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# Uganda: How Zziwa Won Eala Speaker Post

BY JOYCE NAMUTEBI, 6 JUNE 2012

The new Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly, Margaret Nantongo Zziwa, went to Arusha as the underdog in the race for the coveted race.

But to those who have dealt with her long, her victory didn't come as a surprise. She is described as an assertive and confident lady. In the political circles, Zziwa has been known as a plain-speaking person who doesn't fear to take an independent position. No wonder she insisted on standing for the position of Speaker against the official candidate, Dora Byamukama.

As the Speaker of EALA, Zziwa will be a key player in the East African Community and one of the region's top political figures. In her new role, she will be closely consulting with the region's presidents.

An excited Professor Victoria Mwaka, who was Zziwa's lecturer in the Department of Gender Studies, remembers her as a forthright bright student.

"I groomed her. She was my student," Prof. Mwaka who supervised Zziwa for her Master's degree says and describes her as a "lucky girl and a devoted Catholic." Mwaka is now on the board of St Margaret Secondary school, a school Zziwa started in Makerere.

Mrs Joyce Mpanga, a veteran woman leader who was with Zziwa in the Sixth Parliament told New Vision that Zziwa "she speaks with confidence and researches what she says."

Mpanga observed that Zziwa is very intelligent and will perform well in her new assignment.

Another woman leader, Mrs Loice Bwambale, who worked with Zziwa in the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) described her as an extremely committed capable person. "I know she will perform the task," she said.

In her official CV, Zziwa says she wants to promote faith issues because she wants leadership with integrity. She is a fervent promoter of women's rights and loves singing in church, reason she formed the St. Francis choir at Naguru St. Jude Church.

Married to former minister Capt. Francis Babu, Zziwa, 49, was daughter to Charles Mugerwa and Josephine Mugerwa of Mpererwe.

She has a prolific profile, with a number of academic qualifications. She holds a Master's degree in Policy (Applied Social Research) of the University of Stirling, UK and another MA in Gender and Women Studies of Makerere University. She is also a holder of Bachelor of Arts Degree in Economics, a Post Graduate Diploma in Education, a diploma in legislative drafting and another diploma in trade and policy from TRAPCA-ESAMI.

Zziwa was first elected to EALA in 2007 and is serving her second term in the regional assembly. In her first term, she served on the committee of communication, trade and investment (CTI) as well as being a member of the general purpose committee and regional affairs.

Prior to this, Zziwa served for two terms as Member of Parliament (Kampala) in Uganda's Sixth and Seventh Parliaments between 1996 and 2006. She was elected to Parliament after defeating Naava Nabagesera in a hotly contested race in 1996. Zziwa later tussled with Nabagesera in court and finally prevailed and virtually drove Naava out of Kampala elective politics. However, she later lost the seat to the incumbent Nabilah Ssemपाला.



Photo: New Vision

Margaret Zziwa: As Speaker she will be a key player in the region and one of the region's top political figures.

When it appeared as though she had reached end of her political career, Zziwa, maneuvered in the political corridors and bounced back as member of EALA in 2007.

While in Parliament, Zziwa served on the Parliament's powerful governing board, the Parliamentary Commission and spearheaded the MPs' Medical health Scheme, Members Pension Scheme and the Parliamentary Human Resource Policy.

Zziwa also served as Constituent Assembly Delegate (1993 to 1995).

Before joining politics, she was Economics and Geography teacher at Kololo Senior Secondary School. Zziwa also was a part time lecturer, Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University.

In her political career, she has served in various capacities in the NRM including being chairperson NRM Issues Committee from 2009 to 2010. She was chairperson NRM Kampala sub-region and in 1996 chaired President Yoweri Museveni's Kampala Task Force.

At the international scene, she was president, Global Parliamentarians on Habitat (GPH) Africa focusing on implementing the habitat Agenda and Millennium Development Goal 11.

How elections were conducted

John Odyek reports that Margaret Natongo Zziwa (49) Tuesday became the first female Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), after causing a major upset by defeating Uganda's official candidate, Dora Byamukama.

Zziwa who was shortly after elections sworn in by Kenneth Madete clerk of the assembly, obtained 33 votes in the second round of voting. Byamukama (40) got 12 votes in the second round, down from 18 votes she got in the first round. Forty five MPs from the five EAC member countries voted.

The elections were a Ugandan affair after the Burundi candidate pulled out leaving Zziwa and Byamukama to fight it out.

According to the Rules of Procedure (rule 7) of the Assembly on election of Speaker, the members directly elect the speaker by secret ballot from among their number on rotational basis.

The rules require the speaker to get at least two thirds of the votes to be declared a winner. Zziwa won round one with 27 votes. They both fell short of getting at least 30 votes required to make two thirds.

What made Zziwa prevail?

David Bahati, spokesperson of the NRM in Parliament congratulated Zziwa on the election. "We need to move forward. There were some internal dynamics which caused Byamukama to lose but we have to focus now on integration," he said.

One of the Ugandan MPs who travelled to Arusha said Zziwa won because she had the support of the EALA secretariat and the council of ministers of the EAC who worked hard for her. The council of ministers includes ministers from the member states in charge of the community affairs. Uganda's representative in the council is First Deputy Prime Minister, Eriya Kategaya.

"Zziwa delivered a good speech, she appealed to many people and she appeared mature," the MP who requested not to be named, observed.

Other sources argued that Byamukama, who appeared to be the frontrunner initially, lost because during her tenure as commissioner in EALA many people were not comfortable with her. "Some people say she is arrogant, that she does not greet people, not welcoming to members," said a source.

The source said Soroti Municipality MP Mike Mukula, also NRM vice chairperson Eastern Region, Lydia Wanyoto former EALA member and Eriya Kategaya, minister for East Africa Community affairs allegedly backed Zziwa and decampaigned the official candidate, Byamukama.

Efforts by New Vision to get comments from Kategaya, Mukula and Wanyoto were fruitless. Wanyoto had earlier shown interest in the post of Speaker, but was barred from standing because she had also served her two terms.

The source said that following the political tension among members of Uganda's delegation, Mukula subsequently withdraw from the venue back to his hotel and didn't attend the swearing in ceremony of EALA.

Sources said it appeared Byamukama's camp had underestimated Zziwa, since she had not been endorsed by her party and the Uganda government.

Betty Amongi, UPC Whip in Parliament who was also in Arusha appealed to Ugandans to support Zziwa following the free and fair elections. Amongi, also chairperson of Uganda Women Parliamentary Association said Ugandan women are once again at the forefront of emancipation and pushing regional integration. "The assembly members exercised their democratic rights. We should support her," Amongi said.

Zziwa presided over the swearing in of the elected MPs for EALA at the EALA Chambers in Arusha.

Sources said religion could have worked in Zziwa's favour as some members reportedly from Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania favoured her on account of being Catholic.

Zziwa has replaced Abdirahin Abdi from Kenya as speaker. The first speaker of the Assembly was Abdulrahman Kinana was from Tanzania and

was succeeded by Abdirahim Abdi.

A source that attended the elections, said both candidates were very strong. "An election is never won, till it is won. There was a lot of campaigning by Zziwa and Byamukama. It was a secret ballot, so you couldn't tell who voted for whom," said the source.

This was the first time there was serious campaigning for the post of the speaker. The previous speakers were agreed on through a consensus and went through unopposed. After Byamukama was endorsed by her party, it was assumed she would also sail through unopposed.

Both Zziwa and Byamukama promised to build a vibrant regional assembly and deepen the integration process. Both possessed vast experience in EAC regional integration and are loaded with numerous academic qualifications.

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