

UGANDA

Uganda, a landlocked, equatorially located Eastern African nation, gained its independence from British rule in 1962. For centuries prior to colonial conquest, its territory had been a meeting place of different peoples; long settled by Bantu speaking peoples, it saw the arrival of Nilo-Hamitic groups in the seventeenth century and of Arab mercantile settlers in the mid-nineteenth century. British explorers, the first Europeans to reach the area, crossed the Buganda kingdom in the 1860s. For a while British jostled with German colonialism for control of the territory, a contest eventually won by the British, who formally declared it a crown protectorate in 1894.

Not long after winning independence in 1962, Uganda entered a period of instability and by 1971 was under the brutal military rule of Major General Idi Amin Dada. Amin was deposed in 1979 and in 1980 Milton Obote, who had ruled the country from 1966-1971, was elected President. He was again ousted by a military coup in 1985, but the new army rulers were in their turn pushed out by the National Resistance Movement (NRM), led by Yoweri Museveni. The NRM leader, inaugurated as President of Uganda in January 1986, continues to rule the country.

Since the ascendancy of Museveni and the NRM in the mid-1980s, Uganda has followed a form of government in which candidates stand for election as individuals rather than as representatives of political parties. The President is assisted by a Prime Minister and a Cabinet composed of representatives of various political parties; the latter continue to exist, but campaigning and other overt, organised forms of party political activity are banned. The country's legislative body, the National Resistance Council, comprises 216 elected and 67 presidentially appointed members.

A new constitution, drafted by an elected Constituent Assembly, was promulgated in October 1995. This ratified the country's system of no-party politics, and pledged to protect basic human rights, including the rights of women. The Government undertook to hold elections within nine months of the date of promulgation, and Uganda's first direct Presidential Elections took place in May 1996. The result was a landslide victory for Yoweri Museveni, who won 74.2 per cent of the national vote. The President consolidated his position in Parliamentary Elections held in June 1996, when his supporters won a convincing majority in the new National Assembly.

The Ugandan Government has placed considerable emphasis on decentralisation. Today, the country is divided into 39 Administrative Units or Districts, each headed by a District Resistance Chairman. Districts are in turn divided, under the Resistance Council system, into county, sub-county, parish and village units.

Women In Politics

In the early years of independence, very few women in Uganda occupied positions of political leadership. Recent years have seen efforts, including government initiatives, to redress this situation.

The drafting of the country's new constitution took place in a context of raised awareness of gender justice. Women delegates to the constituent assembly formed a Women's Caucus, headed by Winnie Byanyima, one of Africa's few women aeronautical engineers. This initiated a series of gender dialogues with male delegates in a bid to garner support for issues of concern to women. Among the achievements of the caucus was the writing of the Constitution in gender neutral language; explicit provisions for equality of men and women before the law; an Equal Opportunities Commission; and affirmative action provisions.

Under the new constitution, 30 per cent of representatives on all statutory bodies must be women. One post of Secretary is reserved for women on all nine-member Resistance Council Committees from the national to the district level. Every district, too, is obliged to send a female representative to Parliament, which guarantees women a minimum of 39 seats, roughly 14 per cent of the total.

In addition to the 39 women who entered Parliament via this route in the 1996 elections, two women came in as nominees from other interest groups (the army and the disabled) and eight women won seats by contesting elections. This has raised the number of women legislators to 49 out of a total membership of 284, or 17.3 per cent. They are given practical support by a non-governmental organisation, the Forum for Women in Democracy, set up by the Women's Caucus after the dissolution of the constituent assembly. The forum offers woman legislators induction courses, support in running workshops for their constituents, and access to national and regional networking.

Today, Uganda has a woman Vice-President, Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, and several women Ministers of State handling portfolios such as Agriculture, and Gender and Community Development. The Ministry of Gender and Community Development has organised training sessions where women politicians from other countries have shared their experiences with their Ugandan counterparts.

Current Government policy is directed at strengthening the position of women in the economy by raising the value and productivity of their labour and giving them access to, and control over, productive resources such as land, capital, credit, education and information.

SPECIOSA KAZIBWE

Vice-President and Minister of Agriculture

Former Minister of Gender and Community Development

Former Minister for Women in Development, Culture and Youth

Former Deputy Minister of Industry and Technology

Speciosa Kazibwe, Uganda's first woman Vice-President and Africa's highest ranking woman politician, remembers her first election attempt well. As a first year medical student at the University of Makerere in the early 1970s, she stood for election as hall chairperson, but was turned down because of her "fresher" (newcomer) status. Undaunted, she stood again the following year – and won.

"I know that many women, when they try the first time and don't make it, give up," she says, looking back on the experience. "They think people don't like them; that they are not good enough. But I think it is very good to keep on trying and face the challenge."

Early Life

Speciosa Kazibwe was born in 1955 in a region of Uganda near Lake Kyoga. She was the eldest of nine children and the only girl in the family. Her father, who worked for the local branch of the post office, appreciated the value of education and had no prejudices about sending his daughter to school.

At a time when pre-school facilities were rare in Uganda, Kazibwe was fortunate enough to attend a nursery school with sporting and recreational facilities near her father's place of work. She then moved on to a girls' primary school a two-and-a-half mile walk from her home. The distance to be walked subsequently rose to four miles when her father was transferred to another work place. "This experience," says Kazibwe, "gave me endurance and a determination to achieve."

In 1967, she gained high marks in her primary school leaving certificate and was enrolled at Mount St Mary's College, Namagunga, one of the best girls' high schools in the country. Here, she acted as school librarian, a responsibility which helped nurture her interest in reading and acquiring knowledge. "Fellow students used to call me a walking encyclopaedia," she recalls with a chuckle. "I was never allowed to participate in the school quiz, because every time I did, my class would win." Instead, she was given the job of setting the questions.

At high school, Kazibwe served as a prefect and as a member of the school council. She was an enthusiastic participant in singing, drama and dancing, pursuits that helped to build her confidence in front of audiences and her communication skills. She also involved herself in voluntary work on behalf of the poor, sick, disabled and elderly.

After completing high school, she moved on to Makerere University, where she read medicine. At that time, Makerere was one of the most renowned universities in Africa. Its hall chairpersons constituted the University Students' Council, and as a member of this, Kazibwe interacted with the university administration, gaining knowledge of management and decision-making as well as of issues relating to discipline and leadership.

Her student days at Makerere coincided with the worst years of repression under the Idi Amin regime. During a demonstration against injustice that subsequently came to be known as "Black Tuesday", a number of students were assaulted and beaten by Amin's security forces, while others were abducted. As a student leader, Kazibwe felt she had to speak out. "We had to stand against all odds to fight for the rights of other people and to speak for them," she says. "You should not back out when things become very hot."

The trainee doctor completed her Master's degree in surgery in 1987. She worked at Mulago Hospital and later at Butabika Hospital for the mentally disturbed. Working among severely disturbed people, she believes, taught her patience and the ability to listen to other people's problems.

Besides her hospital work, Kazibwe involved herself in a number of women's organisations, including the Senior Women Advisory Group on Environment and the Mothers' Union. By this time she had married her engineer husband and was in the process of raising her four children.

Entry into Politics and Rise to the Top

Kazibwe began her political career in the period after the rise to power of Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM). While still a medical practitioner, she participated in her local Resistance Council Committee. In 1988, she was elected to represent her area in the district council of Kampala. The following year, she was elected to Parliament as the woman representative from Kampala district under the Government's Affirmative Action Policy for Women.

In 1989, the year of her arrival in Parliament, Kazibwe was appointed Deputy Minister for Industry and Technology. In 1991, she joined the Cabinet as Minister for Women in Development, Culture and Youth, and in 1994 she was given the additional portfolio of Tourism and Wildlife. The same year, she contested the elections for the Constituent Assembly that was to draw up the country's new Constitution. Opting not to make use of the affirmative action ticket, she stood against six male candidates in the mainstream election, and won.

In November 1994, Kazibwe was appointed national Vice-President and concurrently Minister of Gender and Community Development. Her appointment coincided with the Dakar Regional Conference for African Women being held in preparation for the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women

Enabling Factors

Kazibwe identifies her experience of family life as very important to her subsequent development. Growing up as the eldest child and as a daughter with eight younger brothers, she learnt to interact with men as equals – and to have males subordinate to her. “The feeling of equal status between me and my brothers at home,” she says, “prepared me to deal with male counterparts as equals in adult life without suffering from an inferiority complex and without regret at being female. And I didn’t harbour stereotyped notions of what women could or could not do.”

Perspective on Women in Politics

Kazibwe believes that women in politics need to foster positive attitudes about themselves and the contribution they can make. Having herself always shunned gender stereotypes, she urges women to aim high and to dispel the notion that they should be led and protected by men. “Believe in yourself in order to empower and give confidence to others,” she affirms. “Women should offer themselves as leaders. They should make themselves visible and take on the challenges given to them.”

As an experienced politician, she highlights the importance of collective responsibility and of working as a team. “Women need to get out of their cocoons,” she says. “They must learn to recruit and draw on other people’s resourcefulness and expertise in work.” Delegation should be used as a strategy for collective achievement and as a way of helping others identify with the task or challenge in hand.

Women hoping to succeed in politics must be able to deliver, she argues. This demands thorough-going professionalism and attention at all times to performance, since “performance must be the basis for credibility.” Broadmindedness and a continuing thirst for knowledge are also important. “When you become a leader you become a jack of all trades,” she points out. “You become a fount of knowledge. The culture of reading has helped me to go beyond my medical profession in that I have taken interest in reading about subject matters not related to my profession. And that’s a good thing for any politician.”

JANAT MUKWAYA

Minister for Gender and Community Development

Former Minister Responsible for the Rehabilitation of the Luwero Triangle

As a child, Janat Mukwaya aspired to become a magistrate. She duly became one, but soon found herself caught up in activity of quite a different type. Her opposition to the regime of Idi Amin led her to take to the bush, where she fought alongside the male guerrillas of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), emerging from the war with the rank of captain.

The experience equipped her with the skill to mobilise and organise people around a common cause. It also awakened her to women's double burden of oppression: political and gender. After the coming to power of the NRM, she put these lessons to work as a cabinet minister handling challenging portfolios and as an elected member of Uganda's Constituent Assembly. She succeeded Speciosa Kazibwe as Minister of Gender and Community Development.

Early Life

Janat Mukwaya was born in 1951 into a family with a tradition of political involvement. Her father was a veteran politician, involved in clan politics and in a nationalist organisation called the Bataka Bu, which agitated against colonialism. Janat was the eldest of nine children: four girls and five boys. As the first born, she was expected to provide a role model for her younger siblings and was therefore encouraged to develop leadership skills at an early age.

Both parents appreciated the value of education. Mukwaya feels a particular debt of gratitude to her mother, a trained midwife, who devoted much of her earnings to paying school fees and buying her children the materials and equipment they needed.

Mukwaya attended nursery school and primary school in her home district of Mukono. She then moved away to boarding school, eventually becoming deputy head girl of Nabisunsa Girls' High School. Life at boarding school helped her to gain independence and maturity. She became an active member of the debating club, building skills in public speaking, reasoning and persuasive argument. On one occasion, she mobilised her fellow students to demonstrate against an American teacher who had called the students "black monkeys." The teacher was eventually deported.

After completing school, Mukwaya obtained a diploma in law and fulfilled her childhood ambition of becoming a magistrate. She developed a particular interest in family law and in issues relating to human rights.

Entry into Politics

As a child, Mukwaya was surrounded by the political talk between her father, his friends and members of the family. These discussions kindled her interest in politics.

By 1980, her interest led her to involve herself in election campaigning for the Democratic Party. The elections were plagued by charges of fraud and the Democratic Party – widely regarded as having won the elections – was not allowed to form a government. Mukwaya recalls the anger she felt not only towards the way the elections had been conducted but also towards the timid response of the Democratic Party, which did not protest against the injustice.

Disillusioned, Mukwaya joined the National Resistance Movement and took to the bush to fight the government. She rose to the rank of captain in the guerrilla army.

After the war, she was appointed Director of Women's Affairs at the NRM secretariat. Here, she further developed her skills in organisation, management, planning and setting priorities. In 1990, she went back to study at the University of Makerere, obtaining a degree in political science and sociology in 1993.

The same year, she was one of seven women to contest and win elections for seats in the Constituent Assembly; like Speciosa Kazibwe, she did not gain her seat under the affirmative action programme. At this time, too, Mukwaya joined the Cabinet as the Minister responsible for the reconstruction of the Luwero Triangle – Uganda's killing fields during the civil war. Her ministerial appointment automatically made her a nominated Member of Parliament.

She contested the elections of June 1996 as an ordinary candidate (i.e., not under the affirmative action programme) and won her seat. She was subsequently appointed Minister for Gender and Community Development, the high-ranking post previously held by Speciosa Kazibwe, who was now Vice-President.

Enabling Factors

Mukwaya identifies her husband as her greatest source of support: "Far from being upset by my achievements," she says, "he has been my companion through all challenges and successes." Her extended family has also been supportive, although she had to work quite hard with her in-laws to help them understand her point of view.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Mukwaya believes that in order to succeed in politics, women must be as organised as possible. While political involvement does reduce the amount of time women can spend with their families, careful planning can mitigate the situation. As she points out, "as a woman, if you are not well organised you can lose your home. This is not only in politics but in any other career."

In general, she suggests, women need to develop the same skills as men in politics. She believes in the closest possible contact with her constituents: "Continual consultations with the people one represents; getting to know and understand their needs and interests; and having a good grasp of locally important issues: these are the key to the success of any politician." Then come the skills of mobilising people, along with organising, setting priorities and allocating resources. It is also important, she says, to learn how to delegate. And everyone who wants to succeed in politics must keep themselves conversant with topical issues, nationally and glob-

ally, and be able to communicate their knowledge to people in a language they can understand.

At the personal level, women in politics – in common with their male colleagues – should make it a point to be open, honest and consistent. “Declare your intentions – and do not make false promises,” she advises.

RHODA KALEMA

Former Deputy Minister of Public Service and Cabinet Affairs

Former Deputy Minister of Culture and Community Development

Former Member of Parliament

Rhoda Kalema has her own claim to history making. Back in the colonial Uganda of the 1940s, when clerical work was a male preserve, she was, she thinks, the first woman in the country to “try a typewriter”. From then on she made it a point to challenge stereotypes. This eventually led her into politics, where she encountered the assumption that only a man could effectively deliver the goods. “In my constituency,” she recalls, “I’d be known as ‘our man.’ People would say, ‘you are a woman and a half.’ Children would call me ‘our man’, which tells us that people believe that it’s a man who can be effective in administering politics.”

Early Life

Rhoda Kalema was born in 1930 into a distinguished political family. Her father was the Katikiro (Prime Minister) of Buganda, and she grew up amid affluence and political influence. For her primary schooling she attended King’s College, Budo, a prestigious boys’ school which had just become co-educational. The girls, she remembers, were acutely aware that they were in a “boys’ school”, because there were so few of them. But the experience helped build their confidence and taught them to deal with the boys as equals.

In 1945, Kalema enrolled at a commercial college where she studied typing, stenography, shorthand and office administration. After completing her course in 1947, she got a job at Gayaza High School, where she worked as a secretary and bursar. In 1950, she married a teacher who was based in Budo and began teaching secretarial courses on a part-time basis.

In the mid 1950s, she travelled to the United Kingdom to join her husband, who was studying for a degree. She enrolled in an adult education course at the University of Edinburgh and went on to study social work.

On her return to Uganda, Kalema worked as an officer in charge of probation and welfare in what was then the Ministry of Culture and Community Development. She also became involved in the women’s movement. By 1958, she was a member of the Uganda Council of Women and was asked to be Secretary of the Sub-committee investigating the

status of women.

One of the tasks handled by the Sub-committee was educating men on the need to make wills. At this time, many widows were being deprived of their possessions by their husbands' families. With the support of the then Prime Minister, Ben Kiwanuka, a commission to look at marriage issues was instituted and a report compiled. This train of events culminated in a national conference on the rights of women in 1960.

In 1966, Kalema retired from the civil service on medical grounds.

Entry into Politics

In the early 1960s, Kalema's husband was actively involved in politics. He became an MP in the government set up immediately after independence in October 1962. But it was not until after the overthrow of the Idi Amin regime at the end of the 1970s that Kalema herself entered the political arena.

In 1979, she joined Parliament as a member of the National Consultative Council, representing Kampala district. She was the only woman member on the Consultative Committee and gained invaluable experience by being on it. In the period 1979-1980, she also served as Deputy Minister of Culture and Community Development.

When the second Milton Obote administration turned sour, Kalema joined the NRM. She contested the 1989 elections as the National Resistance Council representative for Kiboga, and won. From 1989 to 1991, she served as Deputy Minister of Public Service and Cabinet Affairs. She later contested the election to the Constituent Assembly, and was one of a handful of women to win their seats in direct competition with men rather than through affirmative action.

Enabling Factors

Kalema highlights the support she won from her husband. "He encouraged me to pursue further studies and to stay a year longer than he did at the University of Edinburgh so that I could finish my course," she says.

Another factor which helped shape her success in politics was the fact that her children were grown up by the time she started pursuing a political career.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Kalema believes that women in politics must be bold, assertive and willing to take on challenges. In fact, she says, such attitudes are the key to women gaining acceptance: "If a woman has confidence and she is determined to deliver and not just to talk, she will be accepted. I think that is how they accepted me."

At the level of practice, women must be taught basic skills in such areas as organisation, management, public speaking and book-keeping. Educated

women, she argues, have a special responsibility to appreciate the needs of other women and take concrete steps to help them up the ladder. "Educated women must realise that they are educated to raise others," she affirms, pointing out that her own circumstances were such that she could have led a comfortable life without exerting herself.