Gawanas (2014) said that for any government to ensure gender equality is met measures have to be put in place and be implemented. Gender equality is not ornamental in the constitution, but should yield tangible results. The Kenyan government should implement the law on violence against women during

⁹ <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke>.

¹⁰ <http://valerietarico.com/mysogynistquoteschurchfathers>.

electioneering period. In the past there has been lower women turning out during voting and candidates vying for political seats because of violence. There should be a special police unit armed with the latest technology to track down those who abuse women politicians and incite voters through the social media. Many women politicians have suffered in silence when their marriages, personality and social life are discussed all over the media. The government should also gather intelligence prior to avoid politician attacks on women and their supporters be it male or female.

The Kenya Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA-Kenya) has complained of the authorities not doing enough to protect candidates and their supporters. The laxity by the authorities has served as a catalyst for violence against women candidates. To minimize violence meted on women, Josephine Mong'are chairperson of Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) stated that they launched a toll-free SMS for victims called Sema Usikike (Speak and Be Heard) making it easier for victims of political violence to report the type of violence and the location. FIDA will then take up the matter with the police and follow up to logical conclusion. Affirmative action implementation should be effected immediately. Kenya is not the first country to have gender inequality. Simon Lesrima, MP for Samburu West (2003-2007), noted that, men as observed in other developed countries such as Sweden always want to have the upper hand. Such countries have faced challenges but have developed affirmative action (Hansard, October 19, 2006). Were it not for affirmative action, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf would not have become the president of Liberia. Male MPs should take up challenge in parliament and pass the two thirds gender rule considering that the women are their sisters, aunts, mothers, daughters, wives and girlfriends. Women should be allowed to separate voting queues during the general elections and party primaries to avoid cases of violence and insults. This would prevent men from intimidating, coercing or abusing women during the vote because such acts take place pre-, during and post-election period. If women were given separate queues, it encourages participation in the women voting to root for one of their own. The late Bomet Governor Joyce Laboso was determined that even harassment and intimidation from male political opponents would not deter her from aspiring and achieving her goals to become both MP and governor. Women should not be afraid to vie for elective positions. Former Nyeri woman representative Priscilla Nyokabi was even more blunt that, women have to fight it out with men to occupy their rightful political space rather than waiting to be given on silver platter. This will earn women even more respect. When she vied for the 1997 presidential polls and was interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times*, Charity Ngilu, who is among the three elected governor in 2017 polls was more categorical that she is qualified like those men in the contest because as committed and honest person, all women and men should realize that political seats are not a reserve for men but which they should fight for.

At least 80 percent of Kenya's population is made up of people aged 35 and below. According to Kenya's demographics, the country boasts of the most youthful voters in the East African region. More than half of the 19 million registered voters in Kenya are considered youth and their participation in the August 8 general elections, 2017 was crucial. The Kenyan women candidates should be creative to appeal to the youthful voters. They can be created by decorating their campaign posters with what appeals to the youth, graffiti on public transport known as matatu/manyaga. In the run-up to the 2013 elections Rachel Shebesh won the woman representative seat by rebranding herself as "Manzi wa Nai" (Girl from Nairobi). Other women politicians such as Bernadette Wangui Ng'ang'a, the nominate member of Nairobi County Assembly, campaigned with the slogan "Ms B Tosha" (Miss B is enough), Millicent Omanga with the slogan "Supa na Works" (Beautiful

Woman who Works). This was an indication enough that women have what it takes to win and occupy elective seats. Women should not cry foul when they can give their male counterpart a run of their money in wooing the youthful electorate.

In view of this, it is worthwhile to appreciate that knowledge is power; and as the old adage goes: 'if you educate a man, you educate one person; but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation'. Sadly, there are still pockets of communities in Kenya who still do not believe in the education of women, but marry them at an early age. Rather, women should be given equal opportunities by the community to go to school. Jain and Sen (2005) believed that if daughters are taken to school, they would get good jobs and will eventually be independent from men and thereafter have a good life. The Kenyan First Lady, Margaret Kenyatta, acknowledged that to attain gender equality the girl child should be empowered. She stated that empowering the girl with skills and knowledge is the greatest way to secure gender equality¹¹.

Increased civic education and advocacy for women enhance female participation in political scene. Prior to the 2017 general elections, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) partnered with both the national and county governments to educate women on obstacles that hinder them from ascending to political power. The program was held in Taita Taveta County and bore fruits when one of the beneficiaries of the partnership program was elected a Taita Taveta County woman representative. The woman representative Ms. Lydia Haika was a first-time contender of any elective post. Such initiatives of advocacy and training empower women and highlight the need of inclusivity. The training in Taita Taveta saw a behavioral change where traditionally men would not imagine women in political leadership.

Political parties which form a platform for women attaining elective posts should always adhere to the constitution which emphasizes on the two thirds gender rule. Most political parties' primary elections are marred by violence and women who seem weak and vulnerable to violence do not stand a chance of clinching the party tickets. In some places getting party ticket is as good as having set one foot in parliament or county assembly. This intensifies the quest to have party ticket. Women should not be discriminated against and their rights should be guarded as per the Maputo Protocol, which advocates for full women rights to take part in political process, social and political equality with men¹². Some political parties do not have gender parity and women are hapless when it comes to political parties and should not be accused for not participating in policies. In the Kenya African National Union (KANU) era during the infamous mlolongo (queuing) to elect candidate for party primaries, women couldn't withstand because it was survival for the fittest to queue and get the best candidate. It left only men getting the much treasure party ticket those days when KANU was the only political party to elective seat.

Women who are senior in political positions should discipline and mentor young women. Mentorship encourages personal and professional growth. In mentoring, the senior women in politics will motivate the younger generation women to vie for high political seats. The younger women politicians will strive to achieve goals or even higher than those set by their mentors. An inspirational entrepreneur, Oprah Winfrey stated, "A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself". The younger women will see hope of becoming great politicians in Kenya. In mentoring the younger women are given room to create opportunities themselves. Mentorship develops leadership abilities that are needed for growth. In her article in the *Saturday*

¹¹ <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/>.

¹² <http://issafrica.org/iss/Kenya>.

Nation, February 22, 2022, Njoki Chege, director of Innovation Center at Aga Khan University, Graduate School of Media and Communications says that women need to stick together and mentor each other to success and quotes a research done by Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts which found out that female mentorship encouraged a sense of belonging, motivation and confidence among female workforce. Female mentorships are therefore important in achieving gender balance¹³.

Conclusions

The article sets out to show the peripheral role given to women in politics in Kenya despite their numerical strengths that are undermined by patriarchy. Political leadership determines the future development of any nation. Despite the patriarchal society that we live in, and being always biased against women leadership, there is still so much for women to do in the governance of the nation. Certainly, women have great skills and ability to lead the nation to greater heights of prosperity. They therefore need to fight for their rightful position, a position that is God given and enshrined in the constitution of the Republic of Kenya. Women must fight for their political space to deliver their dreams in serving the county at both national and county levels. Likewise, men and women in Kenya must uphold the rights and privileges for all so as to guarantee a better Kenya, and for posterity.

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¹³ <https://www.nation.co.ke/oped/opinion/>.

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