Women gain strength in Kenya’s general election

By Lilian Juma

Women have always been a key part of Kenyan society, playing important roles in family, community, and national life. However, when it comes to politics, their presence has been minimal. The recent general election in Kenya saw a significant increase in the number of women elected to the national parliament, marking a turning point in the country’s political landscape.

**For the first time in Kenyan history, women get elected in significant numbers**

**THE gains may be modest by East African standards, but Kenyan women have emerged from the just-concluded general election stronger than ever before. After years of mediocre rankings in politics, the December poll saw nine women elected and another eight nominated by the two main parties – the National Rainbow Coalition and the former ruling party, Kanu. Although a far cry from neighbouring Uganda’s 75 women parliamentarians out of a total of 304 and Tanzania’s 61 out of 274, it was cause for celebrations across the country.**

In the last parliament, there were only four elected women and five nominated. Indeed, the number of women had never exceeded 10 throughout Kenya’s history. And the icing on the cake was yet to come: Three of the women were appointed to the Cabinet of the new government, with another three as assistant ministers. The last time a woman was in the Cabinet was just prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. It was a short-lived performance, at any rate, as she lost in the 1997 poll. Cynics were quick to link Nyiva Mwendwa’s appointment to a sense of shame arising from the fact that previous delegations to women’s world conferences had routinely been led by men – including the end of the United Nations Decade for Women conference held in Nairobi in 1985. And so the New Year dawned bright and promising, with the women appointed to significant ministries – health, water resources and the office of the vice-president – and not just the traditional culture and social services.

**changed attitudes to women**

“The election of nine women to Parliament is a clear indication that Kenyans have changed their attitudes to women, while their appointments show that the new president has confidence in women’s leadership,” said Betty Tett, a Nairobi politician, who was nominated and appointed an assistant minister as part of a deal to avert violence and ugly confrontations in Westlands constituency.

**Indeed, prominent Kanu women had gone on record opposing affirmative action as a policy to improve women’s presence in leadership and decision-making. Zipporah Kittony, a nominated member of the last parliament and a relative of the former head of state, came out openly to chide the first woman ever to contest the presidency in 1997, telling Charity Ngilu that Kenyans still needed the fatherly guidance of the then president, Daniel arap Moi.**

Mothers of the Kanu women in the last parliament chose to sit on the fence during a heated national debate over their party’s decision to renege on Kenya’s promise to name women to one-third of the country’s slots in the East African Legislative Assembly. With the National Rainbow Coalition euphoria sweeping across the country in 2002, however, it soon became apparent that women’s chances of gaining a stronger foothold in politics have not yet been realised, as she lost in the 1997 polls.

**Women’s presence in leadership traditionally had no time for women in politics – favouring token appointments rather than any concrete measures to improve the performance of women in leadership across the board.**

Indeed, prominent Kanu women had gone on record opposing affirmative action as a policy to improve women’s presence in leadership and decision-making. Zipporah Kittony, a nominated member of the last parliament and a relative of the former head of state, came out openly to chide the first woman ever to contest the presidency in 1997, telling Charity Ngilu that Kenyans still needed the fatherly guidance of the then president, Daniel arap Moi.

One of the most remarkable achievements of the National Rainbow Coalition was the decision to advocate for the appointment of women to key positions. This was a significant step forward for women in politics in Kenya, and it set a new standard for gender equality in leadership roles.

**Here come the main winners**

By Kwamboka Ogoro

S
taining in day was a time for hugs and congratulations for the nine women elected in the Kenyan elections of December 27, internationally acclaimed for ushering in a peaceful transition as former president Daniel arap Moi began his retirement. For Kenyan women, however, it was the dawn of a new era in more ways than one.

Here are the stories of some of the key winners.

**CHARITY NGILU Minister for health**

Fondly known as Mama Rainbow – after the rallying cry of Kenyans desperately hoping for change through the ballot box – Charity Ngilu is a symbol of the Kenyan woman who has shattered all the stereotypes of women in politics.

She made history as the first Kenyan woman ever to contest presidential elections in 1997. Her strong will and empathy for the grassroots woman has endeared her to voters in Kiambu Central constituency and to Kenyans in general. President Mwai Kibaki recognised her strength and showed confidence in her ability by appointing her to the plum post of Minister for Health.

Although she did not clinch the presidency in the 1997 elections – she got 469,067 against Moi’s 2,444,803 – she showed history as the first woman in sub-Saharan Africa to go for the presidency.

She had clearly cut a niche for herself in the Kenyan political landscape.

“Kenyans need their pride and honour restored. This can only be achieved if women aspire for leadership positions. With extensive and committed training through seminars and workshops, this can be realised,” she said.

When the ruling party was negotiating the winning formula, she was the only woman among eight men in the National Rainbow Coalition core group that worked on merging of parties and finally
The main winners

From Page 1

taking over the government.

With that kind of national outlook, it was almost impossible for her rival, former minister George Ndoto, to sway the Kitui Central voters. They knew where their votes would go and Ngilu counseled him by getting 25,635 votes against his 7,809.

There are those who have questioned her credentials for managing the crucial Ministry of Health on the grounds that she is not well educated. Yet the same concerns are not raised about the ability of her male counterparts. She has rightly chosen to ignore this and get on with what needs to be done.

Her husband, Michael, who owns an electrical engineering firm, has kept a low political profile and let his wife run the show. But when he gets an opportunity, he marshals support for his wife. At a rally, he once encouraged men to let their wives become involved in politics, reassuring them that her wife still makes his breakfast — probably to crush the myth that women cease to be feminine when they get into leadership positions.

LINAH JEBI KILIMO Minister of State

Seeking election in the traditional Marakwet community has not been easy going for 39-year-old Linah Kilimo and her husband, engineer Philemon Kilimo, who has been challenged over letting his wife “walk around as if she has no domestic responsibilities”.

Despite this, the jubilation in the constituency after she was appointed to the Cabinet was resounding. It was the best thing that happened in the constituency since creation, they said. Her victory was special, coming after a campaign conducted largely on foot since there are no roads in Marakwet district.

She stuck her neck out campaigning against female genital mutilation, which is widely practised in the constituency. It is to be hoped that the fact that 9,159 voters chose to back her over rival John Marinomi, who garnered 5,317 votes, means that her people have accepted her crusade against the practice.

BETH MUGO Assistant Minister for Information and Tourism

Beth Mugo had to choose between supporting her cousin, Uturu Kenyatta, who was running for the presidency, and joining the opposition under whose ticket she joined parliament for the first time in 1992.

“It was difficult,” she says. Ultimately, she chose what she knows best, which is opposition politics, and it paid off when she won back her Dagoretti seat in the December poll. She attributes her success in it to her opposition to the women’s groups she worked with before making a debut in politics in 1992. They asked her to stand for election and pressed her husband into their service when she appeared reluctant.

She encouraged her to go for it and has stood beside her ever since. Her grip on the constituency is as strong as ever and she has mastered the art of campaigning against women in the battle.

Yvonne Khamati

By Mildred Barasa

THOUGH Kenyan women made remarkable strides in the just-concluded general election, the December poll was not without its drama for the candidates. And so it was that in Westlands constituency in Nairobi, perennial rivals Betty Tett and Fred Gumo geared up for the fight of their lives — the only difference being that this time they would be doing so within the same party, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC).

With the threat of intra-party violence looming large, the coalition leaders had to think fast if they were to resolve one of their biggest dilemmas. The solution? The party simply made Tett an offer she couldn’t refuse. If she stepped down for the battle-hardened Gumo, she was told, she would get an automatic nomination to parliament.

It was a grim recognition of the place that violence plays in denying women a fair chance to compete in elections when male candidates considered too weak to survive the electoral experience. At the end of the day, Tett was one of the lucky women to scrape through the nominations. All the parties contravened nomination rules and in almost all cases, men were favored at the expense of female candidates considered too weak to survive the electoral experience.

This was the case for Karen Magara, a parliamentary candidate in Nairobi’s Makadara constituency, who was sidelined by her party, Ford People, which was jittery about her prospects for winning the seat.

Says Magara: “Women were mistreated in all the parties. I won the nominations by queue voting. But they dismissed me because I am a woman. They thought I could not wage a fight.”

Magara garnered a total of 1,560 votes against her closest opponent, who had only 46. Her party’s rules were that at the end of the nomination day, the winner would be decided by the results from stations where nominations had been done even if it was only one. With the lead in four stations, Magara was the undisputed winner.

She and nine other female aspirants had met their party leader, Simeon Nyachae, seeking assurances that there would be a level playing field for all candidates. “When I called Nyachae’s office a day after the nominations, his secretary congratulated me for doing well,” recalls Magara.

But to her shock and disappointment, she was not given the certificate. She was told instead that since her brother had won nomination in their upcountry home, she could not be taken on board. There is a long history of siblings sitting in the same parliament since the 1970s.

“I was sacrificed because of my brother James,” says Magara. “The whole exercise was like painting a dog. They knew they had given out the ticket, but they let us through the exercise. The people just pretend that they support women, yet nobody really does.”

She learned that the certificate she had tirelessly worked for had been given to a man whose name did not even appear on the party’s nomination list. The same situation prevailed in Karachionyo constituency, where the party cleared a man who had been beaten in the NARC nominations at the expense of Teddy Olang.

Neither did women in the other parties fare any differently. Yvonne Khamati, also a parliamentary candidate in Makadara constituency, put all her strengths in campaigning for NARC until the last minute.

Faced violence

The 21-year-old Khamati says she faced violence and all manner of insults in the name of the coalition, only to discover that her key rival had been put in charge of printing the ballot papers to be used in the party nominations.

Says she: “I felt let down. Right now, I feel betrayed and cheated. NARC was created to ensure free and fair elections, to be an alternative to Kanu. Now it does not even have the 30 per cent tickets it had promised.”

The parties chose to give precedence to male ability to withstand the violence and chaotic nature of electioneering, they ignored one major factor in politics: Legislators do not get elected to fight physically but to represent the interests of their constituents. The only muscle anyone needs to do this is the brain.

THE KENYA ELECTIONS

Women lose in the battle between brawn and brain

By Mildred Barasa

THOUGH Kenyan women made remarkable strides in the just-concluded general election, the December poll was not without its drama for the candidates. And so it was that in Westlands constituency in Nairobi, perennial rivals Betty Tett and Fred Gumo geared up for the fight of their lives — the only difference being that this time they would be doing so within the same party, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC).

With the threat of intra-party violence looming large, the coalition leaders had to think fast if they were to resolve one of their biggest dilemmas. The solution? The party simply made Tett an offer she couldn’t refuse. If she stepped down for the battle-hardened Gumo, she was told, she would get an automatic nomination to parliament.

It was a grim recognition of the place that violence plays in denying women a fair chance to compete in elections when male candidates considered too weak to survive the electoral experience. At the end of the day, Tett was one of the lucky women to scrape through the nominations. All the parties contravened nomination rules and in almost all cases, men were favored at the expense of female candidates considered too weak to survive the electoral experience.

This was the case for Karen Magara, a parliamentary candidate in Nairobi’s Makadara constituency, who was sidelined by her party, Ford People, which was jittery about her prospects for winning the seat.

Says Magara: “Women were mistreated in all the parties. I won the nominations by queue voting. But they dismissed me because I am a woman. They thought I could not wage a fight.”

Magara garnered a total of 1,560 votes against her closest opponent, who had only 46. Her party’s rules were that at the end of the nomination day, the winner would be decided by the results from stations where nominations had been done even if it was only one. With the lead in four stations, Magara was the undisputed winner.

She and nine other female aspirants had met their party leader, Simeon Nyachae, seeking assurances that there would be a level playing field for all candidates. “When I called Nyachae’s office a day after the nominations, his secretary congratulated me for doing well,” recalls Magara.

But to her shock and disappointment, she was not given the certificate. She was told instead that since her brother had won nomination in their upcountry home, she could not be taken on board. There is a long history of siblings sitting in the same parliament since the 1970s.

“I was sacrificed because of my brother James,” says Magara. “The whole exercise was like painting a dog. They knew they had given out the ticket, but they let us through the exercise. The people just pretend that they support women, yet nobody really does.”

She learned that the certificate she had tirelessly worked for had been given to a man whose name did not even appear on the party’s nomination list. The same situation prevailed in Karachionyo constituency, where the party cleared a man who had been beaten in the NARC nominations at the expense of Teddy Olang.

Neither did women in the other parties fare any differently. Yvonne Khamati, also a parliamentary candidate in Makadara constituency, put all her strengths in campaigning for NARC until the last minute.

Faced violence

The 21-year-old Khamati says she faced violence and all manner of insults in the name of the coalition, only to discover that her key rival had been put in charge of printing the ballot papers to be used in the party nominations.

Says she: “I felt let down. Right now, I feel betrayed and cheated. NARC was created to ensure free and fair elections, to be an alternative to Kanu. Now it does not even have the 30 per cent tickets it had promised.”

The parties chose to give precedence to male ability to withstand the violence and chaotic nature of electioneering, they ignored one major factor in politics: Legislators do not get elected to fight physically but to represent the interests of their constituents. The only muscle anyone needs to do this is the brain.
If I were first lady, here’s what I’d do...

By Betty Muriuki

Kenya has just come through some particularly sensational electoral elections since independence. Not only were the campaigns intense and exhilarating, with a seemingly non-ending progression of twists and turns, the outcome was thrilling, ushering in phenomenal changes that few had dared believe possible, and sending Kenyans across the country into rapturous celebrations. Of these changes, three were particularly sensational.

First, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), which had been in power for two-and-a-half decades, was thrown out by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), a grouping of political parties and politicians that had twice separately tried to break this hold with no success.

Then there was the exit from State House of Daniel arap Moi after 24 very long years, and the entry of President Mwai Kibaki. The election of a new government ushered in an era of hope for Kenyans, who are optimistic that Kibaki will lift the country out of the social, economic and political morass into which Moi had driven it.

Moi was around for so long that his leaving will take getting used to, almost the same way one needs time to acclimatise to one’s own house when a tyrannical mother-in-law leaves after an extended visit. Only that this is better, because while the mother-in-law is bound to return, Moi is gone for good.

Moreover, for the first time since 1978, Kenya has a first lady. Once upon a time, Moi did have a wife, but they were separated before he succeeded Jomo Kenyatta, the country’s first president. Kenyatta’s youngest wife, Mama Ngina Kenyatta, is the only first lady Kenyans have ever known.

Now there is Lucy Muthoni Kibaki.

Apart from making appearances beside her husband before the elections and after his installation as head of state, little has been seen of Lucy. In fact, there is very little documented public information about her. Nor has she granted audiences to any of the journalists who have been hounding her for an interview.

Which is her first big mistake. Kenyans are keen to know just who their first lady is. Maybe Lucy still can’t believe that she is really in State House and would first need to get used to the idea herself before talking to anyone about it. If I were in her shoes, it would probably take me time to find my feet, too, but I would go about things a little differently.

If I were first lady, I would open up to the media. While guarding one’s privacy is good reason not to talk to the press, it is a reason that often has the opposite result for public figures. Mystery only seems to draw attention to them. Lucy’s reluctance to talk to the press may be for fear that she would open the door for the whole nation to peer into a closet full of family skeletons – and there are quite a number in that closet. But most people are more interested in who she is and what we can expect from her.

Anyway, a little scandal may not be such a bad thing. Consider how the Monica Lewinsky saga worked for Hillary Clinton in the US. It must have been one of the most trying times of her life, but her position as the wronged woman and her decision to stand by her husband raised her popularity and might ultimately have contributed to her election as senator.

For most people, what stands out more from Hilary’s eight-year stay at the White House was the active role she played in policy making rather than the scandals in which she was involved (have no fear, Cherie Blair). She was, in fact, the first lady to have an office in the presidential West Wing.

The Kenya Human Rights Commission might have borrowed a leaf from Hilary’s group when it recently called for provision for an office of the first lady, complete with budget and staff.

The commission argued that women constitute more than half of the country’s population, yet ‘their invisibility in public life is shocking’, an anomaly which Kibaki could correct ‘by using his office to underline the humanity and importance of women in public life’. Now, if I were first lady, I would draw my husband’s attention to that suggestion. I would use my new status as a chance to push to the fore some of those issues that have been confined to the back burner in favour of politics. Leadership in Kenya has always tended to concentrate more on politics and power games and to trivialise the issues that are closest to the hearts and lives of the people.

If I were first lady, I would pick a cause or two, like street children, Aids orphans or home-based care for HIV/AIDS patients, and make them my pet concerns. Or I would concentrate on income-generating projects for women. In this I would have a worthy mentor in next-door neighbour Janet Museveni. The Ugandan first lady is a very public figure, and is always at one function or another, giving headlines to women’s groups or installing solar projects in the rural areas.

Last year, Janet was awarded the first ever Global Aids Leadership Award from an international consortium of Aids organisations for her work with HIV/AIDS orphans.

Like Janet, I would consider it my role to do what I can to narrow the gap between the poor and the rich. If I were first lady, not for me would be the gluttonous ways of the graceless Grace Mugabe, first lady of Zimbabwe. Grace’s love for travel and shopping while her countrymen go hungry and her husband continues to rain what he can of the economy have earned her a place on the Bank of England’s and the European Union’s sanctions list, along with terrorists like Osama Bin Laden and international drug barons.

So determined is she to acquire as much as she can be fore Mugabe ultimately goes the Moi way, that she now seems to have thrown all caution to the wind. Last October, Grace marched onto a 1,200-hectare estate just outside Harare and told the elderly white couple who owned it that it now belonged to her, and they had to leave. They did, and Grace is now the proud owner of the farm, which has a two-storey mansion with at least 20 rooms, as well as cottages and two swimming pools.

But there is one thing that I would take from Grace. If I were first lady, I would dress to the nines. A president’s wife is often one of the most visible women in a country. Kenyan women are graceful and beautiful, and I would do my best to reflect this image wherever I went.

I would spend hours in front of the mirror, if need be, or get a trainer if there are any, to train my face to hold an amiable expression, at least in public. I would hire the best hairdresser I could find and avoid wearing wigs that made me look as if I were a mobile thatched hut – and a bad one at that. And I would fill my wardrobe with clothes that would do justice to the image of the women of my country.

But there is one thing that I would do justice to the image of the women of my country. If I were first lady, I would dress to the nines. A president’s wife is often one of the most visible women in a country. Kenyan women are graceful and beautiful, and I would do my best to reflect the image wherever I went.

I would spend hours in front of the mirror, if need be, or get a trainer if there are any, to train my face to hold an amiable expression, at least in public. I would hire the best hairdresser I could find and avoid wearing wigs that made me look as if I were a mobile thatched hut – and a bad one at that. And I would fill my wardrobe with clothes that would do justice to the image of the women of my country.

"Most people want to know who Lucy Kibaki is and what they can expect from her"
Nominations are good, but being elected is better

Kenyans are justifiably excited at the near doubling of the number of women in parliament. It is not difficult to see why getting a woman into this country's national legislature should cause for celebration. Kenya has languished near the bottom of the international parliamentary rankings for women's representation ever since independence. However, this does not mean that some of the largest delegations to international women's conferences and also hosting the United Nations End of the Women's Decade Conference in 1985.

This has not been for lack of active campaigns to improve the status of women. In the leadership and decision-making process since the country reverted to multi-party politics, donkeys have poured money into civic education and all manner of projects to give women leadership and campaign skills.

The December poll was no exception and, for a moment during the pre-election period, it appeared that the women would not perform any better than usual. And then came the unexpected: The main political parties in the opposition ganged up to present a united front against Kanu's 40-year hold on Kenya's politics. This realigning of the political terrain gave women a window of hope in the sense that it became clear early in the game that the National Rainbow Coalition would whittle down the former ruling party in much of the country. What this meant was that anyone who gained the coalition's nomination would be pretty much guaranteed a seat in parliament. Women comprised a paltry 400.

Despite the long-standing recognition of the fundamental right of women and men to participate in political life, in practice the gap between de jure and de facto equality in power and decision-making remains wide. Consequently, women's interests are not adequately represented in the political decision-making process and levels and women are unlikely to influence key social, economic and political decisions.

Some countries have put in place measures and laws to ensure a significant representation of women in government. In Argentina, the law on quotas demands that all parties nominate 30 percent women as candidates. The Belgian parliament has 40 percent representation of women because of the combined 40-60 percent ratio.

Critics tend to argue that availing women with opportunities does not equate to women being involved in the decision-making process. They have said that opportunities should be extended for women to take advantage of them.

In many countries, women's lack of interest in politics and lack of confidence in political structures often stem from the 'dirty' nature of politics. African politics is fraught with bribery and violence, sometimes targeting even the families of politicians. Women make up more than half of the world's population and it is only fair that they are also represented at every level. Currently 50 percent of government appointees to the district councils are women. Though they are few and far between, women are also represented on boards of directors countrywide.

According to United Nations statistics, 1.3 billion people worldwide are poor; three-quarters of them women. With this level of poverty, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for women to become dynamic politicians any time soon.

In many countries, women's lack of interest in politics and lack of confidence in political structures often stem from the "dirty" nature of politics. African politics is fraught with bribery and violence, sometimes targeting even the families of politicians. Women make up more than half of the world's population and it is only fair that they are also represented at every level. Currently 50 percent of government appointees to the district councils are women. Though they are few and far between, women are also represented on boards of directors countrywide.

According to United Nations statistics, 1.3 billion people worldwide are poor; three-quarters of them women. With this level of poverty, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for women to become dynamic politicians any time soon.

In many countries, women's lack of interest in politics and lack of confidence in political structures often stem from the "dirty" nature of politics. African politics is fraught with bribery and violence, sometimes targeting even the families of politicians. Women make up more than half of the world's population and it is only fair that they are also represented at every level. Currently 50 percent of government appointees to the district councils are women. Though they are few and far between, women are also represented on boards of directors countrywide.

African politics is fraught with bribery and violence, sometimes targeting even the families of politicians. Women make up more than half of the world's population and it is only fair that they are also represented at every level. Currently 50 percent of government appointees to the district councils are women. Though they are few and far between, women are also represented on boards of directors countrywide.

African politics is fraught with bribery and violence, sometimes targeting even the families of politicians. Women make up more than half of the world's population and it is only fair that they are also represented at every level. Currently 50 percent of government appointees to the district councils are women. Though they are few and far between, women are also represented on boards of directors countrywide.

African politics is fraught with bribery and violence, sometimes targeting even the families of politicians. Women make up more than half of the world's population and it is only fair that they are also represented at every level. Currently 50 percent of government appointees to the district councils are women. Though they are few and far between, women are also represented on boards of directors countrywide.
ZIMBABWE

Food in exchange for party loyalty

The Mugabe government holds hungry people hostage as maize meal goes to ZANU PF members only

By Sandra Nyaiva

HER four-month-old baby struggled to her back, Nomsa Chigumbura joined a long queue in the wee hours. She is hoping to get a chance to buy a packet of maize meal, the staple food in Zimbabwe, as protests mount that President Robert Mugabe's government is using food aid for its own ends – to punish opposition supporters and to buy votes from the desperate population.

Unfortunately for the 28-year-old, the maize meal is sold out long before she gets anywhere near the front and she has to leave and join another queue at another shopping centre. She just can't bear the fact of returning home empty-handed to face the hungry faces of her three other children.

Despite her daughter's piteous wailing, she has no choice but to hop, skip and jump to one queue to another. The end of the day finds her in another long queue, this time in the neighbourhood of the rural areas has started resorting to eating poisonous fruit and plant tubers to survive. Alternatives such as rice and potatoes are beyond their means.

Jenny Chikotocho, 56, says "There is no hope for me because I don't belong to their party. It means my household has been sentenced to death for not supporting the ruling party."

Emergency relief

Aid agencies are struggling to meet the demand for emergency relief supplies, the UN's food agency, according to the World Food Programme.

Only recently, women from the suburban townships in Harare held a demonstration urging the leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, to ensure they were fed.

The women, beating pots and pans, said they represented all mothers across the country. They said in a statement: “We are pleading with you to help us, as we are groaning in hunger. Because of Mugabe's destruction and plunder of wealth, Zimbabweans now find themselves facing death by starvation. Our children can no longer afford to go to school and our husbands have been forced out of work.”

Sold to party members

Aid agencies say there is evidence that it is Zimbabwean government policy to force Zimbabweans, through starvation, to support the 76-year-old Mugabe.

The Food Security Network, a local grouping of 24 non-governmental organisations, said a survey had revealed that household stocks had fallen to zero or less than one month's supply and in half of the country's districts "everyone is now in need” of food aid.

At the same time, the survey showed, "there was an increase in reported political interference in relief” during the last month. It singled out "procedural barriers, political bias and reduced supplies” as the most frequent obstacles to hungry people getting food.

Black market prices for staple food have risen to Z$2,000 (Exchange rate one US dollar to 1,600 Zimdollars on the black market and 59 Zimdollars in the banks) a kilogramme – 67 percent more than the September price, enabling those with access to make super profits.

A detailed report on official corruption in food relief by the Danish group Physicians for Human Rights said key figures in Mugabe's ruling ZANU PF party dominated the black market.

The UN says Mugabe has further curtailed the availability of food by banning private companies from importing grain and severely restricting charities from importing for their own relief programmes.

"And despite Mugabe's September promise to WFP head, James Morris, that he would allow genetically modified maize into the country, only minimal amounts have come into the country. Meanwhile, southern Africa faces the threat of yet more drought.
Where women die quietly and needlessly

By Elizabeth Kameo

SAFETY motherhood may have been incorporated into Ugandan national health policy four years ago, but pregnancy and childbirth continue to be the leading causes of death for women. According to the Demographic Health Study of 2001, 305 out of every 100,000 women die in childbirth.

Says Olive Sentumbwe-Mugisa of the Uganda World Health Organisation office, “This translates to about 5,050 women dying every year from pregnancy complications, and 420 women dying every month from complications of bus full of passengers getting an accident and all 42 perishing. But the bus accident gets to be highlighted. What is so sad is that these maternal deaths are never highlighted. Women die a quiet death.”

She adds that the problem of pregnancy and its outcome has not been highlighted. “Women and the communities have not been sensitised or educated to appreciate that every pregnancy carries a risk of death. If the system is not well prepared for the possible emergency, the result is death.”

Late last year, Uganda’s minister for state for primary health care, Beatrice Wabudeya, said Uganda still had embarrassingly high maternal mortality rates. Wabudeya added: “We still have a big problem they do not show any improvement factors in Uganda is that of maternal mortality, says the U.N. Human Development Index of 2001.

Uganda is one of 12 countries with the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. The rates are: India 111,000, Ethiopia 46,000, Nigeria 45,000, Indonesia 22,000, Bangladesh 20,000, Democratic Republic of Congo 20,000, China 13,000, Kenya 10,000, Tunisia 13,000, Pakistan 10,000 and Uganda 10,000. They account for 65 percent of all maternal deaths globally. A progress report from Uganda’s ministry of health estimates that 61,000 women will die of maternal causes between now and 2010 if no action is taken.

Worse still, for every woman who dies as a result of maternal complications, between 20 and 30 more will suffer short and long-term disabilities. In the next decade, 100,000 women will become infertile and about 1.2 million will suffer from disabilities such as inability to breastfeed, incontinence due to fistula and pelvic pain.

Some studies have also indicated that poor maternal health dramatically reduces the capacity of Uganda women to work, constraining their ability to generate income and grow out of poverty.

Sentumbwe-Mugisa says the major causes of maternal mortality in Uganda include haemorrhage, sepsis, unsafe abortions, hypertensive disorders and obstructed labour. HIV/AIDS, malaria and anaemia also contribute.

Studies indicate that 65 percent of the babies born to mothers who die due to pregnancy-related causes would have survived had their mothers not died. This means 40,000 babies will die unnecessarily between now and the year 2010.

The poor health of mothers also increases the risk of death for infants. It is estimated that over the next decade, 38,000 infants will die as a result of neonatal tetanus; 31,000 will die as a result of maternal iodine deficiency and 220,000 will be stillborn as a result of low birth weight attributed to the synergistic effects of maternal anemia and malaria during pregnancy.

Preventable maternal death contributes further to Uganda’s escalating orphan population. There are about 1.3 million orphans in Uganda.

The low rate of assisted deliveries is a major problem in Uganda, says Sentumbwe-Mugisa. “Increasing the assisted delivery rate is a key intervention that will alleviate many of the problems that lead to maternal mortality because skilled attendants will be present to manage pregnancy-related complications,” she told Africawoman.

Despite efforts to train birth attendants and improve emergency services for pregnant women, experience has shown that improving access and quality alone will not ensure better use of services and a drastic decrease in maternal mortality rates.”

Numerous socio-cultural and psychological barriers remain, which will require behaviour change to be addressed as a long-term effective communication strategy between women and health care providers. Mobilising communities and involving men are also crucial to achieving safer pregnancy and motherhood.

“Culturally, people know that pregnancy carries a risk”, says Sentumbwe-Mugisa. “But they also think it’s God’s plan because they have never had a solution, never thought about it deeply and never had the capacity to address the problem.”

Sentumbwe is also a member of the Network for the Prevention of Maternal Mortality in Uganda, which aims to head off maternal deaths by ensuring proper nutrition for girls in the home.

Safe motherhood

Ultimately, Sentumbwe says, maternal deaths will only be reduced when safe motherhood services are permanently incorporated in the primary health care system. This can only happen if women get educated and achieve equality.

She adds that men should be encouraged to accept family planning. The lack of progress in reducing maternal deaths in Uganda is ultimately not too much of a puzzle, considering the lack of resources, but it is not excusable either considering that women’s lives are at risk when maternal deaths are preventable.

“The world has clearly defined the needed interventions to save women’s lives,” says Sentumbwe. “But the resources are missing.” The doctor has just one challenge for Ugandan politicians: It is high time they began addressing the issue of healthy populations and not just numbers.

Football referee Adipo really means business

By Margaret Ziribbagwa

Very much at home officiating at football matches, Catherine Adipo does not hesitate to blow the whistle when a player must be penalised. She is one of only two international women referees in Uganda. The other is Margaret Kubungi, a teacher. Adipo’s refereeing days date back to 1998, when she was a football coach and games mistress at Makerere College School in Kampala.

As she puts it, she didn’t just wake up one day and decide to become a referee. She was inspired by Dick Nsubuga, one of Uganda’s top referees. Adipo refers to the late Nsubuga as the best referee Uganda ever had. Her favourite international referee is Pier-Luigi Collina of Italy. “I admire the way he handles matches and the decisions he makes on the pitch,” Adipo says.

The mother of two holds a bachelor’s degree in education from Makerere University. She knows her game and has never had fan trouble. “It is a challenging job,” she told Africawoman. “I run not less than five kilometres daily. At the end of it, I stretch and take a shower.”

This year’s FIFA list of qualified international referees includes more women than ever before. Ranging from ages 24 to 41, they include Jeorgette Imuli and Andree Yaqiplate from Central Africa Republic, Fatou Gaye from Senegal, Bola Elizabeth Aihoye, Faith Uwuigaran Irabor and Bolanle Celina Sokotiri from Nigeria, Sabela Sihunzi from Zimbabwe and Lisiel Makwena from Zambia.

Adipo, who earns $10 per match at a national stadium and $750 during an international match, recalls officiating at a match between the Ugandan Cabinet, led by President Yoweri Museveni, and the executives of the Federation of Uganda Football Association at the Nelson Mandela Stadium in Namboole.

The president was the captain and went on to score a goal. She was voted best referee during a 2001 tournament in South Africa.

Women referees have proved their mettle on the pitch. All that’s left is to break through the glass ceiling at the administrative level. Can we expect this to happen any time soon?
If fathers took care of babies, there would be no more wars

By Grace Cithaiga

JOHN Ndiritu, 37, talks about the texture of his three-month-old daughter's stool the way some men talk about money or sports. As far as he is concerned, he is 'living the talk'.

Ndiritu is on paternity leave for three months. He is not only taking some of the pressures of parenting off his wife Jane, but he is also taking the opportunity to bond and connect with his daughter Neema Nyawira. “We have bonded quite well and she cries less and less,” he says. “She knows, I know she is either uncomfortable or hungry.”

His employer, the Swedish Embassy, grants paternity leave ranging from four to six months, but it is not compulsory. In most organisations, a man may take three days off work to get his wife out of hospital and help her settle down with the new baby.

Ndiritu opted to take time off from mid-November to mid-February. “Parenting is a challenge and, as a man, you get to see and appreciate what the mother does,” quips Ndiritu. “Taking care of the young one brings out the best in you as a man.”

He goes on to say that his employer supports gender and equal opportunity but is quick to point out that most people speak of gender as something for 'other people'. He feels, therefore, that he is living what his employer preaches.

Won’t take risks

Ndiritu’s day revolves around feeding and playing with his daughter, bathing her and changing diapers, “unless I have to go to town”.

As the baby sleeps, he watches video productions of other men (from Europe) taking care of their babies. It helps him learn new ways of doing things. “I am very careful and won’t take any risks with the baby,” he says.

After breastfeeding in the night, the mother leaves Ndiritu to play with the baby until she falls asleep again. “Right now, we are feeding her with milk and have just introduced her to pawpaw though it is giving her constipation,” he says. “Preparation of food is a department that I need more practice in, but I am learning.”

This experience has taught Ndiritu invaluable lessons. He now knows that it is difficult to bring up a child. He explains, “The needs are so many. It is a very tiring task.”

He feels that the world has not been fair to women, “but we have been socialised that women should do certain things”.

When she was expecting, Jane says, Ndiritu would help in the kitchen. Their son, aged four-and-a-half, would ask the father: “Why are you cooking? Are you mummy-daddy?”

Ndiritu spends very little time with his male friends. “When I drink, I have only two or three and have to leave,” he says, “and so my friends think I am acting strange.”

He is not sure of what they say behind his back, but he argues that handling babies might just be what the doctor ordered for his fellow men. Though men are supposed to bring out children, he adds, as the experience gives one time to reflect on humanity—hopefully, this would re-direct men’s efforts from thinking about war. His wife, who resumed work after two months’ maternity leave, is excited about her husband taking time off to care for the baby.

“IT’S a relief when you are in the office and you don’t have to call home every hour to find out what is happening to the baby,” she says.

Good for family

Ndiritu urges fellow fathers to take parenting seriously, saying it is good for the stability of the family. He recommends that more organisations, particularly those in the development sector, give men time off to ‘get dirty’. Says Ndiritu: “It may be expensive, considering the time away from work, but it is worth it. The social reality is that women are also working and even earning more than their husbands.”

Ndiritu gets his inspiration from his boss, Maria Stridsman, who goes out to work as her husband takes care of their baby.

Clinging to power, the African disease

Experience shows military no better than civilians

By Susan Naa Selyere, Ghana

Most African countries are among the poorest in the world, despite the continent’s vast resources.

One of the key reasons for this state of affairs is instability fostered by military coups. But it all boils down to inefficiencies. A state of affairs is instability fostered by inefficiencies, a man may take three days off work to get his wife out of hospital and help her settle down with the new baby.

Ndiritu opted to take time off from mid-November to mid-February. ‘Parenting is a challenge and, as a man, you get to see and appreciate what the mother does,’ quips Ndiritu. ‘Taking care of the young one brings out the best in you as a man.’

He goes on to say that his employer supports gender and equal opportunity but is quick to point out that most people speak of gender as something for ‘other people’. He feels, therefore, that he is living what his employer preaches.

Ndiritu’s day revolves around feeding and playing with his daughter, bathing her and changing diapers, ‘unless I have to go to town’.

As the baby sleeps, he watches video productions of other men (from Europe) taking care of their babies. It helps him learn new ways of doing things. ‘I am very careful and won’t take any risks with the baby,’ he says.

After breastfeeding in the night, the mother leaves Ndiritu to play with the baby until she falls asleep again. ‘Right now, we are feeding her with milk and have just introduced her to pawpaw though it is giving her constipation,’ he says. ‘Preparation of food is a department that I need more practice in, but I am learning.’

This experience has taught Ndiritu invaluable lessons. He now knows that it is difficult to bring up a child. He explains, ‘The needs are so many. It is a very tiring task.’

He feels that the world has not been fair to women, ‘but we have been socialised that women should do certain things’.

When she was expecting, Jane says, Ndiritu would help in the kitchen. Their son, aged four-and-a-half, would ask the father: ‘Why are you cooking? Are you mummy-daddy?’

Ndiritu spends very little time with his male friends. ‘When I drink, I have only two or three and have to leave,’ he says, ‘and so my friends think I am acting strange.’

He is not sure of what they say behind his back, but he argues that handling babies might just be what the doctor ordered for his fellow men. Though men are supposed to bring out children, he adds, as the experience gives one time to reflect on humanity—hopefully, this would re-direct men’s efforts from thinking about war. His wife, who resumed work after two months’ maternity leave, is excited about her husband taking time off to care for the baby.

‘IT’S a relief when you are in the office and you don’t have to call home every hour to find out what is happening to the baby,’ she says.

Good for family

Ndiritu urges fellow fathers to take parenting seriously, saying it is good for the stability of the family. He recommends that more organisations, particularly those in the development sector, give men time off to ‘get dirty’. Says Ndiritu: ‘It may be expensive, considering the time away from work, but it is worth it. The social reality is that women are also working and even earning more than their husbands.’

Ndiritu gets his inspiration from his boss, Maria Stridsman, who goes out to work as her husband takes care of their baby.

Clinging to power, the African disease

Experience shows military no better than civilians

By Susan Naa Selyere, Ghana

Most African countries are among the poorest in the world, despite the continent’s vast resources. One of the key reasons for this state of affairs is instability fostered by military coups. But it all boils down to inefficiencies. A state of affairs is instability fostered by inefficiencies, a man may take three days off work to get his wife out of hospital and help her settle down with the new baby.

Ndiritu opted to take time off from mid-November to mid-February. ‘Parenting is a challenge and, as a man, you get to see and appreciate what the mother does,’ quips Ndiritu. ‘Taking care of the young one brings out the best in you as a man.’

He goes on to say that his employer supports gender and equal opportunity but is quick to point out that most people speak of gender as something for ‘other people’. He feels, therefore, that he is living what his employer preaches.

Ndiritu’s day revolves around feeding and playing with his daughter, bathing her and changing diapers, ‘unless I have to go to town’.

As the baby sleeps, he watches video productions of other men (from Europe) taking care of their babies. It helps him learn new ways of doing things. ‘I am very careful and won’t take any risks with the baby,’ he says.

After breastfeeding in the night, the mother leaves Ndiritu to play with the baby until she falls asleep again. ‘Right now, we are feeding her with milk and have just introduced her to pawpaw though it is giving her constipation,’ he says. ‘Preparation of food is a department that I need more practice in, but I am learning.’

This experience has taught Ndiritu invaluable lessons. He now knows that it is difficult to bring up a child. He explains, ‘The needs are so many. It is a very tiring task.’

He feels that the world has not been fair to women, ‘but we have been socialised that women should do certain things’.

When she was expecting, Jane says, Ndiritu would help in the kitchen. Their son, aged four-and-a-half, would ask the father: ‘Why are you cooking? Are you mummy-daddy?’

Ndiritu spends very little time with his male friends. ‘When I drink, I have only two or three and have to leave,’ he says, ‘and so my friends think I am acting strange.’

He is not sure of what they say behind his back, but he argues that handling babies might just be what the doctor ordered for his fellow men. Though men are supposed to bring out children, he adds, as the experience gives one time to reflect on humanity—hopefully, this would re-direct men’s efforts from thinking about war. His wife, who resumed work after two months’ maternity leave, is excited about her husband taking time off to care for the baby.

‘IT’S a relief when you are in the office and you don’t have to call home every hour to find out what is happening to the baby,’ she says.

Good for family

Ndiritu urges fellow fathers to take parenting seriously, saying it is good for the stability of the family. He recommends that more organisations, particularly those in the development sector, give men time off to ‘get dirty’. Says Ndiritu: ‘It may be expensive, considering the time away from work, but it is worth it. The social reality is that women are also working and even earning more than their husbands.’

Ndiritu gets his inspiration from his boss, Maria Stridsman, who goes out to work as her husband takes care of their baby.
ZIMBABWE

What Aids? There is no such thing here...

By Ruth Gabi

It’s all a great conspiracy,” said the big-boned man in the swivel chair sporting a 1960s haircut, complete with a parting on the right.

“There is no HIV. It is all lies. AIDS does not exist. People are dying because of fungal infections. HIV/AIDS is not killing people but chemicals, stress and starvation that cause immune suppression. That is what is killing people, not AIDS.”

Meet Richard Ngwenya, the flamboyant former tailor and medical officer in the country’s liberation war of the seventies and now turned medical doctor. Ngwenya contends that AIDS is just meant to frighten people. In the same breathe, claims he can reverse AIDS symptoms. Zimbabwe has one of the highest rates of new AIDS infections. The country is battling to contain the AIDS pandemic that is spreading rapidly despite the massive education campaigns that have been mounted. With a toll of over 2000 AIDS-related deaths a week countrywide, the disease has left a trail of misery in its path. But it seems people like Ngwenya remain untouched.

“I am an AIDS dissident,” Ngwenya declares proudly. “The HIV status of a person is not important to me, but the fungal infections that the patient is suffering from. I treat patients that the hospitals have given up on. I put up a roadblock to death. I treat 60 to 80 patients a day and my success record to date stands at 98.8 percent.”

According to Ngwenya, the other 3.2 percent patients died because they had been referred to him when they were already very ill. A very vociferous man in his mid-forties, Ngwenya caused a sensation in medical circles in Zimbabwe early in 1994 when he went public denouncing the existence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Six years on, his views have not changed. In fact, the clinics he runs under the trade name James Mobb clinics are packed with patients seeking the ‘miracle cure’.

James Mobb clinics are packed with patients seeking the ‘miracle cure’. For people in the ‘terminal stage’, Ngwenya provides the perfect answer – there is no Aids. Ngwenya administers herbal medicines for immune enhancement for an endless list of diseases – among them “the so-called HIV/AIDS, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, arthritis, sexually transmitted diseases, flu, bad breath, hair loss, tooth decay, pimples, epilepsy…”

Leaning forward confidently with his eyes on my thinning hair, Ngwenya says: “I can treat any disease. I can give you medication to restore your hair. My treatment is five percent natural medicine called ephyonitis which contains anti-fungal. The other 95 percent of the treatment requires the patient to follow a correct eating regime. People kill themselves by eating incorrectly. For example, 90 percent of women’s problems are due to yeast infections in the intestine.”

**Yellow liquid**

The reception at the James Mobb clinic in Harare resembles a hospital ward. Over 19 patients sit in reclining chairs, intravenously receiving yellow immune enhancing liquid via drips. Foods foods like beans and nyambele (coconut) cooked in the surgery kitchen are served to the patients for a fee. Ngwenya is a strong exponent of small regular meals.

Six years on, his views have not changed. In fact, the clinics he runs under the trade name James Mobb ‘immune enhancement’ have expanded to four hospitals. Ngwenya is convinced, more than ever before, that his fungal infection therapy is correct.

Ngwenya’s assertions that he can cure AIDS are irresponsible. At the end of 2001, 1.2 million Zimbabwean women aged between 15-44 were living with HIV/AIDS, against their 800,000 male counterparts.

**Turning point**

In an election arena seen as a turning point in Kenya’s history, it was quite clear that the spirited campaign inside and outside parliament – filled with affirmative action had a major impact on the thinking of Kenyan women.

Upholding a new and more youthful leadership, spearheaded by Uhuru Kenyatta, Kanu fell into the spirit by dedicating three of its four nomination slots to women – and professionals, at that, not the typical sympathets that the party has been infamous for.

The chairperson of the Kenya Women’s Political Caucus, Phoebe Aiyio says of the appointments: “There is no doubt that greater and proportional representation of women at all levels is on the way and that gender discrimination will soon be a thing of the past.”

**Gender violence**

In its inaugural statement soon after the Cabinet appointments were announced, minister for gender, sports, culture and social services Najib Balala declared that his ministry would work hard to address gender violence and other key forms of discrimination that Kenyan women face.

In its most recent report, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which monitors the participation of women in government, ranked Kenya at position 109 out of 122 countries in Africa, only Nigeria, Swaziland, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Djibouti had a smaller percentage of women in parliament.

It will take much harder work to achieve the one-third representation at all levels of public decision making that Kenyan women have campaigned so vigorously for since 1997, but there is no doubt that this is a crucial historic moment and the synergy just right. Let the appointments roll!