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We the people...inventing the future

AFRICA
YOUNG WOMEN B+25
MANIFESTO

Nala
Feminist Collective

BINTI NA SIASA





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Foreword by Nerima Wako

Executive Director Siasa Place

In the heart of our work at Siasa, we understand that everything is political. Yet, it is with a heavy heart that we acknowledge the stark absence of women within this realm, a void that becomes even more pronounced when we focus on the limited engagement and participation of our young women.

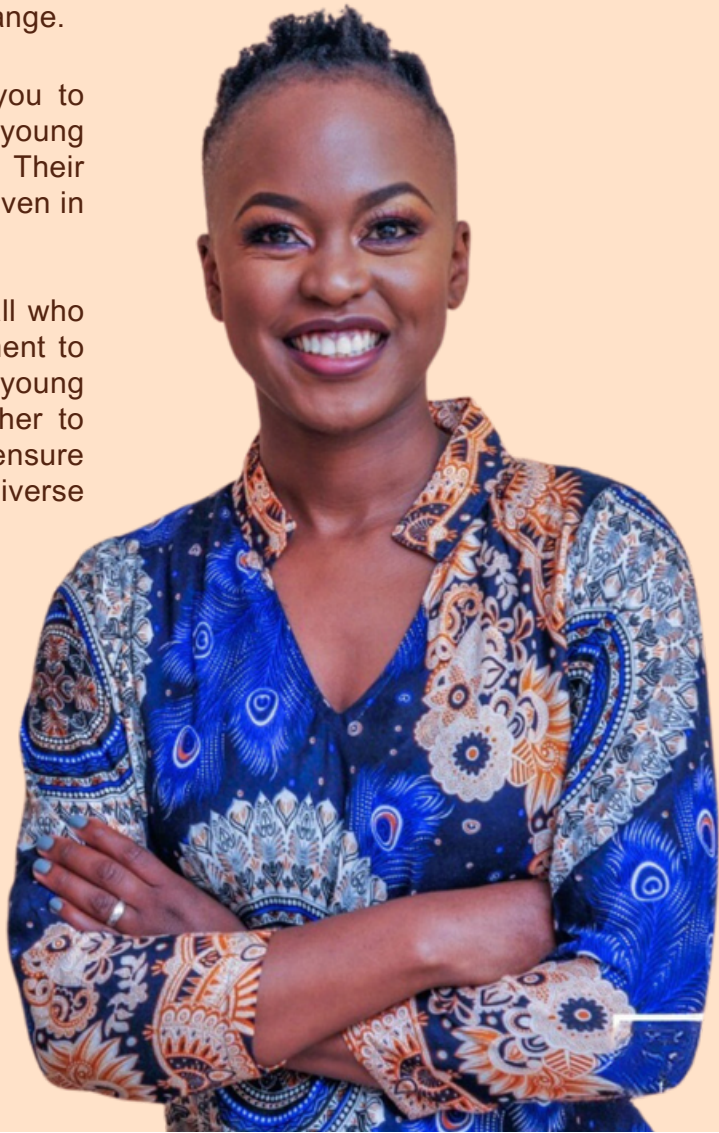
As we sit in conversation with young women, the question looms: Why should women, especially our young women, wish to venture into a space marred by violence, deliberately exclusive practices, and daunting participation barriers? From the exorbitant costs of financing a campaign to the intricate web of family dynamics that often provides little to no support, and the ever-watchful eye society casts upon their marital status, not to mention the escalating tide of online violence and abuse – the hurdles appear insurmountable.

However, amidst these seemingly insurmountable challenges, we discover rays of hope and illuminating stories of young women who have shattered these barriers. These are narratives that deserve to be shared and celebrated, for they serve as beacons of inspiration and strength, illuminating the path for others who dare to dream.

We understand, at the core of our missions, the profound importance of diversity in leadership. It is not merely a choice, but an imperative that brings about exceptional differences. The voices and perspectives of women, especially our dynamic young women, are vital in shaping our political landscape. They offer fresh insights, innovative solutions, and a resolute determination to create positive change.

In this publication, **"Binti na Siasa"** we invite you to delve into the remarkable journeys of these young women who have triumphed against the odds. Their stories remind us that transformation is possible, even in the most challenging of circumstances.

May their experiences serve as a clarion call to all who read these pages – a call to action and a testament to the indomitable spirit that resides within every young woman who aspires to lead. Let us come together to champion inclusivity, support one another, and ensure that the future of politics shines brightly with the diverse brilliance of its women



Foreword by Aya Chebbi

Founder & President of Nala Feminist Collective

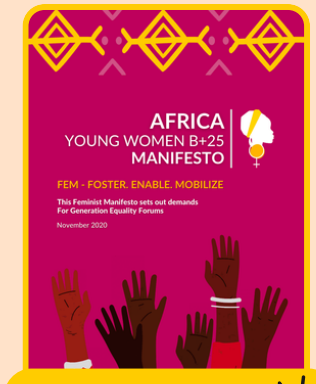
As Nalafem, we are ecstatically delighted to see this important piece of work come to life. Through Nala Fund we're able to support incredible organizations like Siasa Place to drive conversations in politics with young women at the forefront because **EVERYTHING is POLITICAL**. We were exhilarated to present the 2023 Nalafem Award and grant on Intergenerational Co-leaderhsip to Siasa Place at the 2nd Nalafem Summit to birth this handbook.

Editing this publication, I've been absolutely stunned at the courage, consistency and values driven service these 10 young female politicians embody. Their stories evidently show that the realm of mainstream politics heightens the violence, exclusion and discrimination that young women face every day during the political campaigns and beyond. Despite this reality, they dive head first into this space, opening doors for other women and working tirelessly to break structural barriers for us to achieve true gender justice. We hope through the stories you would hold space to appreciate and learn from these incredible young Kenyans who strive to make a difference in politics. You would acknowledge how young women survive harassment and cyberbullying where their gender and age are up for debate rather than their qualifications and skillset.

In 2021, when we launched Nala Feminist Collective we've been clear that women and especially young women must be in politics. To that end, we are building an army of women whose weapon is education, values and service to the African continent.

Our Africa Young Women Beijing+25 Manifesto outlines the bold demands of young women to criminalize Gender Based Violence, access to justice and protection, silencing the guns among other fundamental rights. It is clear that to achieve these demands there is an urgent need for young women to occupy leadership positions, politics, and government institutions in masses.

For that, we need to nurture sisterhood. Our partnership with Siasa Place and the publication of these stories is a testament to the power of that sisterhood -- women co-leading to elevate and celebrate the voices of other women. As you read the stories of these powerful 10 female politicians we invite you to re-evaluate the way you engage in politics, how you support and mentor, what do you fund, and who do you vote for.



View Manifesto



Introduction

In the 2022 Kenya General Election, Kenya has seen a decline in the number of young women participating in politics, particularly as candidates for political positions. Verified information from the Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) research showed that out of the 317 Members of the County Assembly under 35 years, only 14 were women. Member of County Assembly is the lowest level of political leadership that many youth vie for. Despite efforts to promote gender equality and pushing for affirmative action, several factors have contributed to this decline.

The decline in the number of young women participating in politics in Kenya is a multi-faceted issue influenced by societal norms, limited resources, and various challenges specific to female candidates. To reverse this trend and promote greater gender equality in politics, experience-sharing initiatives become essential. By providing a platform for successful young women politicians to share their experiences, challenges, and triumphs, aspiring female leaders can find inspiration, mentorship, and a supportive community that encourages them to actively engage in politics and effect positive change in the country.

In order to create a platform to celebrate the journeys of young women who have vied for political positions in Kenya, we publish this handbook to share their stories, challenges, and wins as well as encourage other young women to actively engage in politics, break barriers, and contribute to positive change in their communities.

The **Binti na Siasa Handbook** is crucial in promoting a more inclusive political environment in Kenya especially for young women. By highlighting the experiences and perspectives of young women, it will contribute to the formulation of policies that promote gender equity and diversity in political spaces, hence increasing female representation in Kenyan politics. The handbook will also serve as a valuable resource for organizations working towards women's political empowerment and inspire a new generation of female leaders who will bring positive change to the political landscape and create a more inclusive and equitable society.

The initiative targeted 10 young women between the ages of 18 to 35 who have an interest in politics, specifically those who vied in the 2022 General Elections and are still considering running for political positions. Additionally, it engaged with community leaders, political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public to foster support and advocate for gender equality in politics.

“Binti na Siasa” is a Swahili phrase that translates to "Young Women in Politics". It is a handbook designed exclusively for young women venturing into politics as a guiding beacon, imparting invaluable knowledge, skills, and inspiration to help young women break barriers, shatter glass ceilings, and make their mark as leaders in the world of politics.

Within the pages of this handbook, you will embark on a transformative journey, equipping yourself with the tools needed to navigate the complexities of the political landscape. Binti na Siasa is not merely a handbook; it is a rallying call, a source of empowerment, and a testament to the unwavering strength and potential of young women in politics. It is a tribute to the visionaries and trailblazers who have paved the way and a roadmap for those ready to embrace their leadership roles with confidence and determination.

So, join us on this empowering journey through Binti na Siasa, as we celebrate the strength of sisterhood and embolden the next generation of female leaders to claim their rightful place in the world of politics. Together, we shall shape the future and ensure that the voices and visions of young women resonate loud and clear on the path to leadership and progress.

Binti na Siasa doesn't just stop at sharing stories; it is also a collection of practical wisdom. It offers invaluable recommendations, tips and calls to action on harnessing the power of online platforms for effective campaigning, establishing impactful mentorship relationships, and initiating community-driven initiatives that truly make a difference.

About Siasa Place

Siasa Place (SP) is a civic-tech youth-led non-governmental organization , established in 2015 that specializes in working with grassroots youth in building institutional structures to support youth participation in politics and good governance.

SP targets youth (men and women aged 18 to 35 years) and develops their skills in policy review, supporting the creation of youth-friendly platforms for public participation in decision- making processes including the budget process and social accountability. SP works in 12 counties including Uasin Gishu, Kakamega, Busia, Kisumu, Homa Bay, Migori, Kericho, Nakuru, Nairobi, Kitui, Lamu, and Mombasa.

About Nalafem Collective

Nala Feminist Collective (Nalafem) is a multigenerational platform of women politicians and activists striving towards the liberation of African women and girls. In Swahili and other languages spoken in African countries, ‘Nala’ means Queen, lion and gift. This platform was launched in July 2021 but emerged in 2020 from Africa Young Women Beijing+25 Manifesto developed in consultation with 1,500 young people from across 44 African countries and over 30 partners.

Nalafem efforts in collaboration with youth activists succeeded to collect over 10,000 signatures and 8 out of the 10 demands were included into UN Action coalitions and Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact. This publication is in line with **Nalafem Strategic Goal 3: Rising Young Africa Women into Politics** where we aim to document and sub-grant feminist organizations and young women to thrive in politics.

CHAPTER 1

KASTI MISHENI



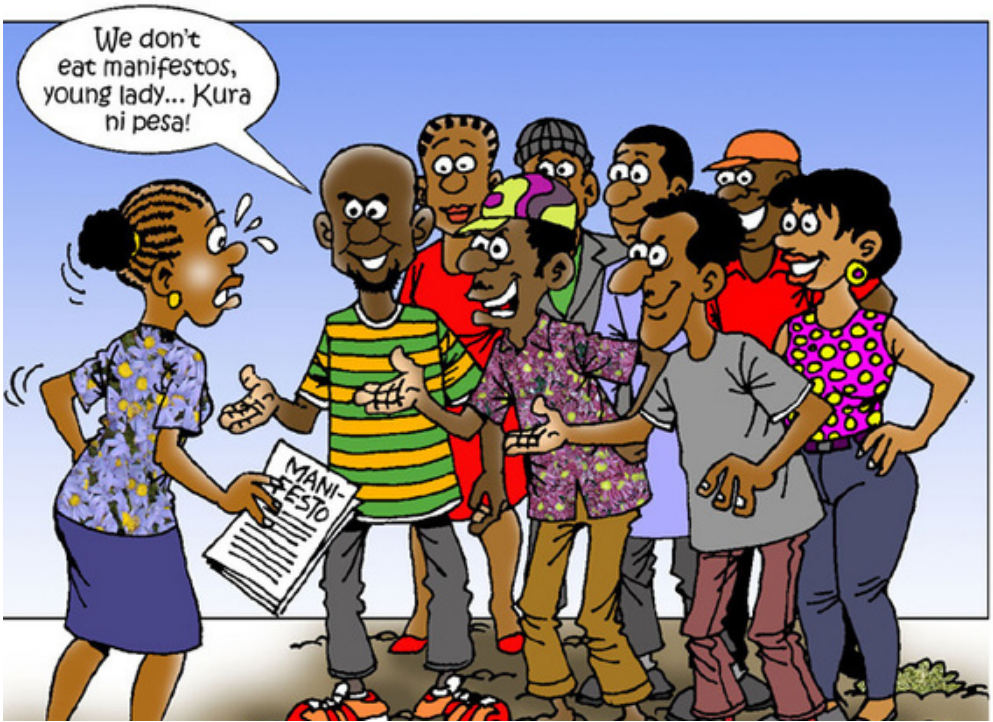
CARRYING A "MWIKO" INTO THE COMMUNITY

Kasti Misheni, a formidable young woman from Meru County's South Imenti Constituency, is not your average politician. With a degree in Business Management specializing in Banking and Finance, she made waves as a candidate for Member of County Assembly (MCA) in Igoji West Ward during the 2022 general elections.

Kasti's decision to enter the rough waters of Kenyan politics stemmed from her early involvement in leadership roles. "I started as a nursery school prefect, then became a head girl at my school," she recounts. "Even at university, I found myself continuously drawn to leadership roles." However, a pivotal moment occurred during her primary school days when she witnessed injustice due to corruption. "My letter was interchanged and was given to another student," she explains, noting that this experience ignited her determination to address injustices through politics.

As Kasti embarked on her political journey, she encountered significant challenges. Financial constraints emerged as a prominent hurdle. "In Kenya, you cannot engage in politics without money," she underlines. This financial barrier often sidelines potential leaders, particularly young women.

Age and gender biases added to Kasti's list of challenges. Many questioned her youth and 'inexperience', with some suggesting that she should prioritize marriage over politics. These prejudices are deeply rooted in cultural norms that hinder young women's progress in politics.
Kasti shared insights into her mental health journey, acknowledging the toll that politics has taken on her.



She emphasizes the importance of a strong support system and faith in navigating these challenges, including cyberbullying and negativity on social media.She advised aspiring politicians to develop a thick skin and not be deterred by negative comments. Blocking individuals when necessary was one tactic she used to maintain a positive online environment.

When it came to leveraging digital platforms for her campaign, Kasti emphasizes the significance of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter for reaching young voters. Regarding online safety, Kasti shares the importance of having a strict policy for managing WhatsApp groups and deleting negative messages from Facebook to maintain a positive online presence. When asked about her campaign strategy, her response was,

> One of my primary campaign tactics involved door-to-door. During these visits, I carried a special item with me; a “mwiko” , which is a large serving spoon that I distributed to households. This simple gesture created a personal connection with the people in my ward, and I asked them not to forget me. It became a symbol of our connection. Even when women gathered in groups, they would discuss how I had given them a “mwiko” and this is how the conversation about my vision continued to grow. When I won the hearts of these women, they played a pivotal role in influencing the traditionally patriarchal views of some men who initially had doubts about electing a young, unmarried woman like myself.

Kasti also highlights her partnership with civil society and her involvement in initiatives that provided job opportunities and educational support to young people. These practical solutions, rather than empty promises, were key to her campaign’s success.

Looking ahead, Kasti remains determined and optimistic about her political future. She envisions moving to a higher political position, believing in the power of possibilities.

Kasti continues to express her gratitude to voters and urges them to focus on substantive political agendas rather than expecting immediate financial assistance from politicians. She calls for a shift in the culture of politics, emphasizing that electing leaders based on their commitment to community development should be the priority.

Kasti Misheni’s journey offers a glimpse into the challenges and opportunities for young women in Kenyan politics. Her story serves as an inspiration for others, in her perseverance, and a commitment to practical solutions for community development backed by a strong support system. As Kenya moves forward, it is voices like Kasti’s that will shape the future of the nation’s political landscape.

CHAPTER 2

SELVIN BOSIBORI NYABUTI



EDUCATION IS YOUR TICKET OUT OF POVERTY

In the bustling world of Kenyan politics, where established norms often restrict the voices of young women, Selvin Bosibori Nyabuti is a breath of fresh air. Selvin shared her remarkable journey as a community development agent, educator, and young aspiring politician. Her story is one of determination, resilience, and the unwavering belief that change can be achieved through scommunity engagement, especially in a digital age.

Selvin's story begins in Nairobi's Mukuru Slums, an area synonymous with poverty and limited opportunities.

> My upbringing in this challenging environment ignited my passion for community development and education. I recognized early on that education was my ticket out of poverty and devoted myself to improving the lives of children in my community.

Selvin passionately recalls. She founded a community-based organization that provides quality education to young children in Mukuru Slums, setting the stage for her future involvement in politics.

Selvin's journey into politics was not a sudden decision when she decided to vie in 2022 as the Member of County Assembly, Landi Mawe Ward but a natural progression from her years of grassroots activism. Her involvement with the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) during her university years marked the beginning of her political engagement. She played a vital role in securing votes for ODM candidates, including prominent figures like ‘Baba’ (Raila Odinga).
Kenyan politics has long been labeled as a male-dominated field and one for older figures. Selvin defies these stereotypes by boldly entering the political arena as a young woman. Her decision was fueled by her deep-rooted connection to her community and a desire to be a voice for the marginalized.

Selvin emphasizes that "Leadership is about passion and commitment, not just a position one decides to occupy". She encourages young women to embrace leadership roles and highlights the importance of recognizing the trust that others place in you when you are entrusted with responsibilities.

Selvin's journey to the 2022 general elections was nothing short of challenging. "As the sole female candidate running for Member of County Assembly (MCA) in Landi Mawe ward, I faced off against 18 male opponents. My campaign strategy was built on strong community relationships, leveraging my deep roots in the community to connect with residents and understand their needs".

Door-to-door campaigns and social media engagement were pivotal components of her strategy. While social media allowed her to reach out to the youth, it also exposed her to online gender-based violence and cyberbullying. Selvin addressed these challenges with resilience and humor, refusing to let negativity deter her.

One of Selvin's key campaign messages centered on education. Drawing from her personal experience, she recognized the importance of education in breaking the cycle of poverty. Her commitment to providing quality education through her community-based organization was a testament to her dedication to youth empowerment. Selvin advocates for improved educational opportunities, both informal and non-formal settings, to uplift the youth in her community. The stories of female leaders such as Anne Waiguru, Martha Karua, and Joyce Atieno Osogo Bensuda, shaped her political aspirations and were a strong presence guiding her journey into politics. She also credits her family for their unwavering support, believing in her even when she had doubts about entering politics.

Raising funds for a political campaign is a significant challenge, especially for young and aspiring politicians. "My approach included personal contributions, fundraising events, support from friends and family, online crowdfunding, and the sale of campaign merchandise. My dedicated team of volunteers played a crucial role in reducing the campaign's financial burden," Selvin explains.

Looking to the future, Selvin is determined to make a more significant impact in Kenyan politics in the 2027 elections. Her strategy includes starting preparations earlier, increasing her engagements in the community, and deepening her connections with the people she serves. She understands that building strong community support in advance of the election season is key to her success.

Selvin Bosibori Nyabuti calls for a more supportive and conducive environment for young and aspiring politicians, emphasizing the need to take them seriously regardless of their age. She urges a shift away from the notion that political positions can be bought with money, but rather support based on vision, passion, and dedication to the community's well being is needed.

CHAPTER 3

NELLY CHEPKEMOI LANG'AT



FROM MUSIC TEACHER TO POLITICAL TRAILBLAZER

In a nation where political engagement often appears daunting and turbulent, Nelly Chepkemoi Lang'at, candidate 2022 MCA Kilgoris Central Ward stands out as a shining example of a young woman who is unafraid to challenge the status quo. From music and Swahili teacher to her burgeoning career in Kenyan politics, Nelly's journey offers insights into the challenges of entering new spaces and staying rooted in your purpose ."Coming from a teaching background," Nelly shares, "you have the opportunity to interact with students from diverse backgrounds. This experience allows you to learn about different cultures, how to effectively communicate with people, and engage with them. These skills are valuable for anyone considering a career in politics because effective communication and engagement are essential."

Nelly's passion for politics and governance was evident even during her college years. She confesses to being highly critical of the government and its policies, but she didn't initially know how to enter the field of politics. Her passion and interest eventually guided her towards a political path.

"I wasn't directly involved in campus politics, but I played a behind-the-scenes role. I provided advice and guidance to some of the campus politicians on how to connect with and engage students effectively."

After graduating from college, Nelly initiated community dialogues known as ‘Skiza forums’. She elaborates on the term ‘Skiza’ explaining that it implies ‘listening’. "During these forums, I interacted with youth and women, who had the opportunity to voice their concerns, grievances, and potential solutions for addressing their issues."

"One key aspect of our work," Nelly continues, "was to educate the community on civic engagement. We emphasized the importance of participating in forums where the county government presents its plans, known as the County Integrated Development Plan. The Skiza forums help determine the government's priorities and how it plans to serve the community. We encouraged community members to attend these forums and voice their concerns. For those who couldn't attend, we offered to represent their issues on their behalf. This approach empowered us to be the advocates for our community's needs."

Nelly attributes her decision to join politics to the encouragement and trust she received from her community. "My decision to join politics was largely influenced by my community. They recognized my ability to influence and assist them on a local level and believed that I could make an even greater impact in a position of influence within politics. This encouragement and trust from the community motivated me to enter politics." Nelly didn't shy away from addressing the challenges she is facing, saying,

> I often emphasize to people that you can't escape politics, whether you're directly involved or not. Politics has a profound impact on governance and our daily lives. Take our current economic situation, for instance. It's intricately tied to politics. The policies that shape our economy are the result of political decisions made at the ballot box and in government.

Nelly also acknowledges the importance of political parties, especially within the context of her political party, Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). "Being a member of a political party provides a significant platform and support structure. It allows young women like me to have a voice at the decision-making table. I appreciate that my party has recognized the importance of empowering young women in politics. My journey began with engaging in various community activities and being an active member of ODM."

Nelly Chepkemoi Lang'at's journey from teaching to politics is a testament to her commitment to making a difference in her community and country. While she may not have initially planned to be a politician, her background as a teacher and her dedication to civic engagement naturally led her into the world of politics.

According to Siasa Place's Seal of Approval research, in the 2022 General Elections, 29 women were elected to parliament to represent their constituencies, 47 women county members of Parliament (women representatives), 3 Elected Senators in the 13th Parliament (2022- 2027). 7 Governors and 115 Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) were elected at the county government level.

> It's important to continuously remind ourselves that if you are in public leadership it is not for gains. Public leadership is about sacrifice, and it is not the kind of sacrifice that will leave you without nothing. But it is nevertheless not a place where you get rich, popular or prestigious. Being a public servant means being a public servant not a public boss and you therefore have to invest in giving without expecting a reward. The biggest reward you can ever have if you are in that role is making sure that the changes that you are making will hold and they will stand the test of time

Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka



CHAPTER 4

ZIPPORA KAMAU



OVERCOMING SKEPTICISM AND INSPIRING CHANGE

Zippora Kamau, is a remarkable political candidate who ran for a Member of County Assembly seat in Kabete, Kiambu County during the 2022 general election. Her motivations, challenges, and experiences in politics, sheds light on the complex world of Kenyan politics, particularly for young women.

Zippora's entry into politics was driven by a genuine desire to address the significant gaps in leadership that she observed within her community. After living there for an extended period, she recognizes shortcomings in education and a high level of youth unemployment. This realization fueled her motivation to make a meaningful impact on the people of Kabete.

To equip herself for this task, Zippora made the bold decision to return to school and pursue a master's degree in leadership and governance. Her educational journey was undertaken with the specific goal of gaining the knowledge and skills needed to effect change in her community, including policy development, effective leadership, and guiding residents toward a brighter future.

Zippora ran for the position of Member of County Assembly (MCA) because she believed it was the closest to the grassroots level, where most of the community resided.



Her campaign strategy was both innovative and comprehensive. She engaged in extensive door-to-door campaigning for seven months, attending multiple church services and even funerals to reach potential voters. She also provided civic education, emphasizing the importance of electing good leadership over short-term incentives.

She encountered some individuals who were open to her candidacy, but there were others who remained skeptical and expressed reservations. She reflects that

> In some instances, this skepticism was articulated in my mother tongue, and the tone sounded particularly negative. These individuals were not receptive to the idea of a woman representing them in politics, and they questioned the value I could bring.They would often ask, 'What can a fellow woman tell us?' This sentiment was perplexing because women make up more than 52% of the population, and one might assume that they would be more inclined to support a female candidate. However, it became evident that breaking through such barriers and stereotypes would be a significant part of the journey.

In terms of funding her campaign, Zippora initially relied on fundraising but faced challenges due to the financial constraints of supporters. She received significant assistance from women's rights organizations, and some individuals who admired her work and dedication provided financial support. However, she acknowledges the need for candidates to be prepared to invest their own money in politics.

Zippora's experiences and insights into the world of Kenyan politics sheds light on the challenges faced by young women aspiring to lead their communities. She emphasizes the importance of mentorship, both in receiving guidance from experienced individuals and in mentoring young women who aspire to enter politics.

Looking ahead to her political future, Zippora expresses her determination to run for office once again. She highlights the need for more support from political parties and recommends that parties need to support aspiring young female candidates.

Zippora Kamau's journey into Kenyan politics serves as an example of resilience and determination. Her commitment to addressing the needs of her community, coupled with her focus on education and mentorship, offers valuable lessons for young women aspiring to make a difference in politics. As Zippora looks forward to the next election, her experiences will undoubtedly shape her future campaigns and advocacy for positive change in Kenya.

CHAPTER 5

ANITA EPALE



RISE ABOVE TRIABLE LINES

Anita Epale, a dynamic young leader with a background in marketing and a deep commitment to community empowerment. She recently bid for the Women Representative seat in Nairobi County. Anita is not only an aspiring politician but also a project manager for Adopt a Generation Africa, an organization focused on empowering women and youth, particularly in marginalized communities.

Anita's journey into politics was a surprising but natural progression for her. Growing up as an outgoing and passionate individual, she initially seemed destined for a legal career due to her love for debate. However, growing up, she developed a strong empathy for societal injustices and realized that her path to making a meaningful impact was through political leadership.

> My decision to run for the Women Representative seat was strategic. My passion for women's financial independence and empowerment made me believe that the Women Representative role was the ideal platform to drive change.

Anita's political journey was not without its challenges, with digital spaces playing a significant role in both her successes and struggles. She recounts her earlier experience running for the position of President at Nairobi University, where online harassment and abuse were relentless. "During that time, I faced blogs written about me and demands for money from online harassers. This led to financial strain and a temporary withdrawal from social media," Anita recounts.

However, Anita's resilience brought her back to the digital realm, with a more cautious approach. She advises young politicians to take charge of their online platforms, using strategies such as blocking or reporting offensive individuals and documenting instances of abuse. She advises creating a team to handle online harassment in order to preserve one's mental and emotional well-being.

During her campaign, Anita utilized a blend of online and offline tactics to engage with voters effectively. She emphasizes the importance of political parties and alliances in achieving electoral success, highlighting that financial advantage plays a significant role in Kenyan politics.

One unique aspect of Anita's journey is her commitment to advocating for minority communities, like her own Iteso community. She recognizes the challenges faced by minority candidates in the political landscape and plans to focus on addressing these unique needs and building support within these communities. From her observation of the impact of tribal affiliations in Kenyan politics, where some candidates garner support based on their tribal connections she aims to leverage her minority background as an asset rather than a liability.

Campaigning and politics although difficult for many reasons does have enjoyable moments. Anita expresses her love for the adrenaline rush of politics and the interactions with people. She learned to be grateful for her upbringing and how privileged she is compared to some young women she met who had been married at a young age.

Anita's advice to young politicians, especially females, is to cultivate self-belief and self-motivation. She encourages them to be their own source of positivity and strength, emphasizing that politics can be challenging, and relying on constant validation from others is not sustainable.

Anita continues to advocate for digital platforms through her involvement in high school mentorship programs, where she educates young students about the importance of responsible digital usage. She emphasizes that the ‘future is digital’ and encourages the youth to build a positive online presence.

Anita Epale's journey in Kenyan politics is marked by resilience, determination, and a commitment to empowering marginalized communities. Her story serves as an inspiration for aspiring politicians, especially young women, who are looking to make a meaningful impact in Kenya's political landscape. Anita's dedication to change and her fearless approach to overcoming online harassment are testaments to her unwavering pursuit of a more inclusive political environment in Kenya that rises above tribal lines.

CHAPTER 6
REBECCA SAKANA



BREAKING BARRIERS AND PAVING THE WAY

In the world of Kenyan politics, where gender disparities often prevail, Rebecca Sakana's story is of unwavering commitment to bringing change to her community in Marsabit County. Rebecca shares her inspiring journey into politics, the challenges she faces, and her vision for a better Marsabit.

Rebecca, a mother of three, hails from Karare Ward in Marsabit County, where her passion for politics was ignited by her desire to see positive change in her community. "Marsabit was once a prosperous region" Rebecca recalls but laments that, over time, the region has fallen behind due to male dominance in politics. “My main mission in politics is to transform Marsabit into a place I can proudly call home”, she adds.

One of the most significant challenges she encountered was the skepticism surrounding female leadership, particularly in her region.

> As a young woman, I doubted my ability to lead. My doubts were compounded by the ongoing conflicts near my ward's border, where gunshots are a daily occurrence

Even though she had firsthand experience with conflict, some questioned whether a woman could handle the demands of political leadership, especially during times of crisis. Rebecca's determination, however, remained unshaken, so she continued her political journey.
Changing the perception of women's leadership in Marsabit County has been a formidable task. The presence of role models in her life such as Naisula Lesuuda, Member of Parliament for Samburu West, served as an inspiration to be in politics. "I believe that through hard work and dedication, more women can break through the barriers and show that they are capable leaders".

Financing a political campaign in Kenya is no small feat, and Rebecca faced this challenge head-on. She relied on support from her family, husband, father, church groups, and friends from her time in Voi. These contributions, both financial and moral, played a crucial role in her campaign. Renting vehicles, providing daily allowances to campaign teams, and covering other campaign expenses required significant financial resources.

Government organizations did not provide substantial assistance to Rebecca's campaign, except for a training session conducted by Echo Network towards the end of her campaign. She emphasizes that more support is needed, especially for female candidates who often face financial constraints.

"I recognized the power of social media and leveraged platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to reach voters and communicate my policies," she said. While she did not experience cyberbullying directly, she mentions that her male counterparts would attempt to tarnish her reputation during in-person meetings.

The issue of voters expecting financial incentives for their support is a pervasive challenge in Kenyan politics. Rebecca acknowledges that many Kenyan voters expect monetary rewards for their votes. Changing this behavior requires education and a shift in the perception of political leaders as providers of immediate financial gain.

Rebecca's campaign strategy was comprehensive, involving door-to-door canvassing, forming committees, and using motorbike-mounted loudspeakers to spread her message. Her commitment to reaching even the remotest areas of her ward was evident. She faced unexpected setbacks on election night due to financial influences, and eventually secured the third position.
Looking forward, she plans to improve her campaign strategies, tackle cultural challenges, and expand her online presence on platforms like TikTok and Twitter. She also aims to work closely with women's organizations to mentor and support aspiring female leaders. She emphasizes the need for mentorship and education to encourage more women to enter the political arena. Her ultimate goal remains unchanged: to bring positive change to Marsabit through improved education, healthcare, and water resources. She calls for a fair chance for mothers in leadership, believing that they can guide communities towards progress. Rebecca Sakana remains a symbol of hope for the future of women in Kenyan politics. Her journey exemplifies the strength of character required to overcome obstacles and create a better tomorrow for her community and, indeed, for all of Kenya.

According to the UN Women Study, sociocultural practices and the patriarchal nature of society are no longer the only main obstacles constraining the participation of women in politics and leadership in Kenya. Rather these challenges are exacerbated by already existing patriarchal structures. For instance, the cost of politics is on the increase and is higher for women. Women incur more costs than men to break the patriarchal barriers and effectively mobilize their support bases. They have to engage their networks outside of those by men.

> When I first announced my bid for the Gichugu Parliamentary seat, I was told to go and get married. I asked them Since when have you asked all the men representing you since independence who their wives are? You look at their credentials and elect them. Why should it matter to you whether I have a spouse?

Hon. Martha Wangare Karua



CHAPTER 7

ALICE WANGARI

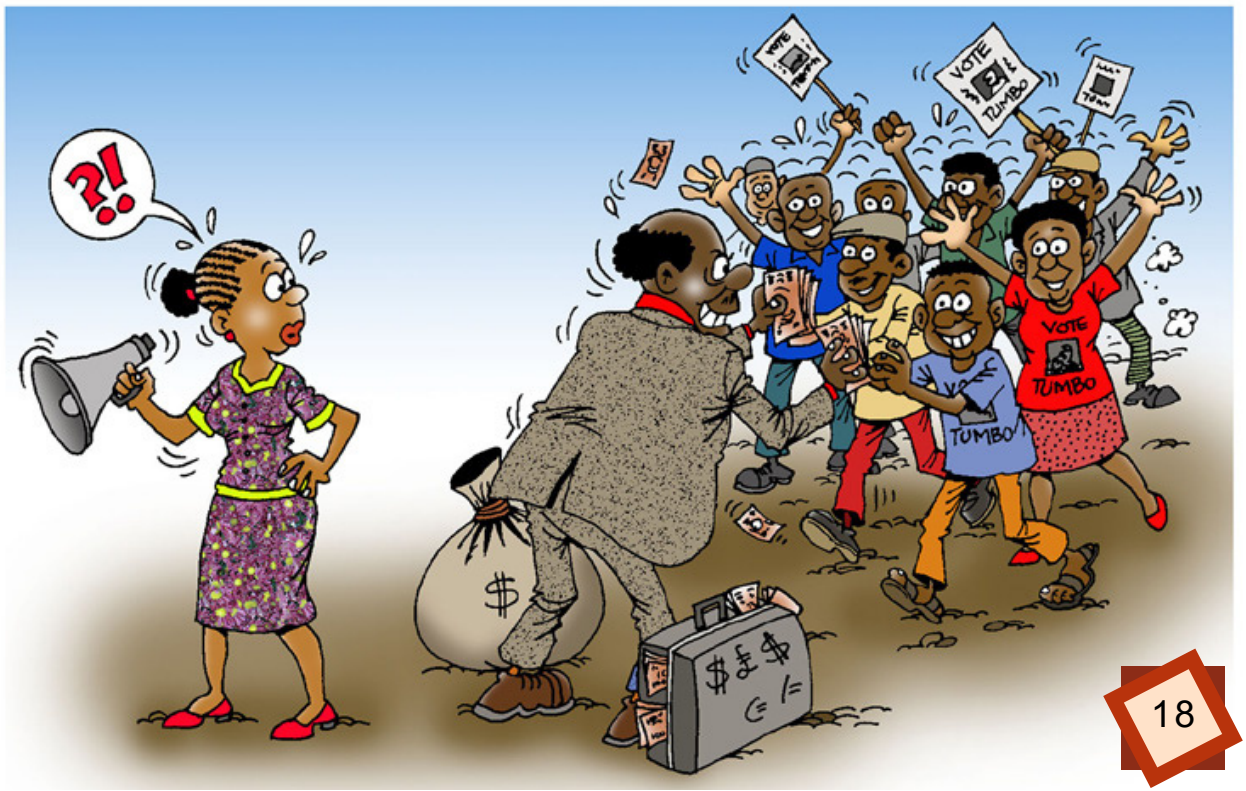


A SENATE RACE LIKE NO OTHER

Alice Wangari, an emerging figure in Kenyan politics. Wangari's journey from being a lawyer and international dispute resolution expert to a political aspirant for the Senate seat in Kiambu County is a captivating tale of determination, resilience, and a passion for effecting positive change. Wangari's story, her motivations, the challenges she faces, and her vision for the youth and women of Kiambu County are remarkable.

"My motivation to join politics was drawn from my involvement in the 2021 Kiambaa by-elections, where I supported Kariri Njama, a Jubilee party candidate. Despite Njama's narrow defeat, this experience laid the foundation for my political aspirations," says Wangari. During this time, she gained first hand insight into the challenges plaguing Kiamba constituency, which she believed were representative of broader issues in Kiambu County.

These issues included alcoholism and drug abuse, period poverty, rising cases of gender-based violence, high unemployment rates, and significant intergenerational conflicts. Wangari's primary role was to engage and campaign among the youth, who were already aligned with the United Democratic Alliance (UDA). Convincing them to reconsider supporting the Jubilee candidate was a considerable assignment, but their efforts made an impact.



"After the by-elections, I organized roundtable discussions with community leaders, women, elders, youth, and church leaders in various constituencies. This way, I was able to understand the concerns and challenges facing the people of Kiambu County and lay the groundwork for my subsequent political engagements".

One of Wangari's primary motivations is to promote literacy among the youth. She advocated for improved literacy skills during her campaign, aiming to facilitate book donations, motivate young learners, and provide additional support to enhance literacy levels. She recognizes that effective communication is essential for leadership, and many young learners struggle with expressing themselves effectively in English or Kiswahili due to insufficiently equipped libraries.

> I had initially intended to vie for the Woman Representative position. I even campaigned for nine months. However, the challenges of being in a lesser-known party and the dynamics of party politics made me shift my focus to the Senate race with only two months remaining in the campaign

Wangari explains. She quickly rebranded herself and embarked on educating the public about the duties and roles of a senator, distinguishing herself as the only candidate to do so.
During her campaign, Wangari faced online violence and cyberstalking, particularly towards the end of the race. Her opponents would often show up at locations she had announced visits to, attempting to discredit her efforts. Even after the elections, she continued to be a target of cyberstalking, highlighting the challenges faced by women in politics.

Despite the obstacles, Wangari's campaign received support from various quarters. Family, friends, well-wishers, and volunteers contributed not only financially but also by providing their time and skills for campaign materials. Media platforms, including Inooro TV and Inooro FM, played a significant role in providing exposure for her campaign.

Wangari's use of the digital platform during her campaign was complemented by a dedicated team of bloggers who volunteered their time and efforts to support her. Additionally, partnerships with the Matatu industry and engagements with various community organizations and churches helped her spread her message effectively.

Looking ahead, Wangari plans to make several changes in her approach to future campaigns. She acknowledges the importance of being part of a major political party, as they provide more significant support and recognition. She believes that a strong party backing is crucial, as it can open doors to various opportunities beyond political appointments. She also continues to engage in civic education, focusing on educating the public about crucial issues such as the Sexual Offenses Act and online safety.

Alice Wangari's journey into politics serves as an inspiration to aspiring young women in Kenya and beyond. Her advice is clear “know yourself and adhere to your principles. Integrity is your currency in the world of politics,”

CHAPTER 8

WANJIKU THIGA



THE HARDWORKING GIRL FOR GENDER EQUITY

Wanjiku Thiga, affectionately nicknamed ‘The Hardworking Girl’ by her community in Kiambu County. Wanjiku's journey into politics began at 21, and since then, she has emerged as a formidable force advocating for youth and women's rights, as well as championing the implementation of the two-thirds gender rule in Kenya's political landscape.

"I'm excited to talk about politics, my inspiration comes from witnessing social injustices within my community. I couldn't stand idly by; I had to do something."

In 2022, Wanjiku embarked on a groundbreaking journey, vying for the Member of County Assembly (MCA) seat in Theta Ward, Kiambu County. Her decision to run for office was born out of a deeply ingrained sense of duty. She witnessed firsthand the discrimination faced by women in her community when it came to accessing education bursaries. Determined to be a voice for change, she entered politics, setting her sights on addressing these injustices.

"Running for MCA was a natural progression for me. I saw the need to address the issues that directly affected my community," Wanjiku shared. "One of my most significant motivations was witnessing the discrimination against women in accessing education bursaries. I wanted to ensure that these injustices would not persist."

Wanjiku's entry into politics was met with both excitement and skepticism. She recounts the challenges she faced during her campaign, where people dug deep into her past, questioned her integrity, and even discriminated against her because of her gender. However, Wanjiku's unwavering commitment gradually won the trust of the people, allowing her to grow her political portfolio and improve her public speaking skills.

"Some of my greatest experiences in politics have been growing my portfolio, improving my public speaking skills, and, most importantly, gaining the trust of the people I serve," Wanjiku states proudly. "But, it hasn't been easy. There were times when my integrity was questioned simply because I'm a woman. However, I persevered because I knew the importance of the work I was doing."

One of the most remarkable aspects of Wanjiku's political journey is her dedication to the two-thirds gender rule, which aims to ensure that no gender occupies more than two-thirds of elective and appointive positions in Kenya. Wanjiku highlights that the main challenges to this rule are the loopholes in the mechanisms used, the perception of the rule as a 'women's issue', patriarchal structures entrenched in the political system, and the lack of political goodwill.

Wanjiku's involvement in advocating for the two-thirds gender rule extends beyond her role as an MCA candidate. She is an active member of the Kiambu Social Accountability Network, a group dedicated to holding elected leaders accountable for the promises they made to the people during the 2022 campaigns. Through this network, Wanjiku ensures that the issues of women's rights remain at the forefront of the political agenda in Kiambu County.

Wanjiku also serves as a member of the National Women Steering Committee. In this role, she tirelessly advocates for the full implementation of the two-thirds gender rule at the national level. Remarkably, this marks her seventh year of advocacy for this crucial policy, demonstrating her unwavering consistency to the cause.

> I believe that advocacy is a long-term commitment, this is my seventh year advocating for the two-thirds gender rule, and I'm not stopping anytime soon. We must keep pushing until we see real change.

Wanjiku Thega's journey from a determined young advocate to a prominent political figure in Kiambu County is a testament to her unyielding commitment to social justice. She is not only breaking barriers but also challenging entrenched gender norms within Kenya's political landscape.

CHAPTER 9

HEATHER WANZILA



ENGAGING YOUTH VOTERS & LEADERS

In the realm of politics, where experience and age often take precedence, Heather Wanzila stands as a beacon of youthful ambition. A candidate for the deputy gubernatorial seat in Machakos, Kenya, with background in education and as the founder of the Ignite Vijana Initiative, she has dedicated her life to girls rights particularly adolescents. Her journey into politics was marked by a unique opportunity presented by Rose Mulwa, a visionary leader who recognized Heather's potential to champion the youth agenda.

Heather's foray into politics began when she was 26, a decision that raised eyebrows and challenged stereotypes. Her small stature and physical appearance initially led to doubts about her ability to navigate the complex world of politics effectively. However, Heather firmly believes that her capabilities should not be judged by her outward appearance. She emphasizes the importance of breaking free from self-imposed limits and pushing the boundaries in a field dominated by seasoned politicians.

One of the defining aspects of Heather's political journey has been her use of digital platforms, particularly Facebook, to engage with youth voters. She recognizes that to reach the new generation of voters, one had to meet them where they were, and in the digital age, that place was undoubtedly social media. "The choice to engage youth on social media was costly in terms of my mental health. I faced negative feedback and cyberbullying." Despite these challenges, She remains undeterred in her commitment to utilizing social media more effectively in her future political endeavors. She now has a dedicated team to handle the negativity and focus on spreading her message of hope and change.



“Campaigning in a vast county like Machakos demanded substantial resources." She received support from friends, family, and her running mate, Rose Mulwa. However, the financial struggles were real and often left her under immense pressure. They were expected to address pressing community issues even before assuming office, a testament to the high expectations placed on political candidates.

These elevated expectations placed considerable pressure on Heather and her team. People in the community often anticipated immediate solutions to their problems, and the burden to deliver tangible results weighed heavily on her shoulders.
While they made earnest efforts to address pressing community needs, the challenges remained complex and pervasive, highlighting the intricacies of governance.

Heather advises selecting a political party with a strong presence in rural areas and encourages voters to prioritize the qualities and agendas of individual candidates over blind party allegiance. She further emphasizes the centrality of comprehensive civic education to facilitate this shift in mindset among voters, ultimately leading to more informed choices during elections.

> I am grateful to my female mentors, particularly Rose Mulwa, who played a pivotal role in shaping my political path.

She continues her commitment to mentorship through the Ignite Vijana Initiative, a platform where the focus is on empowering young girls with knowledge and opportunities. Her ultimate goal is to end teenage pregnancies and ensure that every girl can pursue her dreams without hindrance.

"Electorates should consider youthful leaders who are actively present and engaged in their communities, advocating for the issues that matter most to the people." Her hope for the future is that the next generation of leaders will prioritize the welfare and development of their constituents, ushering in a new era of progress.

Heather Wanzila is a compelling example of the importance of youth engagement in politics and the pressing need to shift away from traditional party-centric voting practices. It is a clarion call to encourage young people to step forward and lead, ultimately shaping their communities and the nation for the better.

CHAPTER 10

MARY NARINOI MWIGAI



A WOMAN'S PLACE BEYOND THE KITCHEN

Mary Narinoi Mwigai, affectionately known as ‘Mary Mary’, sheds light on the challenges and triumphs faced by women in politics, offering pathways to leadership.

> My middle name is Narinoi, and we all come from a background where patriarchal norms have traditionally confined women to the kitchen. However, I am determined to challenge this cliché and reshape the narrative. I firmly believe that a woman's place is beyond the kitchen; it's in the boardroom, where decisions are made, where your voice is heard, and where you can influence change

Mary's words encapsulate her unwavering commitment to breaking the shackles of gender-based stereotypes. Her journey into politics is a testament to her conviction that women can and should play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's destiny.

Mary's journey into politics was not without its trials. In 2017, she faced her first election, a baptism of fire into the tumultuous world of Kenyan politics. Despite the challenges and her initial defeat, she emerged from the experience stronger and more determined than ever. "The crucial experience I would carry with me from my past campaigns is the reminder of why I am in politics... I constantly stress to people that these are their rights, not favors."
Mary's journey is not merely about acquiring political power, it's about ensuring that the voices of those she represents are heard. Her focus on education and awareness campaigns highlights her commitment to informing citizens about their rights and the responsibilities of elected officials.

Her evolution as a politician is evident in her changing campaign strategies. In 2017, her affiliation with a major party gave her visibility but also made her a target of hostility due to differing political affiliations. In 2022, she adopted a grassroots approach, connecting with people at their doorsteps and attending rallies. This shift in strategy emphasizes the importance of personal connections and community engagement in Kenyan politics.

The journey has not been without challenges. "Financial resources were a significant challenge, but I tackled it through fundraising... I learned from my 2017 experience that engaging too much in online spaces could be detrimental to one's mental well-being."

Mary's ability to overcome financial obstacles through innovative fundraising and leveraging her network showcases her resourcefulness and determination. Her advocacy for reporting cyber violence and maintaining mental well-being in the face of online negativity is a testament to her resilience.

In her advice to young women aspiring politicians, Mary states: "Gone are the days when women used to say, 'We are not counted' Now, we must wake up and take action... Every day, make an effort to make a difference."

She encourages women to strive for spaces where their voices matter. Mary believes that women have the potential to inspire and impact future generations, and she urges them to seize opportunities and create positive change.

As Mary looks ahead to the future, she envisions aligning herself with a prominent political party in 2027, having learned valuable lessons from her past campaigns. Her commitment to her community and her determination to effect positive change remain unwavering. Mary Narinoi Mwigai's journey into Kenyan politics, both triumphant and challenging, provides valuable lessons for aspiring leaders, especially young women, who aim to make their mark in the world of politics.

According to Nalafem Afrika Young Women Beijing+25 Manifesto, 1,500 young people across Africa agreed that Intergenerational Co-Leadership is key to Generation Equality Forum. The Manifesto demands (1) Institutionalization of co-leadership for young women's full and effective political participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all decision-making levels in the political, social, cultural, economic and public dimensions of life, while strengthening young women's voices and creating spaces and resources for their agendas. (2) Enforcement of quotas for young women within women and youth quotas. (3) Appointment of young women technocrats and Special Advisors/Envoys and other positions across industry, institutions and at every level of national, regional and global governance and (4)Establishment of sustainable intergenerational dialogues platforms to strengthen Pan-African and inclusive networks of young and senior women for generational learning, sharing, mentoring, solidarity and empowerment.

> "It is no longer sufficient for us to look for allies in the government. We have to become our own allies, and that means women need to conquer the kingdom of politics."
>
> *Dr. Oby Ezekwesili*



Call to Action

Ten ingredients these young women offer to run a race when you're young and female in the context of Kenya but also 10 calls to action to make a difference for them in politics:

1. EQUITY

Gender discrimination affects especially young women of low socioeconomic status and all those in vulnerable settings which result in their exclusion from decision-making, questioning their integrity and even marital status. You don't have to be married to enter politics.



- Challenge gender discrimination in politics, dismantle patriarchal structures to ensure equitable representation and advocate for the two-thirds gender rule

2. CIVIC EDUCATION

Educating the community as part of your campaign on key issues such as Sexual Offenses Act and online safety among others is essential, especially by simplifying complicated jargon to their everyday life.



- Support women participation in governance by educating the public about electing good leadership over short-term incentives

3. POLITICAL PARTIES

It is important to join political parties and alliances to achieve electoral success while reforming their structures as traditionally patriarchal hostile spaces



- Support aspiring young female candidates, put an end to negotiated democracy and direct nominations in political parties and eliminate any form of gender based violence
- As voters, prioritize candidates over party allegiance for a brighter, community-driven future



4. SOCIAL MEDIA

The digital platforms can be toxic spaces but you must develop a thick skin, document, report and have a digital team to handle it to preserve your mental health. Do not be deterred by negative comments but rather use social media to leverage your campaign and reach young voters



- Stand against online violence, cyberbullying and blackmailing

5. FUNDING

Raising funds for a political campaign is a significant challenge, especially for young and aspiring politicians but it’s not impossible. Stay true to your integrity and transparency, organize fundraising events, rally support from friends and family, online crowdfunding, and the sale of campaign merchandise. Build a volunteer network to reduce the campaign's financial burden.



- Regulate campaign finances, be part of the movement to fund a new generation of female political leaders and shift away from the notion that political positions can be bought with money, but rather support value and community driven candidates

6. DIALOGUE

Skiza’ forums are a great example of the importance of community dialogues to listen to community concerns, grievances, and potential solutions for addressing them.



- Host, convene or participate in community forums with young female candidates who strive to co-create with community their priorities



7. SUPPORT SYSTEM

“Mwiko” is a great example of nurturing a support system in your community. Create personal connections with the people you serve, especially other women who understand your challenges.



- Influence the traditionally patriarchal views of some men who doubt electing young, unmarried women

8. MENTORSHIP

The importance of mentorship is to both receive guidance from experienced individuals and mentor other young women who aspire to enter politics.



- Mentor two or three young aspiring politicians it can change their lives and it will be your legacy

9. INCLUSION

Adopting a grassroots approach, connecting with people at their doorsteps, in all their diversities is key to community engagement.



- Promote a more inclusive political landscape by bringing on board young women in marginalized communities to participate meaningfully in politics

10. NARRATIVE

Kenya is diverse which requires effective communication with people, and how you engage with them. Express yourself not only in English but in your local language.



- Elevate and celebrate the voices of young women in politics and challenge stereotypes



Contacts

SIASA PLACE

Ngong Rd Kirichwa Lane Court,
Hse 29 - Nairobi
@SiasaPlace
Siasa Place
support@siasaplace.com
www.siasaplace.com

NALA FEMINIST COLLECTIVE

Nalafem
@_Nalafem
hello@nalafem.org
www.nalafem.org