

# Africa *woman*

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## Women gain strength in Kenya's general election



Charity Ngilu



Lina Jebii Kilimo



Beth Mugo



Martha Karua

## Here come the main winners

By Kwamboka Oyaro

Swearing-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 Kitui 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 469,807 against Moi's 2,444,801 – she entered 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

# IT'S TIME FOR CELEBRATION

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

By Lilian Juma

**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.

Though 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 Kenya had a woman in the Cabinet was just prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995 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.

Part of the breakthrough for women can be attributed to the formation of the National Rainbow Coalition, a union of 16 political parties cobbled together to challenge Kanu's stranglehold on Kenyan politics since independence nearly

40 years ago. It was not a secret that the party 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.

Most 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 poli-

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## The main winners

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taking over the government.

With that kind of national outlook, it was almost impossible for her rival, former minister George Ndotto, to sway the Kitui Central voters. They knew where their votes would go and Ngilu trounced 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 his wife still makes his breakfast – probably to crush the myth that women cease to be feminine when they get into leadership positions.

### LINAH JEBII 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 Marirmoi, who garnered 5,517 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, Uhuru Kenyatta, who was running for the presidency on the Kanu ticket, or 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 Nairobi with a landslide. She attributes her success in politics to the women’s groups she worked with before making a debut in politics in 1992. They asked her to stand for election and resorted to pressing her husband into their service when she appeared reluctant. He encouraged her to go for it and has stood beside her ever since. Her grip on the constituency is tight, if the 24,279 votes she got against her challenger Kangethe Gitu’s 6,996 is anything to go by.

### MARTHA KARUA Minister for Water Resources

For the third time running, Martha Karua trounced her opponents to recapture the Gichugu parliamentary seat by garnering 28,262 votes against 7,859 for her closest opponent Peter Wambugu Kariuki. From the time lawyer Karua came into the political limelight in 1992, she has won the Gichugu parliamentary seat convincingly. What does it take?

“Support from everybody,” says the minister, hoarse after a gruelling campaign. “Without their support, I wouldn’t be here today talking with you.”

Things have worked well for the 45-year-old go-getter. And she is optimistic that the same groundwork will hold her together as she takes the helm at the ministry. At first she thought her new appointment was irrelevant to her training: “I thought law . . . law . . . water . . . law . . . water. I didn’t see the connection, but now I know. My skills are needed at the ministry.”



Yvonne Khamati

### 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 Narc put forward the argument that Gumo was better placed to counter any threats from the ruling party of the day. And this despite the fact that Tett had reportedly beaten Gumo in the 1997 election – when he vied for the seat on a KANU ticket – but was rigged out in a controversial counting process.

Indeed, Gumo is on record as having said: “This woman wanted to win the elections in 1997, and I wanted to go to parliament and I did.”

### Tough talk

It is such tough talk and arrogance that often swings nominations in most of Kenya’s political parties, which seem to believe that brute force, boldness and roughness are necessary ingredients in

supposedly democratic elections.

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 Karachuonyo 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 only to lose out at the eleventh hour. The party had pledged to give 30 per cent of all parliamentary and civic seats to women.

### 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.

## KENYA

# If I were first lady, here's what I'd do...

By Betty Muriuki

**K**enya has just come through one of the most exciting general elections since independence. Not only were the campaigns intense and exhilarating, with a dizzying 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 audience 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 peek into a closet full of family skeletons – and there are quite a number in that closet. But most people are more



Lucy Kibaki congratulates her husband President Mwai Kibaki.

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 Hilary 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

**"Most people want to know who Lucy Kibaki is and what they can expect from her"**

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 heifers 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 HIV/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 ruin 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 before 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 29 rooms, as well as cottages and two swimming pools.

But there is one thing that I would borrow 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 me justice, and do justice to the image of the women of my country.



**EDITORIAL**

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Africawoman is produced by 40 women journalists from Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Ghana who meet in a virtual newsroom once a month. The information produced is then linked to community radios throughout Africa to reach grassroot women.

## Nominations are good, but being elected is better

**K**enyans are justifiably excited at the near doubling of the number of women in parliament. It is not difficult to see why getting 17 women to that country's national assembly should be cause for celebration. Kenya has languished near the bottom of the international parliamentary rankings for women's representation ever since independence – and this despite sending 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, especially in leadership and decision-making. In every election since the country reverted to multi-party politics, donors 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 whitewash 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 election regardless of his or her circumstances.

Though the number of women eventually nominated for the poll dropped from about 50 to 44 in this mother of all elections, it was to mark a significant breakthrough, with nine women elected in 2002 as opposed to four in 1997. The other eight were nominated.

To some extent, it is easy enough to understand the euphoria over these election results: Coming almost from scratch, Kenya now has three women in the Cabinet – and in substantial positions, too, not the typical culture and social services ghetto for women. With another three assistant ministers, the voice of women in the management of the country has been strengthened beyond expectations.

But, at the risk of being accused of raining on other people's parade, *Africawoman* would like to suggest that this bounty for Kenyan women happened more by default than by design. Going by all accounts, women would have performed even better had there been a level playing field all round – especially at the stage of candidate nominations. Yet you will learn from our reports on these elections that many promising women were either tricked out of victory or simply denied a foothold by parties driven by the same old tactics of cronyism, favouritism and even downright cheating and violence.

Promises were quickly ignored by some parties that had little faith in women's capacity to deliver, the excuse being that some seats required greater skill and capacity to withstand pressures from all sides. And yet, at the final count, women such as Linah Kilimo – now a minister of state in the office of the vice-president – ran for election on the strength of defying deeply entrenched traditions such as female genital mutilation. How much harder can it have been to persuade her people that she was the right person for the job?

Since 1997, groups working to improve the numbers of Kenyan women in leadership and decision-making have pushed for affirmative action. Critics have derided them as wishful thinkers, on the grounds that affirmative action is discriminatory by its very nature. Yet the outcome of the Kenyan nominations prove affirmative action works to make amends for those left out of the political system for reasons other than competence. For *Africawoman*, the true cause for celebration in those elections was the tacit recognition that women have always had a case when they argued that the political environment was heavily tilted against them.

When it came to nominations for the 12 special seats in parliament, the erstwhile ruling party – much vilified for being one of the main stumbling blocks to women's advancement – chose to name women to three of its four slots. And they were nominated on the basis of professionalism rather than sycophancy.

That's progress, but all the political parties should reverse the process next time round – leveling the ground for more women to contest the poll rather than looking for last gasp solutions to ease their collective conscience. Women have proved that they can do it, but can their parties?

**POINT OF VIEW**

# Where are the women in politics?

*Men have long dominated the leadership game and make the rules*

By Golda Armah, Ghana

**O**ver 95 percent of countries have granted women the two most fundamental rights: The right to vote and the right to seek election. So why do women continue to perform so poorly in elections worldwide?

Women's representation at the highest levels of national and international decision-making has not changed in the five years since the 1995 Beijing Conference.

According to 1998 Inter-Parliamentary Union statistics, men totaled 31,137 in countries that had upper and lower houses of legislature while women comprised a paltry 4,004.

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 and concerns are not effectively represented at policy-making 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.† Germany and Australia have made significant progress through the proportional representation system. The Swedish parliament has 40.4 percent representation of women because of the 40-60 percent ratio.

Critics tend to argue that avenues already exist for women to be actively involved in the decision-making process and blame the situation on lack of interest on the part of women to take advantage of such opportunities. They choose to ignore the significant social barriers that women encounter in seeking leadership.

### Created to worshipmen!

As far back as AD 865, a conference was held in France just to consider whether women were human beings! The worse part of it was that the conference concluded that though women were human beings, they were created purposely to worship men.

Most of the struggles of women's rights organisations are not limited to political participation. They have struggled also for the right to be educated just like men.

Women in the developed world also had their fair share of the struggle. In fact, American women did not even get the right to vote until 1920, with the 19th Amendment to the American Constitution. For over half a century, women in Britain had to struggle for political representation through the vote.

At every socio-political level, women worldwide are under-represented in government and often far removed from decision-making.† Women seeking to venture into politics find that the political, socio-economic and socio-cultural environment is often unfriendly or even hostile to them.

This is essentially because men have dominated the political arena and formulated the rules of the political game, which does not take into account the special needs of women. This eventually makes most women abandon their political ambitions.

Christine Churcher, Ghana's minister for girl child and basic education, says money is one the greatest handicaps for women who want to venture into politics. Discrimination against girls in education ensures their playing field is not level even during childhood. This makes it difficult for many women to find their way into top positions, where they are likely to move easily into the political limelight.

Recent International Labour Organisation statistics show that even in developed countries such as the United States of America, only 5.1 percent of women occupy "top line" jobs (that is, positions as chief executives). "Men are given the chance in the early stages to acquire enough education and skills to be economically empowered," says Churcher. "This is one thing most women lack."

### Party support

Ama Benyiwa Doe, who has been in Ghana's Parliament for almost 12 years, says party support for women candidates is also another problem area. Some party leaders have been known to bribe people to organise smear campaigns against women candidates, she says.

Ghana's Parliament of 200 representations has only 16 women, down from 18 in the

last poll. Since 2001, however, the government has taken concrete steps to promote significant representation of women at the grassroots 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 the world's population and it is only fair that they are allowed a level ground to participate in high-level decision-making on issues that affect their lives. No more lip service, please!



Christine Churcher



## 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 Nyaira

**HER** four-month-old baby strapped to her back, Nomsa Chigumbura joins 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 29-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 from one queue to another. The end of the day finds her in another long queue, this time in the neighbourhood of the densely populated Mufakose Township – the hub of opposition politics.

But Nomsa and the vast majority of those in the queue are destined to return home empty-handed. The yellow maize meal, selling for \$500 for a 20kg bag, is not for sale to just anybody: A Zanu PF card is more valuable than money.

When the news filtered through that maize meal was available, she did not know it would be at the offices of the ruling Zanu PF. "No

Zanu PF card, no maize meal," a party official said through a loud-speaker.

The desperate people were then ordered to line up into party districts, before being slowly admitted into the walled yard by half a dozen baton-wielding police officers manning the gate.

Most women in Zimbabwe have to go through this on a daily basis to make sure they get the precious maize meal to feed their families. In the urban areas, at least, some get to buy the maize meal through the back door; the majority of the country's desperate population in 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 Chikotoko, 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.

Some 6.7 million people, or half the country's population, are



**Children in Zimbabwe are suffering as government gives maize meal only to ZANU PF members.**

threatened with famine due to food shortages. Aid agencies, including the United Nations, blame the shortages on drought and disruption of commercial agriculture due to the land reform programme.

The Mugabe government blames the drought for the food shortage but aid agencies say the famine is largely man-made.

They hold Mugabe solely responsible for the destruction of the country's highly productive commercial farming industry through the illegal seizures of white-owned farms and his unsound economic policies.

Tsvangirai, who is challenging Mugabe's controversial re-election in the March presidential ballot, could only tell the women his party would remain resolute in its efforts to make sure food is bought to feed millions of starving Zimbabweans.

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 groping 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

Asked to comment on why food was being sold only to card-carrying members at party offices, Emerson Mnangagwa, the Zanu PF secretary for administration, said: "What? Selling maize-meal at our party offices? We don't allow that. Go and ask them why they are doing that. They should tell you why they are doing it."

In the meantime, the WFP said food imports, by both the government and humanitarian agencies, fall far short of the amount required to feed the Zimbabwean people. "WFP does not even have

the resources to meet our target of three million beneficiaries in November," representative Kevin Farrell said. "It is an extremely serious situation and it is only going to get worse," he said.

The WFP and the Zimbabwe government faced a shortfall of well over 300,000 tonnes of maize between December and March 2003, when the next harvest is due, painting a bleak picture for the helpless and hungry masses. "We will all have to work non-stop over the coming months if we are to prevent millions of people from starving in Zimbabwe," said Farrell.

Aid agencies say there is evidence that it is Zimbabwean government policy to force Zimbabweans, through starvation, to support the 78-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 52 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.

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## UGANDA

# Where women die quietly and needlessly

By Elizabeth Kameo

**SAFE** motherhood may have been incorporated into Uganda's 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, 505 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. This is the same as a bus full of passengers getting an accident and all 420 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 a 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 signs of coming down, something which is peculiar to Uganda and not other African countries."

## Infant mortality

Despite improvements in Uganda's economic performance since 1987, the social sector in Uganda has not undergone a significant transformation. "One of the most discouraging factors in Uganda is that of maternal mortality," says the U.N. Human Development Index of 1999.

Uganda is one of 12 countries with the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. The rates are: India 110,000, Ethiopia 46,000, Nigeria 45,000, Indonesia 22,000, Bangladesh 20,000, Democratic Republic of Congo 20,000, China 13,000, Kenya 13,000, Sudan 13,000, Tanzania 13,000, Pakistan 10,000 and Uganda 10,000. They account for 65 percent of all maternal deaths globally. A progress report from

## Too many women die in pregnancy and childbirth

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 Ugandan 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 anaemia 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 in Uganda.

Numerous socio-cultural and psychological barriers remain, which will require behaviour change and an 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.



Catherine Adipo: Top referee

## UGANDA

## Football referee Adipo really means business

By Margaret Ziribaggwa

**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 Kubingi, a teacher. Adipo's refereeing days date back to 1988, 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 of arts degree and a post-graduate diploma 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: Jequete Imiudi and Andree Yaqkpaile from Central Africa Republic, Fatou Gaye from Senegal, Bola Elisabeth Abidoye, Faith Uwugiaren Irabor and Bolanie Celina Sekiteri from Nigeria, Sabelo Sibindi from Zimbabwe and Liseli Mukwena 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?

## KENYA

# If fathers took care of babies, there would be no more wars

By Grace Githaiga

**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. "When she does, 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 easily. "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 be tough, he says, dealing with a baby brings out their softer side. "This is the chance to demonstrate the capacity to be compassionate and see human beings as they are," says Ndiritu.

There would probably be no wars if all men took time to nurture babies, 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 af-

ter 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.



John Ndiritu with his daughter, Neema Nyawira

## Clinging to power, the African disease

*Experience shows military no better than civilians*

By Susan Naa Sekyere, Ghana

**M**ost 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 ineffective leadership, according to analysts.

African leaders come in all hues and colours. Some inherit their jobs, others come to power through the barrel of a gun and yet others through the ballot box – by fair means or foul. But they all have one thing in common: Once they've tasted power, they want to hold on to it forever.

Jimmi Wangome of the Kenyan Army, author of *Military Coups In Africa – the African neo-colonialism that is self-inflicted*, traces the root of the problem to the independence era of the 1950s and 1960s, which was mainly driven by the success of the anti-colonialist crusades in India.

High expectations swept across the continent as nation after nation attained self-government. However, the dreams of nationhood were soon shattered as govern-

### POINT OF VIEW

ments fell victim to coup d'états. The new military rulers accused the civilian governments of everything from corruption and incompetence to mismanagement of the national economy. From Algiers to Johannesburg, and Dakar to Somaliland, conflicts are rife due to bad leadership.

But the African experience has shown that the military are no better than civilians when it comes to running governments. The examples are rife: Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and Congo are just some of the countries that come to mind.

There is no doubt that Africa started on a promising note.

Leaders like the fiery Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, the charismatic Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, the scholarly Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, the nationalistic Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone, the emotional Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria demonstrated strong leadership.

They were instrumental in shaping the

destinies of their countries. But some made the mistake of clinging onto power too long, starting a trend that would become hard to break. Bakili Muluzi of Malawi, Omar Bongo of Gabon, Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe are desperately hanging on while Frederick Chiluba of Zambia and Flight-Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings of Ghana clearly wished they never left.

The leadership styles of many of Africa's rulers are hopelessly flawed. Some analysts have argued that African culture is partly to blame for this state of affairs. In most African traditions, the ruled hardly raise a finger against the ruler. Until recently, criticism – positive or otherwise was not tolerated. Even now, most government's consider their opposition rivals as enemies to be crushed.

The examples of faulty leadership are overwhelming. Despite having been in power over 30 years, Eyadema hardly has anything new to offer his people. Yet he has conspired to get a ticket to literally rule for life. To add insult to injury, the Economic Commission of West African States recent-

ly chose him to mediate in the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire.

Any wonder that the so-called ceasefire that he brokered did not hold?

Other scenarios of civil conflict and wars that have arisen due to leadership crises are cited in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Uganda, Somalia, Burundi, and now Ivory Coast – the list goes on.

There is a ray of hope in the criticism leveled against military governments by African heads of state at the 33rd OAU Summit hosted by Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. The most stinging criticism came, however, from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and not any of the 30 African leaders gathered at that summit.

When Burundi's Major Pierre Buyoya grabbed power on July 26, 1996, through a military coup, neighbouring countries placed an embargo on his country less than a week later – offering the possibility of regional policing.

The ruled in Africa can take solace from such initiatives on a continent where leadership is nothing to write home about.



## 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 96.8 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 vocal man in his mid-forties, Ngwenya caused a sensation in medical circles in Zimbabwe early in 1994 when he went public denying the existence of the HIV/Aids.

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 cities and he is convinced, more than ever before, that his fungal infection theo-

## Former tailor packs clinics with patients seeking miracle cures

ry is correct.

James Mobb clinics are packed with patients seeking the 'miracle cure'. For people in the 'denial 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 ephytoni which contains anti-fungal. The other 80 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 10 patients sit in reclining chairs, intravenously receiving yellow immune enhancing liquid via drips. Health foods like beans and nyembaŋ (cowpeas) cooked in the surgery kitchen are served to the patients for a fee. Ngwenya is a strong exponent of small regular meal, as he says: "This rids the body of all toxins and a healthy body should have at least three bowel movements a day."

Tabeth Ngoro, a teacher in her late thirties, has been a patient at James Mobb clinic for four years. "When I was referred to Dr Ngwenya, I was so thin that I had difficulty walking on my

own," she says, her eyes looking hopefully at the yellow liquid going into her bloodstream. "But within a month I was fit and strong and I regained my original weight. Now I am back again due to stress. My husband died four months ago from meningitis. After that I got sick and was hospitalised. As soon as I recovered, I came back to this clinic for the immune enhancement."

New patient Catherine Moyo, in her late fifties and favouring her left leg, is hopeful that Ngwenya will prescribe something for the unbearable pain in her leg. "A friend referred me to Dr Ngwenya," says Moyo. "He believes the problem with my sciatica nerve can best be dealt with by following a strict diet."

### Disturbing voices

Diana Tapiwa, a science teacher in the city, sums up Ngwenya's phenomenal rise as unfortunate. "In this day and age of the HIV/Aids pandemic, voices like those of Dr Ngwenya are disturbing as they reverse the gains that have been made in the acceptance of the disease and then dealing with it effectively instead of hiding behind denial."

She adds: "But it has not been entirely his fault. Dr Ngwenya is a very eloquent speaker and he loves publicity. Journalists have flocked to him and given him undue publicity as he tells the same story of fungal infections over and over again."

Women make up an estimated 58 percent of HIV-positive adults in Zimbabwe compared with 50 percent worldwide, according to the United Nations. Young women are particularly at risk.

In 2002, an estimated six percent to 11 percent African women aged between 15-24 were HIV-positive, compared with six percent of young men.

The medical fraternity here dismisses Ngwenya's assertions that he can cure Aids as irresponsible. At the end of 2001, 1.2 million Zimbabwean women aged between 15-49 were living with HIV/Aids, against their 800,000 male counterparts.

## Kenyan women applaud election successes

From page 1

tics would be greatly boosted – as long as they got past the nominations stage.

Although 44 women were finally nominated, there was a hue and cry that the process itself was flawed – with complaints that some popular female candidates had been cheated out of victory by violence and cronyism. Many of those left out resorted to last minute shopping for new parties to sponsor them, and those parties were often out of the National Rainbow Coalition-Kanu loop, rendering them almost irrelevant in the two-horse poll.

### Turning point

In an election largely seen as a turning point in Kenya's history, it was quite clear that the spirited campaign inside and outside parliament for affirmative action had a major impact on the thinking of Kenyans.

Under 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 sycophants that the party has been infamous for.

The chairperson of the Kenya Women's Political Caucus, Phoebe Asiyu 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 his 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 African, only Nigeria, Swaziland, Egypt, Niger 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 a crucial historic moment and the synergy just right.

Let the appointments roll!

## GHANA

## Wife poisoned for making boys do housework

By Charity Binka

IN a scary end of the year incident, a farmer from the Upper West region of Ghana tried to poison his wife for making their sons help with domestic chores.

Reports from Gengekpe Duonang, a farming village over 1,000 kilometres from Accra, indicated that 60-year-old Wather Kuutege got fed up with his 50-year-old wife,

Josephine, for 'overburdening' their little boys with duties 'meant for girls.' He decided to end it all by killing her.

The couple, married for about 35 years, have 11 children, most of them boys. Kuutege, according to the police, saw sweeping and cooking as jobs for girls while the wife felt times had changed and boys too must be given skills to equip them for life.

On December 31, he returned from a drinking spree to find one of his sons cooking. He was infuriated and accused his wife of imposing a foreign culture in the house. He threatened to poison Josephine with an insecticide. She fled to the local police, who arrested Kuutege.

The farmer was granted bail, but that was not the end of the story. He decided that if the law would not allow him to kill his wife, he

would take his own life by drinking the poison he had prepared for her. He was out of luck, however. Neighbours saw him and sent him to hospital. He has recovered but now faces two charges: Threatening to kill his wife and attempted suicide.

Clearly, the gender equality message still has a long way to go in Africa. Is it perhaps time to do some soul-searching and 'Africanise' the message?