

# Why female representation in

By Umaru Kashaka

Statistics since 1986 when the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government came to power indicate a steady rise in female political participation in elective offices.

The provision of a woman MP for each district and for 30% women's representation in Local Councils (LCs) has brought many women into positions of leadership.

"The hitherto invisible have become very visible and as a result, society is gradually accepting the inevitable; that women make as good leaders as men," says the Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga.

She says this in her paper she presented at the 10th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting in Bangladesh in June 2013. The paper is entitled 'Women's political leadership in East Africa with specific reference to Uganda'.

Kadaga, who has been the Kamuli Woman MP since 1996, says while affirmative action both at the level of Parliament and local government has increased numbers to a critical mass of women, the expected social transformation has remained slow.

"In a number of cases, appointment of women to leadership positions is perceived as doing them a favour for

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which they should be grateful. On the other hand, women's activism for 'political space' has been more reactive than proactive," she says.

She adds that there is more emphasis on capacity development to get more women for empowerment to participate rather than supporting them to be more assertive and to reclaim what belongs to them by right.

**Sylvia Tamale weighs in**

Prof. Sylvia Tamale, the first woman dean in the Law Faculty at Makerere University, argues that women's empowerment cannot be isolated from the wider issues of development because the two are intertwined.

"Issues of women's empowerment



**Much as we have many women in political positions, the expected social transformation has moved slowly**

are critical for sustainable development. Empowerment cannot be achieved through a single strategy, but requires multi-pronged strategies with the involvement of various actors including women themselves, men, policy makers, civil society and the media," she says.

Tamale contends that women's empowerment involves complex changes that are personal and political, nonlinear and structural.

"So, for example, gender justice cannot happen in the context of neoliberal restructuring processes or in the absence of human security. Policies such as affirmative action are simply tinkering around the edges of

institutions that prop up male power such as the family, the army and the media. We need to work strategically to change internalised sexist beliefs, attitudes and behaviours," she says.

**Perceived as possessions**

Kadaga says women are perceived as possessions and known to be wives/mothers/caretakers and Uganda being a patriarchal society, men are dominant in decision making.

"Women who strive to take part in leadership are ridiculed as wanting to be 'men', money minded, ambitious, immoral and unruly; women are shy, lack confidence and have a low self-esteem. Men do not

allow their wives to attend meetings as they fear that women are being lured into relationships with other male leaders," she says.

The other aspect which Kadaga says affects women's political empowerment is the triple workload which women carry and particularly the unpaid care services.

She says the workload can have some negative impact on women's horizontal mobility if it impacts the time they have to invest in political activism or even time to relax.

She also says the literacy level of aspiring women political leaders affects their capacity to comprehend and engage in technical processes which the government engages in.

"In spite of good government policies to promote education for all through Universal Primary Education and Universal Secondary Education, a good number of women of leadership age are still of low education," she says.

The former Serere Woman MP, Alice Alaso, says tokenism and patronage have affected women empowerment.

"The real issues affecting Ugandan women have not been dealt with. The Ugandan women have been made to get satisfied by the fact that there is a district woman seat, there is a woman councillor whether there are drugs in hospitals, whether there are sanitary pads or not, whether there is investment in agriculture or

# politics is not increasing

not, that is no longer an issue," she says.

Also says rural empowerment would have focused more on addressing the real issues affecting women and then from there leadership would be generated.

## Inadequate resources

Analysts say women do not have ownership of productive resources, for example, land and property.

"In a bid to meet the household responsibilities, women are engaged in food supply with agricultural labour, informal employment and all these are characterised by high workload and unpaid labour. This leaves them with no funds and time for politics or any other leadership position," Kadaga says.

Kadaga also argues that most women leaders in Uganda lack negotiation and lobbying skills.

"This undermines their capacity to compete favourably with their male counterparts. They lack confidence," she says.

She also says some men feel that women may not serve well when they are engaged in child bearing and that as a result of their domestic roles, some women leaders always find it hard to keep time or hit deadlines at the workplaces and this results in poor participation in the decision making process.

"Girls, therefore, cannot hold positions of leadership in a

community because they sooner or later get married and go to another community, so they are not elected to leadership positions," she says.

Kadaga asserts that Uganda has made tremendous progress towards gender equality over the last 20 years.

She says the country has one of the most gender sensitive constitutions in the world, has many laws and policies in place to address gender imbalances and women's empowerment.

"The challenge remains at the implementation level coupled with inexplicable complexities that are inherent in the Ugandan socio-economic setting," she says.

## Statistics

Elections for women can be traced back to the establishment of the National Resistance Council (NRC) in 1989.

In this election, affirmative action measures for women were introduced, and 34 women were elected to "women's seats".

Some women were also elected on the "regular" seats and in total women constituted 17% of the NRC (41 seats).

During the 6th Parliament (1996-2001) there were 39 districts in Uganda, accordingly 39 women were elected as female district MPs.

When the 7th Parliament (2001-2006) was elected, Uganda had



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women parliamentarians and six special interest representatives. This constituted 31% of female representation in the 8th Parliament.

With the new constituencies created in 2010, the 9th Parliament comprised of 375 members with 129 (34.4%) women MPs, 34% increase from the 31% in the 8th Parliament.

In the 10th Parliament, the statutory number of directly elected members increased from 238 to 300, and that of women representatives from 112 to 122, due to an increase in the number of constituencies, approved by Parliament in August 2015.

About 35% of the whole 10th Parliament is constituted of women, but women activists say it is still lower than the parity target set by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

The numbers of women MPs who competed with men fell from 16 in 2006 to 11 in 2011; and of the 129 women MPs, 112 represent districts as a result of affirmative action.

Kadaga argues that this shows that women have not yet broken through the barriers of competing with men for a political position.

"While many women had hoped that this seat (women seat) would be a training ground for more women to enter Parliament, those that gain the seat find it safer to keep it than to compete with a man even after two or three terms," she says.

## Women in LCs

The affirmative action in the Local Government Act (1997) provides for one-third women's representation at all local council levels.

While each district council is comprised of at least 30% women, regarding top leadership in districts, (chairpersons, speakers and chief administrative officers), the numbers of women dwindle.

For instance, from the general election of 2011, out of the 112 chairpersons of districts, there were only two (1.7%) women, out of 112 chief administrative officers, only 11 (9%) were women.

## Women in parties

Observers says the issue of the inclusion and active participation of women in the different political parties, however, remains problematic because there are very few women holding positions in party executive decision making organs and structures at all levels.

"Political party leadership in Uganda is male dominated. Although the major political parties commit to specific indices of women at each level in the structure, (NRM 30%, Forum for Democratic Change 40%) the reality is different," Kadaga says.

Before the 2016 elections, the NRM for example had only five (25%) women out of a total of 20 members at the national executive committee, the highest organ of the party.

introduced 17 new districts, securing women at least 56 positions in Parliament. In the 8th Parliament, out of the 255 members, 99 were women, 79 of whom were district women representatives, 14 directly elected