



Sudanese women balancing the delicate political act

By Jane Godia

For Sudanese women, going to the ballot box for the first time comes with many challenges and opportunities. While it's appreciated that Sudanese women are going into the election platform with a few advantages that include 25 per cent appropriation for women and 15 per cent for political parties, the women also stand a chance of vying in the 60 per cent appropriation that includes men. However, the issue of whether the women are ready for what comes with political elections remains a matter that needs to be addressed.

It must be remembered that even though many women were given political appointments and nominations in 2005 as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, none of them vied for any seat. And the last time elections were held in Sudan was in 1983 and even then women were neither candidates nor were they voters.

Politics, it must be clearly remembered is a dirty game that often comes accompanied with violence and corruption. For the Sudanese women it must be made clear that political contest is not for the faint hearted.

Women are ripe

However, women leaders from across the Eastern Africa and Great Lakes region believe that the Sudanese women are ripe for politics and all that they need is training on all that appertains to politics, but they must approach the issues with a common agenda.

According to Ms Lucie Luguga, UNIFEM's country Director in South Sudan and one of the key organisers to the Conference for Southern Sudanese Women on Political Parties to Develop a Women's Common Agenda for Elections, the time for Sudanese women in elections is now.

Says Luguga: "If you say the women are not ready they will never be ready. For most of them it will be their first time and we must appreciate that the first is always challenging for anyone."

But Ms Marie Immaculee Ingabire from Rwanda says that the excitement engulfing Sudan is a clear indication that the women are interested in the elections. However, she says the women are still lost as to what entails a common agenda. "The women need to understand what is the difference between political parties and women's movement," Ms Ingabire reiterates, adding, "Even though they are very few women in the executive committees of political parties, they must



YES WE CAN! Celebrating the launch of women's common political agenda in Juba as the clock ticks towards general elections. -Photo Wambui Gicheru

read the manifesto and influence it to be gender sensitive."

But Hon Mrs Rose Waruhiu, a political leader from Kenya sees it as a new beginning for South Sudanese women who must use the available opportunities to salvage their country if they start on a right footing.

"The opportunity is there, they only have to be ready to use it, Mrs Waruhiu, advises. "From 15 per cent of the party list, they must agree on what they are being given."

The same applies for the 25 per cent women's appropriation list which must be open. They must ensure there are enough women's names and they must also be involved.

Enough time

According to Hon Dr Miria Matembe, a politician from Uganda, this conference was a stepping stone for women to get into the process and they have enough time to prepare themselves. "Within eight months the women should influence the parties' with the women's agenda to influence their party's agenda to be incorporated in the political manifesto."

While it's going to be a tough call, women have to place themselves strategically. Says Hon Matembe: "If women place themselves strategically they can be

able to influence the process with the three opportunities."

The three opportunities which the women have out of the electoral law are; the 60 per cent which is open for anyone who wants to go for competitive politics, the 15 per cent through the party list and the 25 per cent affirmative action which is enshrined in the CPA as the women's appropriation.

However, these three opportunities can be a constraint in that because of the 25 per cent appropriation women may be denied the opportunity to contest for the 60 per cent because when they want to seek nominations they are likely to be told to stop being greedy as they have their own seats.

Mrs Waruhiu says: "They must identify the gaps to help them utilize the numbers. They need to have organization and capacity to aim higher, sit together as women and say 'this is what we have.'"

Concurring with Mrs Waruhiu and Ms Ingabire, Hon Matembe says women have to be clear on their agenda on how they want the list made up.

As they balance a delicate act in new frontiers, the women of South Sudan will need all the help they can get from various quarters to enable them the women's agenda forward. Even as they embrace the current

political atmosphere, the women need general sensitization and mobilization on importance of women's participation in politics.

Women must be trained on skills of political participation such as fund raising, organizing campaigning, public speaking and how to handle the media among other issues. Donor organizations must also come to the support of Sudanese women and organise a training programme for women who will engage in political campaigns.

Clarion call

However, as Ms Luguga of UNIFEM intimates, the conference was just the beginning of getting the women on track and once they own the process as theirs, it will be disseminated to other groups. "Building the capacity of women to fully participate in the political process is paramount but it will be more encouraging if the women themselves came out first to express their desire training", says Luguga, adding, "UNIFEM will look for partnership with other organizations to build the women's capacity."

And as the clock ticks to the elections, the clarion call is for Sudanese women to assert themselves in the forthcoming polls.



POLITICAL GOODWILL: Minister for Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs, Hon Agnes Kwaje Lasuba (second left seated) took time to pose with delegates after officially opening the conference for Southern Sudan Women in Political Parties to Develop a Women's Common Agenda for 2010 Elections.

Opportunities and challenges on the ground

By Ruth Omukhango

While general elections pose an opportunity to usher in new government, for women aspirants in South Sudan to participate in the upcoming polls, only eight months away, the challenges are myriad.

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005 provided more democratic space for women guaranteeing 25 per cent Affirmative Action therefore seeing many women ascend into leadership positions through political appointments.

The upcoming General Elections to be held in April 2010 will provide an opportunity for Sudanese women to battle out with their male counterparts for political representation at the all levels of leadership.

Despite the anxiety, for South Sudan, which has been at war for more than 20 years now therefore destroying all the infrastructure of development, this remains an uphill task for women who face social, economic and cultural barriers.

At the just concluded Conference on Conference for South Sudan Women in Political parties to develop Women's Common Agenda for the Elections held in Juba organized by various donor agencies, participants posed their challenges for women in a post conflict environment

Participants at the conference expressed reservations about the accounting for the majority in numbers, the situation for women require major interventions because there are massive gender imbalances.

It was evident that despite the provision of the quota system, the challenge was for women to build capacity into understanding

the functionality of the process in order to bring meaningful change.

"women have to own the 25 per cent quota system, shape its implementation and ensure that it is meaningfully enforced so that it can have an impact on the government, laws, policies and programs of government and other political parties," says Miria Matembe, former member of Parliament in Uganda

Woman candidates also have an opportunity to harness expand their representation opportunity that lies in the 15 per cent party nomination as well as 60 per cent geographical constituent vote.

Despite the opportunities, for women candidates challenges lay in the fact that women lack education. In a post conflict country like South Sudan, it is evident that many women have not had an opportunity to go school.

For those in leadership positions, there is a needed to further education in order to understand and interpret any policy documents like the National Electoral Act correctly.

Participants at the conference expressed their concerns in understanding their intricacies about the Act itself as well as their party manifestos based on the fact that most of them have only basic education.

"Our children don't go to school, we understand its value (education) but to what degree is it a priority when we can't even put food on the table?" confirms Miriam Lucy, a vegetable vender on the street.

The situation for most women has been further complicated by the fact that many of their men died during the war fueling an increase in the number of female headed homes and orphans.

"During the war, the difficulties mainly revolved around staying alive, now the war

is over and with it we find ourselves faced by situations we never or were never prepared for," says Lucy Kiha, chairlady of the Women's Union in Torit - Eastern Equatorial State.

Cultural practices that have been dominated by the patriarchal society have also continued to become an impediment to women's empowerment and participation in politics.

Women have not been empowered to support their own fellow women who are willing to stand in leadership positions.

According to Tereza John, an aspirant from Wau County in Bar El Ghazel State, men would not allow women to rally behind other women but rather support men vying for the same positions.

"Most women will not be able to attend campaigns because they will not be allowed by their husband - they are advised to attend to other home chores which are considered important to the family." Says Tereza.

With all challenges at hand, the media will be required to play a critical role in shaping the agendas of people.

Although participants allied their fears that with the remaining short time left to voter registration in October this year, the public will not have received any civic education while other people do not have any form of identification.

The onus will be on the National Electoral Commission in conjunction with the media to sensitize the people of South Sudan on the electoral process but most importantly the women candidates to negotiate with their parties for their inclusion and active participation

Consequently, Sudan remains a struggling democracy using very infant structures of democracy to find its place in an international community that has made tremendous steps ahead.

— An AWC Feature

Gender Minister tips on how to overcome barriers

By Jane Godia

As Sudanese women gear up for the 2010 general elections many barriers stand in the way, further hindering women's active involvement in politics. Speaking at the conference of South Sudan women in political parties to develop a women's common agenda for elections, the Minister for Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs Hon. Agnes Kwaje Lasuba said that a number of issues blocked women from active involvement in political life. These constraints include:

1 Stereotypical traditions that prevent the girl child from going to school, which has resulted in high illiteracy among women compared to men.

2 Early marriages involving girls between 10-14 years deny them the chance to complete schooling and acquire skills necessary for developing careers.

3 Comparing women who are in politics to prostitutes discourages many women from getting involved or participating in politics and developing their full potential.

4 Discrimination against women prevents them from participating on equal terms with men not only in politics but also in social-economic development.

Hon. Lasuba asked women to be aware of the obstacles before them that have the potential to slow their progress in politics, the public and private sectors. Her advice being: "Concrete measures should be taken at all levels of government to promote women's participation and to inform the public of all the legal provisions which establish and define the principles of equality between men and women."

She added that the road to achieving the third millennium development goal of gender equality must be paved with political goodwill from the government as well as commitment and unity of purpose from women in all the political parties of Southern Sudan

The Minister called on the government and political parties to eradicate prejudices, discourage customs that hinder women's progress and all other negative social practices which are intended to make women feel inferior.

"To fight discrimination and labeling of women as inferior, women in South Sudan must unite and lobby seriously to pressurize the government of the Republic of the Sudan to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW)."

The UN general assembly adopted and opened CEDAW for signature, ratification and accession in December 1979.

Continued on page 4

Gaps in Electoral Law threaten to derail women's ambitions

By Ruth Omukhango

With only eight months left for the Sudanese population to elect a new government, the yawning gaps in the National Electoral Act are undermining the political fortunes of women in South Sudan.

At a recent conference to design and develop a common agenda for women in political parties ahead of the April 2010 elections, women expressed their misgivings about the complexity of the National Electoral Act given the real constraints they face in the remaining time to the elections. The elections had earlier been scheduled for February 2010.

Their concern is that these factors will undermine their chances at increasing women's representation in the race for public office because the Act limits their participation both as candidates as well as voters.

Signing of Peace Agreement

Despite its complexity, the Act passed by the National Assembly on 7th July, 2008 and signed by the President Omar Al Bashir on 14th July, 2008 is the vehicle that will take the Sudanese people into their first ever General Elections since the cessation of war between the north and south in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan. The last time a General Election took place was nearly 24 years ago.

According to Rabab Baldo, UNIFEM Khartoum's Programme Specialist for Gender Equality, Good Governance, Democracy and Transformation, although the Act provides a basic legal framework for conducting the elections in each state in Sudan matters of complexity have arisen during a critical

interpretation of the implications from a gender perspective.

Major issues exist in the 25 per cent Affirmative Action clause which advocates for women's proportional representation because it presents some limitations for independent women candidates. This percentage is merely restricted to women nominated by political parties. Independent women candidates do not qualify.

Selection strategy

"This will require women to have bargaining power to negotiate with their individual parties in order to identify who will be on the women's list," says Baldo.

Without clear criteria on the selection strategy for the women's list, Baldo's concern is legitimate in calling for further dialogue with the individual parties prior to the preparation of the list.

The same challenge also lies within the 15 per cent window for party nominations which constitutes members elected on the basis of proportional representation at the State level from separate and closed lists.

However, during the conference, one of the critical concerns raised was the lack of capacity for women to negotiate with their counterparts in their various political parties. Women are equally concerned about the lack of understanding of their party policies and the contents of the party manifesto, leaving them at the mercy of mainly male party leaders to decide their fate.

The complexities of the voter registration exercise also pose limitations for both women and youth. For Instance, Section 22 which states that no voter shall be eligible to participate in the election or referendum unless she/he was registered three months before the date of elections or referendum,

will exclude a huge swathe of potential voters who might have voted for women.

The same section stipulates that during registration, voters must possess personal identification documents or certificates authenticated from the People's Committee at the locality or the native or traditional administrative authority.

However, in a country that has been in conflict for so many years and in the absence of civic education, many people require time to acquire these vital documents - effectively shutting them out of the voter registration window period.

"Our people are yet to be sensitized about the elections even as they settle down in order to get acquire the relevant documentation needed to register," says Anisia Kato Achieng, Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Secretary for Political Mobilization in Eastern Equatorial State.

Positions of leadership

The greatest challenge falls on the qualifications which potential candidates must fulfill in order to contest for any seat. According to Section 52 which stipulates that the candidates must be literate could be a key obstacle for some potential women candidates - given that the South Sudanese were robbed of the chance of an education during nearly two decades of armed conflict in the region. Indeed, conference delegations raised the issue of literacy as one of challenges facing women in South Sudan leading to their exclusion from ascending positions of leadership.

"Since most of us have been appointed through Affirmative Action, this will put off many women aspirants and there is need for a mechanism to incorporate everyone," says Adak Costa, member of the Legislative

Assembly from the Lake State," she adds, "The only reason I am a member of the Legislative Assembly is because I went to school."

The issue nomination fees to be paid by prospective candidates from the party list as well as the women's list as indicated in Section 56 of the Act will also pose a challenge for women candidates many of whom do not have the required fees due to their lowly economic status.

Gender sensitive budget

There is no special fee or fees waiver for women candidates in the 25 per cent proportional representation category. As a matter of concern, women called for a gender sensitive budget within the political parties to assist women during the nomination as well as during the campaign period.

As echoed by Tereza John, a member of the Legislative Assembly in Western Bar El Ghazel State, there was need for funds to assist women in the whole election process and especially during the campaigns and mobilization activities.

Another sensitive matter concerns the protection of candidates as stipulated in Section 65 of the Act. During the electoral campaign period, every public officer or public authority is expected to provide equal treatment for all candidates and political parties, in an impartial manner and without favor to any of them in order to guarantee the principle of equal opportunities between them.

However, the clause is said to be too generalised and silent on concerns regarding women. It does not provide adequate gender sensitive measures to protect women candidates against acts of insecurity or violence specifically directed against them.

— An AWC Feature



BARGAINING POWER: Women aspirants discuss how they can overcome gaps in the law to achieve great numbers in the coming elections.
-Photo Wambui Gicheru

Sudanese polls to be graft-free

By Odhiambo Orlale

Women candidates in the forth-coming Sudanese elections will be supported to promote and embrace anti corruption practices.

The assurance was given by the chief executive of the South Sudan Anti-Corruption Commission, Dr Pauline Riak, who identified the high cost of running a campaign as a major disadvantage that most women candidates for the parliamentary, gubernatorial and county seats will face.

Dr Riak said: "We have a country that is just coming out of two decades of war and has always traditionally upheld integrity by not stealing or telling lies. Our society also regards women as not being corrupt."

The print and broadcast media will also be used by the Commission to promote anti-graft messages during civic education and the campaigns.

But in the same breadth, Dr Riak acknowledges that the historic polls slated for next February will incur a huge financial burden on the candidates, especially the female ones who are less endowed and politically exposed to the demands and intrigues of carrying out an election campaign.

However, the anti-graft boss is happy that the electoral law is very specific about

the punitive action that will be taken against any political party and/or its supporters and candidates found engaging in corruption.

"What we in the Anti-Corruption Commission want is to work closely with the civil society, the media and women leaders and candidates to ensure that we are each others' keepers by not condoning graft," maintains Dr Riak, who has held the post since it was created in July 2006.

So far the official is proud of her record and reveals that the Commission has successfully investigated and filed a damning report against "some big fish". The victims included a former Finance Minister, who was later forced to step aside and allow further investigations and legal action to be taken against him by the relevant authorities, together with some under secretaries.

Her team of professionals works without fear or favour, thanks to the political goodwill right from Vice-President of Sudan, Mr Salva Kiir, who doubles as the President of South Sudan, as per the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2005.

To ensure that the polls are graft free, the Commission is working closely with the National Elections Council to ensure that all candidates sign wealth declaration forms to promote transparency and accountability in the campaigns.

"Our Commission will ask all the candidates to explain where they got their

wealth from. Women are disadvantaged in South Sudan because our society does not allow women, who are the majority despite what the recent census says, to own property," Dr Riak says.

She notes that women candidates are not there to compete with their male counterparts, but for them to work together to develop the country. "We want to work together to develop our nation that has just come out of civil war and is currently enjoying relative peace. We are looking forward to the polls to help us further consolidate our nation."

But the Commission will be on the look out to "identify and deal firmly with parties and/or candidates who are conspicuously rich", and found to be interfering with the electoral process through corruption.

The Electoral Law bars any party and/or candidate from receiving funds from abroad. It has a provision for the Government to set aside funds for parties and candidates to run their campaigns.

Dr Riak, who is a former lecturer at Kenyatta University in Kenya, identifies other major challenges facing women candidates as high illiteracy rates, how to access campaign funds and capacity building to learn the electoral process and system

"Security is also another major concern to the women candidates and we must all be very sensitive about it," the official warns.



DR PAULINE RIAK: Chief Executive of the Anti-Corruption Commission

Minister tips on how to overcome barriers

from page 2

Hon. Lasuba reiterated that women's participation corrects imbalances and promotes good governance.

"Political parties should be made aware of the importance of women's participation because it is an integral part of the democratisation process." She added, "the participation of women in politics should be established as one of the main principles of democracy."

All southern political parties are required by the Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan (ICSS) 2005 to adopt the affirmative action principle of 25% representation of women in their respective parties. According to Hon Lasuba, this stipulation is not always adhered to:

"This is a big challenge to all men and women particularly those working to promote the rights of women. In order for women to succeed and obtain big numbers in the 2010 elections they must promote networking among women to support each other"

She emphasised that women must mobilize and support one another to register and vote for women. The Minister re-affirmed the need for capacity building and called for training of women in communication, public speaking, negotiating skills, and lobbying strategies as well as effective and efficient management of public affairs. Women also need funds for campaign and lobbying, and her advice to them is that they must never overlook the issues of fundraising and resource mobilisation because they cannot be effective in the political game without financial support.

The minister concluded with a call to women that they must compete to win in both geographical constituencies and the political list.

Her parting shot: "The women's list of 25% is only for women and whoever comes in remains a woman and is one of us."

Election Commission grapples with a strategy for handling logistics and security

By Jane Godia

As the largest country in Africa, Sudan's gigantic size remains a big challenge for election officials. The sheer size is also a source of worry for women candidates especially whether or not the election centres will be convenient for voters, the majority of whom are female.

With the elections scheduled for 2010, South Sudan women have raised the issue of whether or not the single voting day will be convenient for this massive country. However, Mrs Jersa Kide Barsaba, a member of the South Sudan Elections Commission, there are many centres that have been created for voting and voter registration.

Says Barsaba: "We will have cars transporting people to polling stations and chiefs will help facilitate how the electorate will get there." She adds: "If voting is not finished within a day, the Commission can make a decision to extend voting."

At the Conference for South Sudan Women in Political Parties to Develop Women's Common Agenda for Elections, other than the vast landscape, the issue of insecurity kept cropping up and women candidates wanted assurances on security particularly in the south where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels from Uganda had infiltrated the country.

"The LRA is a security issue which must be dealt with by the Government of South



JERSA BARSABA: Member of National Elections Commission. -Photo Wambui Gicheru

Sudan. There will be security wings in all voting stations along the borders of Uganda and Sudan or Sudan and Zaire to minimise the question of insecurity," says Barsaba.

While the question of funds required for one to qualify for vying in a particular position was raised, most women said they were unable to raise money as candidates for positions such as presidency in Sudan and South Sudan as well as governorship.

"These positions demand a lot of money and most women cannot afford to raise the requisite amounts. For women this leaves only the Legislative Assembly seats which require 100 Sudanese Pounds and women can afford to raise this," says Barsaba.

She adds: "Where women feel that the money being asked for is too high then they

should ask donor agencies among other organisations through their political parties to assist them."

The complicated voting system, so far the toughest in the world where each voter will have to cast a ballot 12 times has also been an issue of concern and the worry is that the illiterate, majority of whom are women, might be challenged with the electoral system. According to Barsaba, illiterate voters must be educated before voting day especially by political parties. The National Elections Commission tied to a timetable to train those who will work in the election processes as well as the support staff.

"We will also train staff who will go to the very states to train voters," she adds.

Already a programme on voter education is in place and is being carried out in conjunction with UNIFEM. "We are already training 10 women from all the States to go and train other women on voting challenges."

But as the clock ticks towards the election voting day, the problem of money for women candidates refuses to go away. Says Barsaba: "The budgeted money for the elections has not been sent. The little money in the coffers is barely enough for salaries. There are not enough cars and we are hoping that United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will offer vehicles."

She adds: "There are no offices allocated for the South Sudan Elections Commission, which operates from the premises of the Local Government Board."

Paramount Chief Adelina Tito

The Iron Lady to whom men bow

By Ruth Omukhango

At 6.30 am in Torit County of Eastern Equatoria of South Sudan, everything is quiet with almost all homesteads in a slumber. But in one homestead, it is hectic business with human beings moving from one point to another.

Unlike in other homes, small children are already awake, sipping tea as they tease each other. Next to them are three men conserving intimately in their mother tongue, ostensibly waiting to be assigned their days work.

In their hands were shovels, indicating they were going to engage in some construction work.

Two women welcome and request us to make ourselves comfortable in small thatched house. Before long, a light built woman emerges still wearing her brown night gown and speaking softly to someone over her mobile phone. We pass her as one of the workers or just another family member. But as she introduces herself, we are left tongue tied: she is the paramount chief of Eastern Equatoria State of South Sudan.

"Meet Adeline Tito, the principal chief of this State," she says, exuding pride and confidence. This is the Adelina, the woman who holds sway over this extensive region.

Unlike many women, Adelina exhibits confidence and authority but laced with a lot of humility. Living in a country that has experienced conflict for many years and now grappling with a myriad of problems, Tito's agenda is loaded. It is like she and her people are racing against time to catch-up on things they missed in the past two decades taking away by the conflict. They have had to work hard and consolidated any small gains they make.

Tito's past seems to help her go around many of these challenges with a lot of ease. A widow and a mother of two sons, she has managed to overcome cultural barriers and challenges of conflict to rise through the ranks, becoming the only the female Paramount Chief of Eastern Equatorial State. She is in-charge of 397 chiefs, all male.

Born 50 years ago in Lopa Country of Torit, she was privileged to come from a background of royalty where her grandfather was a rainmaker chief.

Her family was determined to see her get good education, by first taking her to Torit Primary School. But the language of instruction being Arabic, she found it difficult to catch-up since she was not from an Arab speaking community. Her difficult studies were brought to an abrupt end when the war-broke out in 1955. Her father was killed.

Her problems had started, forcing to get married in 1975, aged 16. Her husband did not win the admiration of her family because he could not pay



POWER OF A WOMAN: The great Paramount Chief Adeline Tito at her home in Torit, South Sudan. -Photo Paul Jimbo

her dowry. "In our society, a man is respected by the way he is able to pay dowry as a result my marriage was not good because my husband was poor," she says.

This however did not stop them from getting married. They stayed together in Torit before they were forced to move to Juba after the second war broke out in 1992.

Like other families in Sudan who have tales to share about their experience during the prolonged conflict, Tito has own as well. Her husband was executed on suspicion that he was a member of Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) warrior in Juba. Like her fathers deaths, this too changed her.

"It is at this point that I had to fend for myself and children, I joined the police force and became a powerful police woman." She continues.

Not living anything to chance, Adelina used her position in the police to play a crucial role in the war and prop herself as a leader able to deliver on the demands placed on her.

While working as a prison's officer, she shuttled between Juba and Torit, organizing for the release of hundred of young Sudanese soldiers, who later escaped to Uganda by road or across the River Nile. This was to help them escape the massacre of young men that was going on at that time.

"It is this type of work that propelled me into the position of leadership," she exclaims. Many of those who were saved by her actions considered her a hero. They decided to crown her as a rainmaker in 1992 as reward for her contribution to her country's struggles.

By 1996, her fame had spread in South Sudan, resulting in her being crowned the administrative chief of Torit County while living in Juba. By then, Torit was one of the

epicentres of the war, making it difficult for her and her community to reside there.

The many years she served as professional policewoman and understanding of the law helped her to execute her functions well, something that was difficult for other chiefs who lacked such training.

"I began listening to cases and solving matters including giving penalties for offences," says Adelina. Due to her competence, she became famous in her local community.

It was only after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2005 and peace returned to the troubled region that she relocated from Juba to execute her functions within the Torit Country.

Her coming to Torit had its own blessings. She was promoted to the rank of paramount head chief.

As a woman chief, Adelina is liked by many people for her excellent interpersonal skills. Many consider her as a fair and just arbiter when it comes to conflicts or interpretations of the law.

The demands on her are immense that it leaves her with little time to share with her two boys. A development she talks about with a lighter touch.

"I am glad I am not married because I would not have achieved what I have today," she says. "I have traveled to many countries and exposed to many systems of governance, which have helped me learn a lot about leadership and management."

Although she appreciates that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has expanded the democratic space for women to enjoy the 25 percent Affirmative Action in political representation and other decision making levels, she says a lot needs to be done. Sudanese women, she notes, face a lot of obstacles such as access to information, education and cultural barriers, among other issues.

For her, the Affirmative Action principle will ensure she remains in a leadership position in the next general elections. Her only challenge is winning the first ever election that will be conducted for SPLM chiefs to select one head chief as a representative to the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS).

"It is a tall order since am the only woman who is going to vie for the position," she says smiling. But she is not afraid. Her greatest asset is her leadership qualities that have seen her pull-through difficult moments especially when living in a patriarchal society where a woman has little or no say on many of the important issues affecting the family and the country.

One of her success is managing to solicit funds from donors for the construction of the state administrative office in Torit which will serve all the chiefs in the Eastern Equatorial State.

Besides fighting for political prominence, she is also working to see more women follow her footsteps. So far, she has identified strong candidates to vie for leadership positions in different parts of her county.

"I have already identified three women with good leadership qualities and encouraged them to vie for elections for chiefs during the coming elections in Langiro, Kudo and Chukdum payams within the Equatorial State," she adds.

Using her three shops as an example of to generate income that can help cater for the family needs; Adelina has been moving around preaching and educating women on income generating initiatives.

As she talks about this and counts her successes, she looks up in the sky and says: "The almighty is going to see me through any difficult situation. And when you come back again, I will be talking to you as the representative of all chiefs to the Government of South Sudan."

Sabina Dario Lokolong

Thriving in one of Africa's most turbulent political waters

By Joyce Chimbi

Born to the Chief of Kapoeta Village South Sudan in 1969 many knew that she was no ordinary child but even for her, rising to the position she now holds at a relatively young age was a dream she could not even dare to dream.

Growing up in one of Africa's most turbulent countries characterized by a civil war that spanned on for a little over two decades, many were the times when she too doubted her capability to rise from the ashes.

But almost 40 years later Hon Sabina Dario Lokolong is not only one of Sudan's most powerful women in a male dominated political arena, she is also the first serving female Speaker in the entire country,

"I am a very ambitious person and I always knew I could rise to great heights in whatever career I chose but to be the Speaker in a country where women almost don't count in political discourse? That surprised me," says Hon Sabina, Speaker of the Eastern Equatoria Legislative Assembly, Government of South Sudan (GOSS).

Sudan exercises a Federal System of governance.

Her situation is even more peculiar due to the fact that not only is she not married but she also has no children of her own, "I have therefore being treated with more hostility than you can even imagine."

Interestingly though, the Assembly she chairs constitutes of 48 Members of Parliament nine of whom are women although the 25 percent women representation required in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has not been met to rise the number to 12 female parliamentarians. She, therefore, chairs an Assembly with a high male majority.

Hon Sabina attended Kapoeta Primary School after which joined Supiri Intermediary Secondary School. Later she was accepted at Juba girls Secondary school which saw her join Ahfat University for Women in Khartoum. At the University, the Speaker studied Psychology and Pre-school Education, "the field was not popular at the time but then again there were not that many choices to choose from, mine was one of the four fields in the entire University," she says.

By the time she was graduating in 1993 she says life in Sudan "was hell on earth and particularly the South Sudan where there had been a massacre and the Sudanese People Liberation Army (SPLA) had taken a hold and penetrating some parts of the region almost meant certain death."

In 1985 she was in school in Juba away from her family in Kapoeta village when she went back to bury her father but as she left for school after the ceremony, little did she know that she would not lay eyes on her mother for the next twelve years.

"This was really the point at which the civil war gained momentum and the relations between the South and the North was at its worst, I was very young then and worried sick for my mother,

"With no news of her whatsoever, I begun to fear that she might have died in the clashes



SCALING POLITICA HEIGHTS: Sabina Dario Lokolong runs the powerful office of Assembly Speaker. -Photo Paul Jimbo

as most of my relatives and close family friends did, in fact, it is in my village where most fatalities happened because it was SPLA's stronghold."

She however continued with her studies in Khartoum where education was not only much better, the environment a lot more peaceful, but she could now learn in English as opposed to the Arabic she had grown accustomed to and had been desperately yearning to break away from,

"Being unable to speak or write in English would clip my wings in as far as career development was concerned, in fact I had earlier wanted to study Law but it was only offered in Arabic which is one of the most dominant languages in Sudan," Hon Sabina explains.

During this period she says that her siblings had left for the United Kingdom to further their studies leaving her alone, and without knowledge of her mother's status, it was more than she could bear.

It was at this point that she begun making frantic efforts to go back to her village in spite of the fact that most of the people who attempted to do so lost their lives but her efforts bore no fruits.

Although her village borders Uganda she could not travel to this country because the relationship between Sudan and most countries was very hostile due to the humanitarian abuses known to have been taking place as it happens in times of war,

"Most countries as a result wanted to disassociate themselves from a country torn by civil war," she expounds.

Even though she had graduated in 1993 and largely due to the fact that she had been famous for introducing key changes in her University for instance the Young Christian Students Association and the South Sudan Students Association, she was part of the 1995 students' delegation sent to Rome to attend a church convention.

This would mark the turning point in her life for in spite of heavy surveillance by government representatives sent to trail their every move, Hon Sabina would not return to Sudan,

"I seized this opportunity and I remember the day clearly, I even have the train ticket which took me to some Sudanese who hid me for a while," she expounds.

Life was not easy in Italy because immigrants without a residence permit were being arrested so she decided to apply for political asylum, "the authority was interested in my kind of stories and they (these stories) could open doors, I was therefore granted full refugee status and two years residence."

It was in England that she would later undertake a Masters degree in Project Planning and Management.

With her papers in order she was able to travel to Kenya and then to her village where she met her mother after 12 long

agonizing years, her mother is currently in the United Kingdom after being granted an indefinite visa.

At peace with the knowledge that her mother was alive and well, Hon Sabina chose to stay in Sudan and be part of the team that would transform this country into a new and united Sudan.

"I wasn't prepared for politics by this time though, my interest was to work with communities but my name kept coming up in political arenas and my father's people, the Indiga, wanted me to represent them as Member of Parliament (MP) so I accepted the nomination," she explains.

When it was also proposed that she should take the Speaker's chair Hon Sabina thought it too ambitious but "Even with a male majority in parliament I managed to garner 17 votes against my opponent who got seven votes," Hon Sabina explains.

But the full intent of this vote would later dawn on her as the political heat turned on her almost destroyed her political career,

"I speak my mind even when it might elicit antagonism as long as by doing so am serving my people, being Speaker was meant to shut me up but it didn't, and after a simmering tag of war since 2007, I was almost impeached twice last year," she says.

To frustrate her, MP's would neither write nor present motion to the Assembly. In addition, most of them would not attend parliament since absenteeism can only be cause for disciplinary action if it happens 18 times.

But Hon Sabina introduced a move to cut allowances of MP's who did not attend sessions consistently which did not go down well with a part of the male leadership.

In fact, some opted to leave the Assembly and their MP status all together rather than be under her rule, "when the Speaker enters the Assembly, all arise, this caused so much hostility towards me, an unwed, female young Speaker, they simply couldn't take it."

A motion to impeach her was therefore tabled in her absence, a move that was out of order and therefore dismissed. Her nemesis did not stop there though, they brought nine charges against her the most serious being that of embezzling funds and it actually seemed like they had won,

"I was going to put my life on the line to at least clear my image and after a very trying period, I was reinstated as Speaker."

Although the situation now seem to be under control and the Assembly running as is to be expected, her woes are not over but this is a woman who has in the past defied great odds to rise to incredible political heights in a country where women are judged by the status of their husband.

The Hon Speaker emphasizes that she is here to stay.

And now that she has acquired legal custody of seven children whose parents died in the civil war and following up on two others, these young ones are a constant reminder of why she should never quit but solder on towards a new and better Sudan, for them if not for her.

— An AWC Feature



WALKING TALL: Veteran soldier Brigadier Victoria Arop (left) shares her experiences with Kenyan politician Rose Waruhiu in Juba. Inset: The soldier during the interview. -Photo Wambui Gicheru

Brig. Victoria Arop: Veteran soldier hands over political baton with great honour

Write Odhiambo Orlale and Jane Godia

Like most Sudanese of her age, she was at the forefront fighting for liberation having joined the war at 41 years. And when the guns went silent in 2005 at the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), there was no better way the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) could honour her other than to offer Brigadier Victoria Adhar Arop a seat at the Legislative Assembly where she could exercise her wise counsel to guide her people.

The oldest female Member of Parliament, Brig Victoria says she will not take to the campaign trail this time and will only return to Parliament if she is nominated. However, she reiterates that the time has come for her to hand over her seat to the youth.

Says the war veteran who has represented Twic County, Bhar el Gazal State: "I want to leave it to the younger generation," she says, "I don't plan to stand for elections next year because I have served this country to the best of my abilities. Also there are many young women graduates who are up for the challenge."

Given the best

At 64, the former SPLM women's leader believes she has given her country, her party and her fellow womenfolk the best years of her life.

Brig Victoria still stands tall and walks with pride recalling her decades in the two civil wars, which began in 1965 and again in 1983, culminating with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005.

Despite losing husband in 1965 when he and 72 others were gunned down in the war, she is not bitter. Brig Victoria trekked for 90 days from her village in Sudan with her seven children to seek refuge in Ethiopia when war broke out again in 1983. She lost one of her six sons during the war, leaving her with five and a daughter to care for.

Standing out

At the gathering of South Sudan Women in Political Parties to Develop Women's Common Agenda for 2010 elections in Juba recently, one could not fail to pick out Brig Victoria from the crowd.

A woman of many firsts, Brig Victoria made history as the first South Sudanese woman to qualify as a military nurse in charge of over 19,000 children in a refugee camp in Ethiopia.

A wise woman who has seen many good and bad things, Brig Victoria offered a lot of wise counsel to the women of her country who will be vying for elective political positions for the first time in the country's history. This is also the first time that the women in Sudan will take to the ballot box.

Positive thinking

She's optimistic that the elections slated for next year followed by a referendum in 2011 will be good for the country.

She says: "The elections will not be bad this time around." Before the war broke out, Brig Victoria recalls, women were not considered for political positions. However, after the war, "something positive has happened and women are both voters and candidates", she affirms.

However, she says despite the good tidings, there are many challenges that need to be addressed.

For instance, attaining the 25

per cent proportion for women, she says, will not be easy because many women in South Sudan have never been to school.

She says it's only the few women from Equatoria who went to Eastern African countries who are better exposed. The Brigadier is proud of the fact that there are women in South Sudan who are educated and have made it to professions such as teaching and medicine. She thinks these are the women who will make better opponents to men in the elections as they have the confidence and self-esteem to enable them articulate issues better.

Women advance

"There are over 20 female doctors scattered all over South Sudan and this is an achievement for women."

And she says that nobody should view the 25 per cent proportion as having been given to woman on a silver platter. "It was allocated because women went to war and when they left Khartoum they worked and educated their children," she reiterates.

Brig Victoria is worried that the census results have been rejected by the Legislative Assembly and this will pose a challenge to the elections which is all about people.

The results have been taken to the Executive level, but she is also worried that they want to use the census results of 1983, which are not indicative of today's realities because much has changed in Sudan in the last 26 years.

The Juba Declaration By Southern

On The Women's Common Agenda For The 2010 Elections

Juba, Southern Sudan, July 19, 2009

Preamble:

We, the women from the political parties in Southern Sudan, participating in the Conference for Southern Sudan Women in Political Parties to Develop a Women's Common Agenda for the Elections, which took place in Juba from July 17 to 19, 2009, comprising representatives of the Government, Political Parties and Parliamentarians:

Strongly believe in women working together across party lines;

Affirm that unity of purpose is the foundation of equity and equality;

Also affirm that the women of Southern Sudan are renowned for their active participation in the pursuit of peace and good governance;

Further affirm that gender issues cannot be divorced from the political, social, cultural, developmental, economic and security considerations in Southern Sudan.

Note that women in Southern Sudan have limited access to political party leadership and decision-making, the media, education, economic empowerment, law, security, health, which has compromised women's effective participation in national leadership,

Concerned about the rights and dignity of women, insecurity and the rule of law in Southern Sudan and the environment in which the General Election will be held

State that it is in this context that women now seek greater representation and participation in party politics and national leadership,

Affirm our support for all the outcomes of this conference with a view to strengthening democracy through women's greater participation at all levels of leadership as stated in the 25 percent principle,

Appreciate the role played by the Government of Southern Sudan and the international community in supporting efforts to boost the role of women in politics and transformational leadership and drawing attention to the need to involve women in all stages of the election process and in the implementation of the National Elections Act 2008,

NOW WISH to call upon the National Electoral Commission, Political Parties Affairs Council, Political Parties in Southern Sudan and the media to address the following recommendations:

1.0 EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES

1. Raise women's image and visibility within their parties by:
 - 1.1 Increasing the number of women in political parties through intensive women recruitment campaigns;
 - 1.2 Developing their political knowledge and leadership skills;
 - 1.3 Provision of financial support to women's leagues and groups
2. Build the capacity of all party membership to understand and appreciate gender issues;
3. Prepare and conduct democratic and transparent candidate selection processes through:
 - 1.1 include women in the selection teams and allow the women leagues to monitor the candidate selection processes;
 - 1.2 widely disseminate candidate selection rules;

- 1.3 instituting a mechanism whereby at least 10% of the candidates on the party list are women and nomination of candidates for geographical constituency seats;
- 1.4 commit and promote fair competition during internal elections;
- 1.5 establish an independent monitoring system for internal elections;

4. Party should support to women candidates through:

- 1.1 Provision of material and financial support;
- 1.2 Visibly support women candidates
- 1.3 Set up a women election basket

2.0 DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER-SENSITIVE MANIFESTOS

Political parties should ensure that the following gender specific issues are addressed in their manifestos:

1. Zero-tolerance for corruption
2. Universal primary health care with emphasis on reproductive health
3. Continuous HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns coupled with accessible VCT (Voluntary Counseling and Testing) Centers for the youth and married couples throughout Southern Sudan
4. Mass adult literacy campaign up to the community level
5. Free education for girls and construct at least one girls' only secondary boarding school in each state in Southern Sudan;
6. Clean and safe water at community level;
7. Micro enterprises and a micro enterprise fund for economic empowerment of women at the grassroots / community level;
8. A policy to address gender based violence by:
 - 8.1 Institutionalize special protection units at the police stations;
 - 8.2 Support and medical care to survivors;
 - 8.3 Rehabilitation and/or stiff penalty to perpetrators
9. Establish equal opportunities body to monitor:
 - 9.1 Implementation of the Bill of rights in the Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan;
 - 9.2 Ratification of the international conventions that protect the rights of women;
 - 9.3 Implementation of gender and related policies
 - 9.4 Implementation of the land policy
10. Establish schools for children with disabilities at county level
11. Establish mental health centers for treatment and rehabilitation
12. Inclusive and transparent government

3.0 GENDER SENSITIVE MEDIA

1. Work with women leagues and candidates to promote their visibility through:
 - 1.1 Provision of media space in electronic and print media;
 - 1.2 Organizing media listening groups
 - 1.3 Include gender sensitive training skills in the media training curricula
2. Support dissemination of gender sensitive messages and materials through:
 - 2.1 Create awareness and appreciation among voters on the importance and benefits of women candidates;

Sudan Women in Political Parties

3. Give media space to women candidates during election campaigns to gain visibility among voters;
4. Institute a monitoring mechanism to ensure that all candidates and political parties have equal access to media;
5. Media should be neutral not biased towards any party or any candidate.

4.0 PREVENTION OF ELECTION VIOLENCE

1. Political party leaders should commit to any code of conduct that is developed to prevent election related violence
2. Political Parties Affairs Council (PPAC) should be in position to withdraw registration of any party that involves in election violence
3. Political parties should include discussion on prevention of campaign and election related violence in their South – South dialogues
4. All political parties should issue statements on how they are to conduct transparent campaigns
5. Media should refrain from fueling violence through:
 - 1.1 not disseminating hate speech and inflammatory remarks
 - 1.2 not engage in sensational reporting of contentious issues
6. All political party leaders should encourage party members not to engage in violent activities
7. Women candidates should be united and present themselves to have peaceful elections and should come out with a statement on violence-free elections
8. Women should commit themselves to respecting and abiding by election guidelines and the electoral law
9. Women commit themselves to influencing their respective parties to commit themselves to a violence-free election
10. Media should sensitize the public on free and fair elections and how to prevent and report election violence
11. Media should be also play a monitoring role to bring to attention of concerned authorities about potential for violence and malpractices
12. NEC should raise awareness of the public to prevent corruption, illegal practices and election offences
13. NEC should create awareness among all political party leaders on their obligations under the electoral law and the penalty for non adherence
14. NEC should conduct its affairs in an impartial, transparent and neutral manner
15. Government must take the responsibility of providing security during elections, especially for women candidates, and a special police unit should be trained to deal with election violence.

5.0 GENDER-SENSITIVE ELECTIONS GUIDELINES

1. NEC should provide an easy mechanism for identifying voters in rural areas for registration by involving Chiefs or the village chairpersons.
2. Voter registration centers should be within easy reach and easily identifiable areas.

3. NEC should make it clear that although women have 25% seats, they are also eligible to be nominated for other positions such as President, Governor, party list, and the constituency seats.
4. NEC should set-up a gender responsive voter education and disseminate information concerning elections.
5. NEC should issue strong guidelines against violence in all election processes
6. NEC should invite foreign and local observers during the registration, campaign, voting and counting of votes and announcing of results processes
7. In case government funding, NEC should ensure equal financial support for both male and female at all the levels.
8. PPAC should reject any party list or constituency candidate lists which do not include women
9. NEC should commit to provide financial support for women candidates competing for constituency seats

6.0 CAPACITY BUILDING FOR FEMALE CANDIDATES

Capacity building for women candidates is imperative to their participation and success. The following areas have been identified as critical action areas for women, donors, government and civil society organizations:

1. Training areas:
 - 1.1 Elections Act provisions and electoral procedures
 - 1.2 confidence building
 - 1.3 public speaking
 - 1.4 communication skills and public relations
 - 1.5 Local administration structure and native administration.
 - 1.6 proposal writing
 - 1.7 fund raising for women candidates
 - 1.8 campaign and message development skills
 - 1.9 political skills
 - 1.10 networking skills
2. Institute a fund to train women candidates
3. Women should work at increasing their visibility within their political parties and among voters
4. Women should sensitize other women and encourage women at the lower levels to join political parties
5. Women should develop networking skills so as to appreciate the benefits of networking with women groups and civil society organizations within the community
6. Formation of a "Women in Political Parties forum" as a learning platform for political, voter and civic education.
7. Develop a relationship with the media by understanding how it works and being pro-active by taking advantage of media houses
8. Establish networks and regular dialogue with association of media women in Sudan
9. Learn the workings and take advantage of media outlets and utilize alternative media such as email; SMS, radio listening groups for women, etc
10. Develop a communication strategy to address election related issues using the media

PROFILE

of women aspirants for 2010

Name: Hon. Abuor Gordon Nhianl

Party: Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)

Region: Aweil Eat County, Mangartong — Payam Northern Bar El Ghazel

Position: Currently serving as a Member of the South Sudan Legislative Assembly for the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) and Committee Member of the Peace and Reconciliation and Gender, Youth and Sports committees appointed on November 7, 2008; Served as Minister of Social Development in Northern Bar El Ghazel State after being appointed on May 4, 2008; Served as Minister of Health during State formation on January, 2007 and served as member of the SPLM Assembly since September, 2006.



Aspirations

Having lived as a refugee at the Kakuma Camp in Kenya during the war, Hon Abuor is concerned that her community lost many years in the civil war and many did not have the opportunity to go to school. She believes education is essential to both boys and girls in her state. She would like to ensure that free and quality education is provided to her people.

Hon Abuor would like to see decentralized services like health and sanitation as well as education to the lowest level through good governance.

Having been a minister, she would like to come back and continue to serve the people of Sudan. As a minister, she had initiated programmes which were still incomplete like the primary health care and immunization programmes for children. She had solicited for funds for these programmes and would like to see proper implementation of the projects.

Challenges

There are high expectations of her society without considering that this is a young government which should be given time to prove itself and not be criticized because it has not achieved much.

Due to low levels of education, many women are not qualified to take up the job. There is also the issue of negative attitude of local women towards women aspiring to become Members of Parliament.

Expectations

Hon Abuor would like to contest on the 60 per cent Geographical Constituency seat allocations because she would like to give other women a chance on the 25 per cent Affirmative Action. For her, this is a strategy towards increasing the number of women in decision-making positions.

Name: Hon. Deborah Ajok Garnag

Region: Unity State

Party: Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)

Age: 33 years

Position: Currently serving as the Nominated Member of the Legislative Assembly and sitting on two committees; Peace and Reconciliation and Gender, Social Welfare, Youth and Sports committees.



Aspirations

Hon Garnag would like to contest under the 60 per cent as member of the Legislative Assembly to champion for the rights of widows and orphan in her community to access basic services provided by the government.

As a widow whose husband died during the war, she would also like to ensure the commitment given by the Government to protect vulnerable groups such as the widows and orphans is fulfilled.

She would like to address issues of early marriage by pushing for education of girls. Due to lack education, most girls have opted for marriage and as a result many still remain disempowered and many have also lost their lives.

Challenges

Hon Garnag feels that the community is not ready for the elections, which are just few months away and this might deny women the opportunity to vie for positions.

Registration of voters will take start in November, this year, but this might be late for women to be included since most of them lack identification documents and the duration is too short for all women to register.

Women in the party are not organised at all levels, therefore, posing a danger of being manipulated by the men in the party.

Lack of information about the election as an individual and, therefore, inability to make a decision of what is expected of her.

Insecurity in the region also poses a challenge.

Many husbands do not want women to participate in the elections. This has intimidated many women from supporting her.

Achievements

As a Member of the Legislative Assembly, Hon Garnag has championed for the construction of a school in her community. She has also organised women at the Payam and Boma level through the formation of organised groups for development work and projects.

Name: Hon. Adak Costa

Party: Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM)

Region: Lakeside State, Rumbek County

Position: Appointed Member of the Legislative Assembly under the Affirmative Action



Aspirations

Hon Adak would like to see changes of general life of the Sudanese women through promotion of the status of women in her region. Since the country has been at war for many years, she is keen on the implementation of the major issues in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in:

- Implementation of the free and quality education policy where everyone has equal opportunity to go to school;
- Women's empowerment — many women are widowed after the death of their husbands during the war. Need to empower women financially in order for them to generate their own income and be independent;
- Management of orphans' programmes in the region. Families are unable to take care of the increasing number of orphans;
- Reproductive health care for women through provision of Antenatal to post-natal care services since many women die during child birth

Hon Adak believes women are good managers of public funds and given a chance she can contribute to change the face of South Sudan

Challenges

The electoral process is complex and there are not able to understand it easily. Hon Adak is, therefore, challenged in terms of information that will enable her to make a decision.

Cultural practices that perpetuate dominance by men has undermined women and, therefore, created a battle that has consistently undermined women vying for political positions. Uncertainty of how the nomination process will take place within the party also raises issues of concern.

Achievements

Having been appointed Minister for Information and Communication in her state in 2006, Hon Adak initiated the development of FM and TV Stations in the region. Though this has not been implemented, she hopes to be given a chance to see this become a reality.

Name: Her Excellency Huda Micah Laila

Party: Sudan African National Union (SANU)
Region: Central Equatorial State, Lanya County, Kenyi Payam
Position: Minister of Health in Central Equatorial State

**Aspirations**

Hon Laila would like to contest as a Member of the Legislative Council on the party nominations and this will also allow her to battle it out with the men from other parties.

Having been an advisor to the State Governor on political party affairs, she has the experience and understands how the party functions.

She would like to see a developed Sudan where services are delivered effectively to the people of South Sudan through decentralization of services and unity of the counties and the state.

Challenges

Hon Laila is not threatened by political positioning since she has gained confidence and credibility in the government and the community. However, there are still challenges that she feels need to be addressed.

Having served as Minister of Social Development and now as Minister of Health, one of her challenges have been poor mechanisms of collecting revenue for the GoSS that could be translated into development programmes in health and education sectors.

There is also lack of human resource in both the health and education sectors

Achievements

As a Minister of Health, she has been able to restructure the health sectors by ensuring that there is provision for enough drugs, restructuring of Primary Health units as well as initiating partnerships with donor agencies such as the UNICEF, WHO and USAid among others.

Name: Hon. Betty Poni Joseph

Party: Sudan's People's Liberation Army (SPLM)
State: Central Equatoria State, Juba County
Position: Member of the Legislative Assembly sitting on the Gender and Social Welfare Committee

**Aspirations**

Hon Betty will contest for the Legislative Assembly. She would like to make sure that Government Plan of Action on girl-child education is implemented. As a result of the war, women have lost many years. Had she not had a chance to go to Uganda, she would never have gone to school.

For years, male dominance due to cultural practices have obstructed women from spheres of decision making and negotiations would like to sensitive the community of these issue and Hon Betty would like to start a mentorship programme in order to raise women who will be role models for others in the community

She would like to champion for the rights of people with disability in the community and ensure that their rights are addressed by the Government.

Challenges

Since this is the first time that South Sudan is conducting elections, without proper infrastructure, campaigning may prove to be very difficult. Being the first time that women will be campaigning, there are no clear strategies on how they should conduct the campaigns. Low levels of education poses a challenge for her in terms of understanding the Electoral Act. She does not know where women are on the party list.

Name: Hon Agnes Lawrence Odwar

Party: United Democratic Salvation Front
Region: Eastern Equatoria State, Torit County
Position: Member of the Legislative Assembly and chair of Humanitarian Affairs and Peace and Reconciliation Committee.

**Aspirations**

Hon Agnes as an elderly woman was appointed to the Legislative Assembly through Affirmative Action. The only reason that she is a Member of Parliament is because she managed to go to school. Her mission though is not complete. She has been championing for the rights of younger women to go school through provision of free and quality education in order to reduce early marriages and maternal mortality.

Her mission is to bridge the gap and unite women through common goals that will enhance development for the women of Southern Sudan. She believes that when women are put in leadership positions, governance issues are sorted out effectively.

Challenges

Insecurity remains one of the great concerns especially in Eastern Equatoria where cattle rustling is rife. As a result, many women and children have been killed, while others have been abducted.

In her community, the fact that people live according to their ethnic groups, many people on ground are only aware of the government dominated party — SPLM — leaving out minority parties.

There is also the issue where tend to criticise other women giving prominence to the male manipulation.

Name: Alice Jabe John

Party: UDF (Independence of South Sudan)
Constituency: Lainya County

Aspiration: will vie for a geographical constituency.

Previously had no interest in politics but realised that the war in Sudan had been prolonged because women were not involved.

Position: Secretary of Members affairs at State offices. Charged with ensuring that members in the party have no conflicts among themselves; in charge of contributions as well as checking level of commitment at State level and ensuring that all members weekly meetings.

**Challenges**

Lack of funds and support during campaign times. Need vehicles for moving around. Reaching the women, who make key voters, will be very difficult unless one uses the chiefs.

SPLM as a mother party in South Sudan should support other parties. It's like a tree that grows branches and a river develops tributaries. It will be difficult to campaign because the Political Parties Registration organisation has refused to register UDF under the theme Independence for South Sudan saying this is not the time to talk about independence and we should wait until 2011. There is no budget for youth and women in the party or organisation. This is a problem as youth are not aware of what is going on in the coming elections and those of 2011.

Fears

Insecurity is a big issue. At times you go to an area that lacks sensitisation on multi-partyism and you meet a lot of resistance as many people at the grassroots still believe in SPLM.

Needs

Need for media to communicate that Sudan is a multi-party State and people on the ground must understand that as long as a party is genuinely registered they should accept it.

Name: Hon. Sarah Paulo Lako

Party: SANO
Constituency: Reckon County

Aspirations: Hon Sarah will contest Legislative in Central Equatoria. Wants to find a platform from which she can work to uplift the status of the woman in Southern Sudan which is very low. Would like to help bring development to the area and tackle issues such as security.

**Challenge**

Generally there is a problem with security in South Sudan.

Financial and transport resources are needed for one to reach the far flung areas.

As a woman candidate one has to work twice as hard as you have to convince voters because the men will hardly support a woman candidate and it will take a lot to convince the woman voter.

PROFILES

Name: Hon. Angelica Andrea

Party: Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)

Constituency: Ezo County

Aspiration: Hon Angelica biggest aspiration is to get to Parliament and her main agenda is to support women and generally people in her constituency. These should also include widows and children. She hopes to find a way of improving health care, transport and education facilities.



Challenges

For Hon Angelica the biggest outstanding issue is security. She is worried about Lord Resistance Army rebels from Northern Uganda who are now operating in full swing in Ezo County, Southern Sudan. However, she believes that if the LRA leave the area, movement will be eased for most people as insecurity will no longer be an issue.

Transport also poses a challenge because the roads are poor. The road network needs to be improved to make movement easy.

Expectation: The Government should allocate a certain percentage of seats for youth to be nominated and elected to Parliament where they can also contribute to issues of development. It's important that they youth take over as they have active minds

Name: Hon. Beatrice Aber Samson

Party: SSLA

Region: Magwi County, Eastern Equatoria

Position: Planning/Gender Supervisor Government of Southern Sudan Peace Commission in Juba



Aspiration

As a country emerging from conflict everybody would want to participate in the elections and be able to influence others or influence some decisions. One way that one can get to do this is to join the government through politics. It's the only way that we can get our issues addressed. Coming from a small marginalised community, Hon Beatrice says it was easy initially to get to Parliament through the 25 per cent allocation although she will be contesting for her Legislative Assembly seat through the 60 per cent. She is confident of winning although she says competition will be tough because she comes from an area with many elite people who will be looking to contest for the same seat.

Hon Beatrice is confident of winning saying she never got to her present position easily.

Challenges: Resources remain the biggest shortfall for Hon Beatrice as she aspires to meet her dreams in Parliament. For one to travel regularly to the constituencies for campaigns they need to have enough money. This is what will enable a candidate hold regular meetings and even be able to hire seats and four wheel vehicles, buy water etc to be used in meeting venues. Money is also needed to production of campaign material such as posters, Tee-shirts.

It is also impossible to constitute a campaign team if one does not have enough resources. To be sure of succeeding, one needs to hire a campaign consultant during the lection period to give guidance during the process.

Security remains a big issue. Guns are like walking sticks yet goons are being hired and threats are there and they are real. Most women are being asked by their male rivals not to go for the 60 per cent representation and instead opt for the 25 per cent allocation.

Hon Beatrice is worried that in terms of development the party has done very little for County. Roads are bad, there is famine making people poorer. People are tired of hunger and are asking for food. The party will have a big challenge in trying to convince the electorate because there is too much poverty and the rivals can use this to their advantage.

Voter education remains a big issue. When will voters be educated so they are able to participate effectively yet there is not enough time?

The nomination process might lack credibility as party leaders light only pick on friends and relatives. The nomination criteria is also not clear yet the party has the final word.

Name: Brigadier Victoria Adhar Arop

Party: Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)

Region: Twic County, Bhar el Gazal State

Position: Currently serving as a Member of the Legislative Assembly



Aspirations

As oldest female Member of Parliament, she will not take to the campaign trail this time and will only return to Parliament if she is nominated. She reiterates that the time has come for her to hand over to the youth. At 64, the former SPLM women's leader believes she has given her country, party and fellow womenfolk the best years of her life. She made history as the first Southern Sudanese woman to qualify as a military nurse in charge of over 19,000 children in a refugee camp in Ethiopia.

Challenges

Attaining the 25 per cent proportion for women will not be easy because many women in Southern Sudan have never been to school. She says it's only the few women from Equatoria who went to Eastern African countries who are better exposed posing a challenge to those from other areas.

Name: Hon. Mary Nyaulan Ret

Party: Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)

Region: Jonglei State — Ayod County

Position: Currently serving as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. She is the mobiliser for People, Peace and Reconciliation Forum, which is a grassroots initiative promoted by the New Sudan Council of Churches.

A former secretary of New Sudan Women's Association and a former coordinator of the Gender Relief Association of South Sudan which partnered with UNICEF's Operation Lifeline Sudan until the end of the civil war and signing of the CPA in 2005.



Aspirations

She is a trained soldier who served the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) under the late Dr Gen John Garang. She graduated as a cadet before training as photographer and working for the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. At the 2010 polls she is comfortable looking forward to going back to doing what is close to her heart — promoting peace and integration among her compatriots.

Challenges

She wants to do other things outside the Government — take time off to be with her children, who are schooling in Kenya, even though the electorate say they want her to stand."

Name: Hon Sabina Dario Lokolong

Party: Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)

Region: Budi County, Eastern Equatoria State

Position: Currently serving as the Speaker of Eastern Equatoria State Legislative Assembly



Aspirations

Although the 39 year old Speaker is content in the knowledge that she has reached a political height she never imagined possible at her age, for her, this is just a beginning. She has now shifted her focus towards ensuring that there is increased representation of women in positions of power by making efforts to empower women to stand up and be counted. In addition, Hon Sabina has declared that she will not present herself for the 25 per cent women representation nomination process, but will stand by her party and battle it out with men for another ticket into the Legislative Assembly. This is a dream that those who understand the rough political terrain in Southern Sudan acknowledge to be a difficult path to take, particularly for the women aspirants.

Challenges

South Sudan is not only parochial in its thinking and the manner in which it regards leadership as a preserve for men, it is also very patriarchal. Women are expected to prove themselves unlike their male counterparts who are taken at face value and are hardly subjected to the nature of scrutiny accorded to the women aspirants. In addition, due to her outspoken nature and confidence that she deserves whichever position she sets her eyes on, in addition to have averted attempts to impeach her as the speaker, the battle is far from over.

Name: Hon. Medelena Kije Sule

Party: Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)

Region: Central Equatoria State, North Bare County



Aspirations

Hon Medelena would like to vie as Member of the Legislative Assembly. There is need for women to effectively articulate issues of women and children because they understand them better.

She would like to agitate for widows and orphan's protection because although the government pledged to support them, this issue has not been addressed adequately.

The issue of HIV/AIDS has not adequately been addressed although a commission has been put in place. She would like to have policies that will include in-depth care like Home Based Care for survivors.

She would like to push for free education and construction of schools in grassroots areas in order to make sure the girl-child has access to education. This will reduce cases of early marriages.

Challenges

Resources both monetary as well as human pose a big challenge. Women lack the funds to conduct campaigns and mobilization. On the other hand, the campaigners have to be trained.

Insecurity is still an issue since there are places that still have landmines which are dangerous making it difficult for women campaigners to reach the desired electorate.

Many of the displaced people from the region are still in Juba Town and will be required to get to their regions to vote.

Politics is still male dominated and this does not give women a good chance in the elections.

They have been given only one month for registration and this is not enough. This means most women will miss out of the process

Name: Hon. Aida Eriminio Wande

Party: Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)

Region: Nzara County, Western Equatoria State

Position: Nominated member of South Sudan Legislative Assembly. Previously Nominated to represent Community in the Western Equatoria State legislative Assembly.



Aspirations

Ever since the war Hon Aida, even though young, had her aspirations in to join politics.

She became popular and would often be invited to political meetings.

Her aspiration was always for the youth and women. In 2005 she and others formed a group for youth and women immediately after signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Hon Aida was elected deputy chair for youth representing women.

Hon Aida believes that it's only in politics that one is able to make a difference. She was trained in understanding the CPA so she could also train others to understand the peace agreement.

Challenges

Distribution of constituencies if done by Electoral Commission according to census results is going to affect women. There are some states which are being said to have only one woman candidate. In some counties there are four. This means that there will be few women during the polls.

Finances also pose a challenge. Campaigns need money. Even if you are capable and you don't have money you are not going to be elected.

Low levels of education are also going to affect the election process. There are some political positions that need someone who is educated such as being in the Cabinet or being chair of a certain commission.

Security in South Sudan in general remains a big challenge especially in

Equatoria the LRA rebels are now based. This makes it difficult for one to campaign as most of these areas are now empty as people have run away.

The election act is vague and people are not clear on the procedures. They need to be given civic education as it will be very complicated and may be worse for women because it will be the first time women are either vying or voting in an election.

Hon Aida's greatest fear is that the elections could take off before the boundary and constituency borders have been drawn. This is most likely to bring conflict as people might disagree over areas where they are standing.

The youth must be involved in all this process. They don't have to be politicians but they can learn from school because they are the leaders of tomorrow.

Name: Hon. Mary Kiden Kimbo

Party: SPLM

Current Position: Member of Legislative Assembly was the first minister of Gender and Social development for South Sudan.



Aspirations

"Looking at the 10 states in south Sudan, I'm inspired and happy that women have made tremendous milestones in terms of being in decision making positions. We have 11 women ministers and this is something that had never happened in the history of South Sudan. We have two women leading the Anti-Corruption and Human Rights commissions.

We've made progress in the lower levels where we have women under-secretaries and director-generals.

I'm inspired by the fact that women are ready to move the extra mile to make their positions more effective. With 36 women in the National Assembly, we will be able to achieve the critical mass of 30 per cent if not 50 per cent come the next General Elections."

Name: Hon. Nyanchek Nhial

Region: Bor County, Jonglei

Party: National Congress Party (NCP)

Current Position: Member of South Sudan Legislative Assembly



Challenges

There is need for development of women in the grassroots. There is also need for access to education and provision of health facilities for women. Insecurity is high and women need to be assured of protection during the campaigns. There are women who are bribed while others are used to intimidate women candidates. This violence by men often reduces chances of women vying for elections and also threatens their security

It is important that women from different parties unite and protect themselves for the women's common agenda.

Name: Hon. Tereza John

Party: Sudan African Nation Union (SANU)

Region: Western Bar El Ghazel, Wau County

Position: Secretary to the Party

Aspiration

Hon Tereza would like to contest for the Legislative Assembly. Her ambition is to promote women's issue through giving them a voice by talking on their behalf. She realises that women have not gone to school and hence missed out on many opportunities in the development sphere.

Challenges

Resources — both financial and human — pose a major challenge for Hon Tereza. She realises that political parties are not in a position to fund women's campaigns yet most of the campaigners will need to be paid for. To mobilise and sensitise women to vote and elect them they would also require funds.

There will be need to train women on how to conduct campaigns and this will also require resources.

Due to vastness of the counties, transport will also pose a challenge because there is no clear infrastructure such as good road network. Access through communication with other women will pose a challenge due to lack of communication facilities.

The issue of patriarchy remains dominant as most women will not be able to attend campaigns because they will not be allowed by their husband. They are normally ordered to attend to other household responsibilities which are considered important to the family.

Most men will not allow women to rally behind other women but rather support men vying for the same positions

Sharing experiences

Getting the best practices from Rwanda

By Odhiambo Orlale

South Sudanese women need not look further for lessons on how to campaign and win elective posts, thanks to their Rwandese counterparts who are only too willing to teach them the ropes.

The land-locked Great Lakes country is now exporting its best practices to the region and the world at large on how women can ensure that they increase their numbers in the local authorities and in the national assembly.

Although the Constitution has reserved 30 per cent of the elective posts for women, Rwanda has surpassed its own target to stand at 56 percent which is why it is cited as a world leader amongst countries with the highest number of women Members of Parliament. Fifteen years after the darkest period in Rwanda's history, which saw close to one million people killed in the genocide, the country is now back on its feet and has embraced democracy as well as the principles of gender empowerment.

Ms Marie Immaculee Ingabire was on hand to share her country's experience with Sudanese women parliamentary aspirants last month in Juba, during a national conference organized by UNIFEM.

In a paper entitled "Increasing women's representation in a competitive multi-party system and post conflict environment," the consultant was proud to announce that the 2008 polls ranked her country as the first in the world with the highest number of women in Parliament, representing 56.2 percent of the seats. According to Ms Ingabire, the strategy used was to ensure that Affirmative Action was embraced in the new Constitution, to promote national unity and reconciliation between the Tutsi and the Hutus, as the first step towards

improving democracy and good governance. "Rwandan women understood that they had to forget their differences and work together in order to face the challenges after the 1994 genocide," she said.

The second step was to target numerous laws discriminative of women. Armed with a strong political will to eradicate all forms of discrimination, Rwandan women designed a Constitution on June 4, 2003, which gave back power to women and gave them a free hand to access outstanding political positions.

The Rwandan Constitution states in part in the preamble: "All Rwandan citizens of both sexes who fulfill the requirements provided for

the law have the right to vote and to be elected."

Another explicit clause says: "Building a state governed by the rule of law, a pluralistic democratic government, and equality of all Rwandans and between women and men reflected by ensuring that women are granted at least 30 per cent of posts in decision-making organs."

Turning to the Sudanese women, Ms Ingabire gave them several tips on how to increase their representation in the political arena in the run up to the historic polls slated for April 2010. One of them being that women must unite, encourage their fellow women to register as voters and seek elective

posts. They must also come up with one strong election campaign strategy and rally around it for their own good.

The consultant further advised Sudanese women eyeing Parliament to invest in strong networks which they could use to mobilize funds; attract specialised training in campaign tactics and technics; in addition to building strong partnerships with local media.

Ms Ingabire reminded South Sudanese politicians to be focused on the polls saying they had a golden opportunity to increase their membership in Parliament and to promote their agenda in how their country is run.



REGIONAL COOPERATION: Ms Marie Immaculee Ingabire from Rwanda and Dr. Miria Matembe from Uganda compare notes before addressing Sudanese women during the conference in Juba. -Photo Wambui Gicheru

Popularising Women's Agenda in Sudan

South Sudan women politicians have their job cut out for them, thanks to tips by their Ugandan friends during a symposium to come up with the women's agenda for politics recently in Juba.

Dr Miria Matembe a seasoned politician from Uganda told the women that the sky is the limit and they must not settle for the minimum of 25 per cent of the parliamentary seats, as per the Constitutional provision, but should aim for up to 50 per cent come the 2010 General Elections.

According to her, since this is the first time women in South Sudan will be aspiring for political positions, they must ensure that they have a women's agenda in place.

Says Dr. Matembe, "You must have in place a women's agenda is the women's voice which should be about the concerns,

interests and rights, and how they want them dealt with in governance structure."

Dr Matembe argues that that there is a need for participation of women which can transform the governance agenda by having an influence on policy, legislation and programs for the improvement of the well being of the people, particularly the women and children in the country.

The agenda should also provide a platform for common set of demands aimed at the achievement of gender equity, gender equality, women's empowerment and sustainable development.

Addressing a UNIFEM organized women's conference for parliamentary aspirants, Dr Matembe reminded them that that agenda should also allow women to articulate their concerns in the forthcoming elections process and beyond. Some of

the issues women's agenda should aim at achieving are;

Bringing women together at a common platform to speak with one voice in the political process;

Building good governance through providing a guide for women voters, candidates and other political actors;

Persuading government, political parties and organizations and other stakeholders to priorities people-centered democracy and the interest of the women in the development process;

Raise awareness about gender issues among various political players;

Urge voters in the April 2010 polls to consider issues that are crucial to their livelihoods and of importance to women and children when choosing their candidates;

Mobilise women to actively participate in all processes that promote democracy and national unity;

And, providing a platform for negotiation between women and other political players.

According to Dr Matembe the major issues to be covered in the women's agenda should include democracy and good governance; peace and security; poverty and economic empowerment; women's rights; education and health and reproductive rights.

"The process of development of the women's agenda is one way of popularising it. All women must own and talk for it irrespective of which parties they belong to. There is also need to identify capable women of interest and commitment to the agenda, convince them to contest for elections and mobilize support for them," she explains.

from Eastern Africa

Confronting Violence: Lessons from across the border in Kenya

By Odhiambo Orlale

Sudanese women aspiring for elective posts have much to look forward to in terms of good outcomes in their quest for political office, but they must also not lose sight of the fact that sometimes there is a high price to pay. Unfortunately, in high stakes politics the possibility of violence is a constant companion.

The aspirants can now prepare to face their electorate with the first hand lessons of their Kenyan counterparts, who have still not recovered from the worst political crisis in the country's history, which brought it to the brink of a civil war.

Former Nominated MP, Ms Rose Waruhiu, says the Kenyan experience last year following the disputed presidential elections, was the worst example of how not to conduct elections and announce results.

In the mayhem following the release of the closest contested presidential elections between President Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga 1,300 lives were lost, over 300,000 people were displaced, and property worth millions of shillings was destroyed.

Says Ms Waruhiu: "Violence has been identified as one of the barriers to women's

access to power structures and frameworks. Reference to violence featured as one of the major concerns that women agreed to work on irrespective of party affiliation."

Election violence is aimed at making women withdraw their candidature out of fear. The former MP says that in order to deal with that problem, women candidates should identify the security threats and hire bodyguards to protect themselves, their homes and families from goons hired by their political rivals.

The candidates must always maintain constant contact with the electoral commission officials for information, to gain an understanding of the unfolding trends and in the event that they may need assistance and guidance. "Other measures require the women to work together to tackle the indifference within the security organs and other institutions. They should also collaborate with the media to undertake aggressive campaigns against violence in addition to liaising and lobbying for joint police unit for the Electoral Commission and the police," she advised.

And as they prepare for the polls, Ms Waruhiu says, the Sudanese parliamentary aspirants must campaign for a women's agenda which includes peace and security as a priority, noting that violence undermines



GETTING IT RIGHT: Politician Rose Waruhiu spoke of the Kenyan experience at the conference. -Photo Wambui Gicheru

democracy and the women's right to participation and representation.

Speaking from her own experience, the former MP recalls that she had to face physical confrontation by armed and intimidating armed goons during party nomination; disruption of ballot papers during her party's nomination of civic and parliamentary candidates; in addition to stoning of her vehicle and receiving written

threats and attempted blackmail by her rivals' supporters.

She appealed to Sudanese women aspirants to work together and agree on the priority measures that they could push for together to improve the electoral environment. Says Ms Waruhiu: "Physical violence is only one form of destabilization that women face. I urge you not to give up, but to fight on using dialogue and the law."



By Rosemary Okello

Mary Kiden, the immediate former Minister for Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs is a woman of many firsts.

Being one of the first woman ministers in South Sudan Kiden has gone against all odds that depicts new leadership and established the structure of her Ministry in all the 10 states in South Sudan. When she was appointed as the Minister in 2005, Kiden was

Mary Kiden: First woman Minister for Gender

aware of the difficult circumstances that the women of South Sudan faces and the many displacement, instability, social, cultural and economic obstacles they have undergone.

But looking back, she is all smiles and even though they still face numerous challenges, she says. "Southern Sudanese women have been able to struggle to improve their lives and that of their communities in and outside Sudan,"

But this did not come as easily. She remembers with some nostalgic feeling how in 1994 during the Chukudum declaration, the role of women were recognized in the struggle as well in leadership. "That is why when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed, men felt obliged to enshrine the 25 per cent affirmative action in the CPA," she explained.

However she is concerned that even though the 25 per cent leveraged women's role in political leadership at all levels in South Sudan she is worried that it might work against them when it comes to 2010 General Elections.

"Our first handicap is that the people of South Sudan did not understand the whole

concept of the 25 per cent in that it was supposed to be at all levels of leadership, from national to local level as well as in professional bodies and public service," she says.

According to her since the 25 per cent was viewed by politicians as a way to welcome women in an area which is not their tough, it is like being in power without power." She said.

She however emphasized the importance of the General Election in the political maturation of the women of South Sudan by saying, "This election is going to be the start of women realizing that they need not to participate in the political landscape only in numbers but they need to get power as well."

The first Minister who still hopes to make in back in Parliament whether through the 25 percent nomination or through the competitive electoral process said that as the country is gearing towards the elections, one thing is sure, the country has achieved quite a number of milestones.

"We have achieved a lot for a country which was engulfed in war for the last two decades. Currently we have a gender policy

in place, we have the Child Act as well as adoption for children Act," says Kiden.

In terms of where women are currently in leadership, she said that within the 10 States, there are 11 women ministers and considering that this something that had never happened in the history of South Sudan, Kiden says, "This has opened the eyes of many women who now see that they can also become part of leadership in South Sudan."

Other milestones are the fact that women are the head of very powerful commissions namely; the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Human Rights Commission. Women have also made progress at the lower level of decision-making and there are States which have got women speakers and governors.

"With all these achievements in our hands, we are now ready to go the extra mile and make our positions effective," explains Kiden. She says; "The next step in the women's movement is to take power and because the women have gone something to offer, the government must set up a fund for women for elections."

Seize the golden opportunity, urges Parliamentary Affairs Minister

By Odhiambo Orlale

Sudanese women will have a golden opportunity to take over the Government through the ballot next year, thanks to the country's gender-friendly electoral laws.

The women have the privilege and right to bag 25 per cent of all the parliamentary seats before the National Elections Commission blows the whistle for the start of the official election campaigns heralding the historic polls slated for April, 2011.

Said the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr Martin Elia Lomuro; "Sudanese women have an opportunity to get to Parliament that no other women in the world have, thanks to the electoral law that has reserved 25 per cent of the seats for them."

The same law also gives women an opportunity to compete with their male rivals in an open competition for 60 and 15 per cent of the remaining seats in the constituencies and party lists respectively.

The Minister urged the over 100 women aspirants who attended a conference for South Sudan Women in Political Parties to develop a women's agenda for the polls, organised by the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Juba, to take full advantage of what he described as "golden opportunities" in the electoral laws and the political goodwill by the Government to have as many of them elected as possible.

The historic polls are the first since the end of the civil war and signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005.

Mr Lomuro, who is also a party leader of the South Sudan Democratic Forum (SSDF), praised the women leaders, who included three ministers, an undersecretary and most of the 27 women MPs, saying their decision to meet and draw up a common agenda before the polls was a step in the right direction to sharing power with their male counterparts.

Although the minister urged women politicians to join politics in big numbers, he had a word of caution for them: "But please don't copy men's bad habits that promote violence, corruption and ethnicity!"



Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, H.E. Martin Elias Lomuro, gave words of wise counsel when he officially closed the women's conference in Juba.

Mr Lomuro assured the women aspirants of the Government's support as far as their security and preparations for the polls were concerned. He said over 600 trainers of trainees had already graduated and would soon be sent to the rural areas to start an aggressive civic education programme.

The Minister reiterated: "You must all go out of here today and start to mobilise other women to register in large numbers as voters. Please note that no one will not vote for you because you are a daughter of a chief or a party leader, you will be elected on merit."

Mr Lomuro's SSDF is one of the eight registered political parties in South Sudan. There are 60 in the North, according to the chairman of the Political Parties Council, Mr Mohamed Bushara Dosa.

Mr Lomuro supported demands by some of the delegates that the Government must announce and then release funds to respective political parties to benefit women candidates.

The electoral law in Sudan bars political parties from receiving funds from abroad.

The minister expressed confidence that the women aspirants would work closely with the Government and Electoral Commission to ensure that the polls were free, fair and without violence.

He noted the Government was aware there were some South Sudanese who had still not recovered from the 24-year civil war and were still living in fear of democracy. This will pose a challenge of getting people to vote during the polls in February that will be followed by a referendum on whether to secede or not from the North.

"When you go to the villages to campaign from urban centres like Juba, please don't go with an attitude of one who knows it all. Speak to the villagers, but not at them. You will be shocked to hear how politically aware they are of their rights," Mr Lomuro warned.

In his parting shot, the minister commended the women for seeing it fit to start laying strategies and priorities in place saying: "I can now confirm that the conspiracy of women to take over the Government is now complete, and the men have been put on notice!"

Editorial

Why South Sudan women must unite to make inroads in the polls

The count down to the General Elections in South Sudan is slowly reaching fever pitch as a plethora of activities take place in readiness for the April, 2010, polls.

But for the women, this milestone is not only offering a lifetime opportunity where they can start wielding real power in their respective positions if elected, and yet the elections is also posing a real challenge to many women majority of whom are illiterate.

This was evident during the just ended three-day workshop for Sudanese Women in political parties to develop a women's common agenda for elections by UNIFEM and other donors.

What emerged was the lack of preparedness that exposed the need for civic empowerment and education as well as creating awareness around the importance of the general elections for the women. The other issue was lack of women's common agenda which can be used to gain political leverage with the various political parties.

Even though unlike other countries where the Affirmative Action is not recognised, for the women of South Sudan, they will be going into the polls assured of 25 per cent representation and the 15 per cent which they are supposed to get through the political party list.

However, what is most worrying is the fear that this could be used to bar women from vying for the boundary seats which can offer them a chance to surpass the minimum 30 per cent recommended by the Beijing Platform for Action.

One way to ensure this, is that they must work with the Institute of Political Parties Affairs whose mandate is to regulate and follow-up issues concerning the political parties. and one such issue is enduring that they adhere to their constitution which incidentally recognises Affirmative Action.

It is against this background that the women in all political parties must work together to realise the common agenda for women. They should also partner with other stakeholders such as political parties, Government, media and donor organisations to ensure that come the General Elections the number of women in all governance structure will be increased.

Youthful MP opts for peace building

One of the youthful MPs in South Sudan has opted to quit politics and instead promote peace initiatives in the land-locked country. The MP for Ayod, Ms Mary Nyaulan Ret, says she has learned a lot during the four years she has been a lawmaker in Jonglei State.

Says Ms Ret: "The electorate want me to stand during the forthcoming general elections but I have not decided yet. I feel I need more time to be with my family, who are abroad, and to also promote peace initiatives in Southern Sudan."

The 41-year-old mother of six has been the chairperson of the board of Southern Sudan Empowerment for Peace since 1986. She was also a mobiliser for People, Peace and Reconciliation Forum, which is a grassroots initiative promoted by the New Sudan Council of Churches. Ms Ret is a former secretary of New Sudan Women's Association and a former coordinator of the Gender Relief



Association of South Sudan which partnered with UNICEF's Operation Lifeline Sudan until the end of the civil war and signing of the CPA in 2005. She has also served as an official of the Sudanese Women Peace Initiative.

As the 2010 polls beckon, Ms Ret is comfortable looking forward to going back to doing what is close to her heart — promoting peace and integration among her compatriots. Like most Sudanese, the MP for Ayod is a trained soldier who served the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) under the late Dr Gen John Garang. She graduated as a cadet before training as photographer and working for the Ministry of Culture and Social Services for 18 months.

Does she have any regrets about joining politics? "I now want to do other things outside the Government. I would like to take time off to be with my children, who are schooling in Kenya, even though the electorate say they want me to stand."

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