

A Conversation with Prof. Eddah Gachukia: The Trailblazer



Edited by
Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira

CONVERSATION WITH PROFESSOR EDDAH GACHUKIA

Editor: Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira

Citation: Conversation with Prof. Eddah Gachukia

University of Nairobi

African Women Studies Research Centre & Women's

Economic Empowerment Hub

P.O Box 30197-00100 Nairobi, Kenya

E-mail: awskenya@uonbi.ac.ke & weehub@uonbi.ac.ke

**©2022, African Women Studies Research Centre & Women's
Economic Empowerment Hub, University of Nairobi**

ISBN---978-9914-42-997-8

Technical Editor: Wacuka Mungai

Design & Layout: Flogin East Africa

**Printed by: University of Nairobi Women's Economic Empowerment Hub,
Supported by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**

All rights reserved except for quotations of fully acknowledged short passages for the purpose of criticism, review, research or teaching. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or means without the prior written permission from the African Women Studies Research Centre and Women's Economic Empowerment Hub, University of Nairobi.

The moral rights of the editors have been asserted. Responsibility for the content of signed articles is the editors and it does not necessarily represent the views of the African Women Studies Research Centre and Women's Economic Empowerment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The African Women Studies Research Centre and the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub, University of Nairobi wishes to sincerely thank Prof Eddah Gachukia for passionately sharing her zealous and greatly impactful journey in championing the rights of women and setting the pace for women liberation movements in the African Region and Kenya in particular. This is a story that could only have been told by Prof Gachukia herself. This book is among a series of books documenting women's experiences which is the mission of African Women Studies Centre that houses the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub.



We are equally grateful to the team of interviewers namely: Prof Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, Prof. Elishibah Kimani, Prof. Philomena Mwaura, and Dorothy Khamala who guided the discussion. We thank Fredrick Kimotho who did the transcription of the audio.

We are grateful to Wacuka proof read the book ensuring there was coherence.

Special thanks to the leadership of the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub Management comprising of Prof Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, Prof Collins Odote, Dr Mary Mbithi, Dr Agnes Meroka Mutua, Dr Dorothy Njiraini, and Abigail Nyawacha. This project would not have been possible without your support.

Finally, we are indebted to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for their financial support towards this project. We are grateful.

FOREWORD

I join women, nationally and internationally, in recognizing and indeed celebrating the role played by Professor Eddah Gachukia in putting the women's agenda on the road to development, nationally, regionally, and globally. She has been and continues to nurture, and mentor many women and men into advocating for women and gender issues in policies and action. Walking in my memory lane, I remember being trained in gender by Professor Eddah Gachukia, thirty years ago in June 1992, at Green Hills Hotel in Nyeri. Her passion for the need to improve girls' access, retention, and performance in education was then unmatched. On that occasion, she narrated her childhood story with an emphasis on her early education, despite the death of her mother, when she was barely six years old. The passion for girls' education was later evident in her commentaries in the documentary, "The Lesser Child", which was widely used by gender advocates as a powerful training and lobbying tool for educationists, policymakers, and parents nationally and regionally to support girls' education. I also remember her as an educationist during the development of the "The ABC of Gender Analysis" a tool that was widely used by gender advocates to challenge and eliminate gender biases in textbooks across Africa and, supported and facilitated by FAWE, where she was the founding Executive Director.

Prof. Eddah Gachukia is a seasoned, passionate, and powerful advocate for women's rights. As she championed women's issues, by what she humbly calls God's favour, she was all the times strategically placed, having the opportunity to have worn many "hats"- director, leader, educationist and legislator, to mention only a few.

It is amazing how Professor has been at the forefront as a founder member of many professional and civil society organizations that



Prof Eddah Gachukia with other NCWK officials and a visiting guest. Among the officials are Elizabeth Madoka, Rose Waruhiu, Wambui Njenga, Teresa Shitakha, Damaris Ayondo and Eunice Njambi

spearhead the advancement of women, the earliest one being Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization, where she served as the vice-president from 1967 to 1974, National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK); The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET); Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE); and the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD), where she continues to serve as a board member and a trustee.

During the interview with Prof. Eddah Gachukia, she lamented that the "battle for women's liberation" is yet to be won. However, she is evidently among other pathfinders in the likes of Field Marshal Muthoni, Prof. Wanjiku Kabira, Prof. Julia Ojiambo, and Phoebe Asiyo to mention only a few, who were also resilient enough to have fought against deep-rooted myths against women within the male-dominated socio-economic and political environments.

The documented conversation with Prof. Eddah Gachukia presented in this publication serves as a recognition of a heroin and a pace-setter for the gains in women's empowerment. Admirably, also add that Professor's involvement in public leadership did not in any way compromise her role in raising her children, even with a busy husband who was chief of protocol in the late president Jomo Kenyatta's government. It is in order to congratulate Professor, a selfless role model and a mentor to many. God bless you Professor Eddah Gachukia.

Prof Elishiba Kimani, Ph.D., Gender Education and Development Studies, Kenyatta University



Prof Eddah Gachukia with the FAWE staff in the 1990's

FOREWORD II

This book, to put it simply, is about a trailblazer. The name Eddah Gachukia is synonymous with education in Kenya and Africa. Her fame extends far beyond institutions of learning. She has also made extraordinary contributions – both heralded and unpublicised – to the advancement of women’s rights and policy. She was a natural choice for our series on women achievers. The series was done under the umbrella of the University of Nairobi’s Women’s Economic Empowerment Hub (UoN WEE Hub), located at the African Women Studies Research Centre.

In person, Eddah is a friendly and wonderful conversationalist. I was awed by her memory, and even more impressed by all the things she had accomplished in her life. I thought I knew a lot about her work: establishing the Forum for African Women Educationalists, her years as a nominated Member of Parliament, her advocacy with Maendeleo ya Wanawake, and co-founding the Riara Group of Schools, among others. But during the course of our interview, she shared several other details of which I was previously unaware.



Prof Eddah Gachukia and Family



Prof Eddah Gachukia's Children

For instance, she spoke about leading a maendeleo delegation to see Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya, to ask for paid maternity leave for Kenyan women, which was immediately granted. In 1975, she also detailed the intricacies of getting things done as a nominated member of parliament, a balancing act that required diplomacy and tact. What does it mean to have been “involved in education?” People who know her are aware of the visible successes such as the Riarua Group that she and her husband Mr. Daniel Gachukia founded, which has grown from a single primary school to numerous institutions that range from kindergartens to a university – Riarua University. Eddah’s lesser-known contributions are no less impressive or important. She has been deeply involved in the curriculum development of our national education system, as well as helping shape the country’s language instruction policy.

People who know her are aware that her demeanour belies an iron determination, and in the course of our conversation, her ability to get different groups of people to work together towards a common goal becomes clear. She is modest about her numerous achievements but adds, tellingly: “I only give myself credit for being able to work with everybody. You can hate me but if you are contributing, then thank you very much.” Writing down things she has managed to achieve in her life makes me appreciate just how remarkable her life has truly been. Right from the beginning of her career in the 1960s, she managed to convince the Ministry of Education to revise its language policy and teach young Kenyan children in languages that they already understood – to teach English as a subject, rather than use it as the language of instruction.

By 1974, she had not only started a school but also been nominated to Parliament to give voice to Kenya’s women.

While running the small school, she, together with Jane Kiano, led the official delegation to the United Nation's first Women's Conference in Mexico. Somehow, amidst all this, she managed to obtain a PhD, teach, and raise a family. But she wasn't done just yet. She chaired Kenya's 'NGO Forum 85 Committee' in preparation for the historic 1985 UN World Conference on Women, the first of its kind to be held on the African continent. It was a resounding success, especially in bringing together women from Africa who were working on common goals in their respective countries. Encouraged by these efforts, Eddah co-founded FEMNET – the Africa Women's Development and Communications Network – a global organization which aimed to build on the momentum of the conference and encourage pan-African cooperation. She was the first Chair of FEMNET which continues to advocate for women's rights across the continent.

Seeing a need for a more coordinated continent-wide effort to attract and retain African girls in school, she helped create the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE), which currently operates in over 35 countries in Africa. The organization brings together ministers in charge of education in Africa as well as women Vice Chancellors across the continent. The organization has been instrumental in reviewing and creating policies that promote girls' education in Africa. While working as FAWE's executive director, she commissioned a study on female dropout rates, especially those related to teen pregnancy. Her research and emphasis on female student retention got several African ministers of education to develop policies to address the issue/ finding solutions to allow teen mothers to continue their education.

As we acknowledge her tenacity and accomplishments, Eddah's story also pushes us to consider the powers of collaboration, focus, and the powerful contribution each of us is capable of. We celebrate Eddah for what she has been and what her life means for women and girls in Kenya and Africa.

Prof. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, EBS, CBS; Prof. Emeritus Literature and African Women's Studies; University of Nairobi Women's Economic Empowerment Hub Leader

DEDICATION

What is in this story is not just for me, it is also for you and for my mother. I am looking at these ashes in the fireplace and remembering my mother. My mother had run away from home when she heard that "Giteru" [L.S.B Leakey] had opened a school for girls. She ran away from home to go to school. She was called Wanjiku wa Bibi. This story is also for her.

This is also a story of the many Kenyan women and women from our continent, Africa, who have created the paths towards gender equality. Women who have continued to walk the path towards this destination and have carried the burden of the struggle with a song in their hearts. I dedicate this song to those who also have walked the journey with me for more than five decades. God will continue to bless you.



Prof Eddah Gachukia addressing members of the maendeleo ya wanawake organization in 1975 at the Nakuru State House with the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta where they had gone to brief him on the 1975 delegation to Mexico.

ACRONYMS

ACWW	Associated Country Women of the World
AGM	Annual General Meeting
CCGD	Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
EFA	Education For All
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalist
FEMNET	African Women's Development and Communication Network
GSU	General Service Unit
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KICC	Kenyatta International Convention Centre
KJSE	Kenya Junior Secondary Examination
MP	Member of Parliament
NCSW	National Commission on the Status of Women
NCWK	National Council of Women in Kenya
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPA	New Primary Approach
PCEA	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
TSC	Teachers Service Commission
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UON	University of Nairobi
YWCA	Young Women Christian Association

A Conversation with Prof Eddah Gachukia

“The beauty about the women's strategy was that it brought all women together, irrespective of their religion, region, party affiliations or ethnicity. We all came together and understood that the women's agenda is the same wherever you are.” Prof. Eddah Gachukia

Bio:

Prof. Eddah Gachukia

A Kenyan pioneer educationalist with a passion for the girl child's education. As an academician with a background in Literature, she is the founding executive director of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). As a committed advocate for women's rights, Prof. Gachukia served as a Nominated Member of Parliament, representing women's interests (1974-1983) and in the leadership of the National Council of Women of Kenya, the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization, and the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development. She chaired the Task Force on the Implementation of Free Primary Education; the Task Force on Affordable Secondary Education whose reports were adopted by the Government. She has been awarded numerous honours by various institutions, including Elder of the Order of the Burning Spear (EBS) for contribution to education in Kenya; the African Leadership Magazine with “African Women of Influence Leadership Award” (2009); H.E President of Senegal for Service to Girls' Education in Africa (1997).

Interviewed by: Prof. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, Prof. Elishiba Kimani & Prof Philomena Mwaura

Prof. Gachukia: Are you recording me?

Ms. Dorothy: Yes.

Prof. Gachukia: I have no problem.

Prof. Kimani: We were at African Girls' High school.

Prof. Gachukia: African Girls' High School.

Prof. Kimani: Which then became Alliance?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes, many years later after we left. It was "African" because it was the only African girls' high school, you know, started by the missionaries. So that's how after we did the KAPE - Kenya African Preliminary Examination - two of us from Kabete Junior Secondary School went to the African Girls' High School. It was a truly a national school because Tumutumu probably sent four, Kaaga in Meru had sent one, Kahuhia had one. You know at that time schools like Murray Junior Secondary in Taita and many others all over Kenya - Mumias, Butere - were the schools that sent girls to the African Girls' High School. So in a class of 30, you had probably only five from Central Province. That's one of the best things we remember about the school: that mixture of people, that mixture of cultures.

Prof. Kabira: This is a part of you I have never heard. So this class had about 30 girls from all over the country?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes, 30 girls picked from all over Kenya in one Form 3 class.

Prof. Kabira: Can you remember some of them?

Prof. Gachukia: Some of them?

Prof. Kabira: Just a few of them.

Prof. Gachukia: Oh yes, that I can remember. Many. I can remember, for example, the eight that passed the Kenya Junior Secondary Examination (KJSE) which students took after two years of high school. They were Winifred Nduhiu (later on Winifred Nyoike), the first African nursing officer that we know of. Then there was Charity Muringo Baaru who went with me to Makerere. Then there was Lois Waruhiu who was then Lois Kimenyi, although I can't give you all their maiden names. Lois Kimenyi had to go into nursing because at the time we were doing the examination, her father who used to be a railway station master in Nakuru had been detained. He was detained and for a long time they didn't know where he was, so she decided to start a course or training that would give her some pocket money so that she could support her mother. Then there was Grace Aluoch, later called Odhiambo. Her husband later became the first Vice Chancellor of Moi University.



*With Centre for African Family Studies (CAFS)
Officials*

There was Julia Ojiambo and Serah Lukalo, who was then known as Serah Migidza. Then there was this one who became an accountant whose name I think was Margaret Alividza. I can't remember. Is that eight or seven?

Prof. Kabira: They are eight now with Margaret.

Prof. Gachukia: Eight. That's it. Out of a class of 30, eight moved on to the next class.

Prof. Kabira: Form two?

Prof. Gachukia: They passed KJSE so that they could move on to Form 5.

Prof. Kabira: Ok.

Prof. Gachukia: Everybody else went for the P2 teacher training in the same school. In the class before us, three actually had gone on to form five while the rest went into teacher training. That was a colonial way of organising education because they needed teachers to be the majority. The majority went into teaching at the teachers' colleges and to be trained as P2s, which was a very high level of training. In each college we talked about - like in Embu - they did not do P2; they did the P3 training, which was a lower grade.

Prof. Kabira: Were you on the list of the eight yourself? Were you nine? Those who passed - those eight - plus yourself?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes, we were eight. Margaret was there. Winifred Nduhiu who later became Winifred Nyoike came and she was later on a nurse and matron.

She was even an elder at St. Andrews church. But you know Kimani wa Nyoike? They got married in America. Winifred was going to be a nurse. Even in school, she's the one who assisted the teacher who was in charge of the dispensary. She administered medicine to us and she was number one [in academics] almost throughout our time in high school. A brilliant woman she was, but she wanted to go to nursing and nobody obviously came to tell us or advise us career wise, the way we do with our girls now.

That you are good in this, you're good in that, you can become this. There was no talk like that. For the majority of us the choice was teaching. So going into education was kind of the order of the day. Winifred, Charity, both of them came from Tumutumu. There was Jean Ntirindi (later Mbogori). I have given you Charity, I have given you Winifred...

Prof. Kabira: Lois?

Prof. Gachukia: Lois Kimenyi (Waruhiu) who came with me from Kabete.

Prof. Kabira: Grace Aluoch?

Prof. Gachukia: Grace Aluoch later Odhiambo who came from Ng'iya Girls.

Prof. Kimani: Julia Ojiambo.

Prof. Gachukia: Yes and then there was Serah Migidza and Julia Auma later Ojiambo both from Butere.

Prof. Kimani: Including you?

Prof. Gachukia: Yeah. I guess that's it; the eight of us were together for two years. And at the end of it, we did the Cambridge School Certificate. From there, Makerere took who they wanted while the rest were kind of left stranded, except those who knew what they wanted to do like Winifred and Lois who went into nursing. The rest went to the Royal Technical Training College. Royal Technical was created after we had gone to Makerere or the same year and there they were able to take whatever training that they wanted. Julia Ojiambo went and trained there in home science because they had all the practical courses, especially the ones that needed science.

Prof. Kabira: So you proceeded to Makerere?

Prof. Gachukia: We went to Makerere, yes.

Prof. Kabira: With who else?

Prof. Gachukia: Charity Baaru. Today she is known as Waichungo. So two of us went to Makerere. She was brilliant. Margaret Alividsa did accounting and she became one of the few chartered women accountants in the country.

Margaret did not apply to go to Makerere because she would have liked to do science. But somehow our school did not offer pure sciences. We did something called Physical Science, which did not qualify you for any courses in Makerere. Accounting came later. What you are wondering is why she didn't go to Makerere to study for a B.Sc. because she had also passed very well in science.

Prof. Kimani: So which course did you study at Makerere?

Prof. Gachukia: Look at my motivation to go to Makerere. It was our teacher in form two (Form Four then). Her name was Joan Gitau and she'd come from Makerere. She had trained there and she was the only African teacher in our school; the rest were all European.

That is how it was with an elder sister. Let me tell you Elishiba, being taught history by an African woman who was good at History, who also understood us, who had come from Makerere? For the youth in me, I did not know what I was going to study at Makerere, but I knew I wanted to be like Joan Gitau. Here is my teacher in high school who is the only African. A few men had come to teach us from Makerere but they were on transit to elsewhere. They had not studied education. They were just being hired to fill in gaps because there were no women teachers to teach high school. We had Burundi Nabwera. We had Sam Waruhiu who came for one term only - and he was a very good teacher - but he was on transit to the UK to study law. He taught us Mathematics for a very short period but he was leaving. They were all on transit. But that is how education was conducted. The rest were all European teachers, some very nice, good teachers.

Prof. Kabira: So what did you study at Makerere?

Prof. Gachukia: At Makerere, you first studied three subjects of your choice for two years. At the end of two years, you did the London Intermediate Examination. If you passed that, then you could go on and study for a Bachelors degree, or for a diploma in education.

Prof. Kabira: So after passing that you did education?

Prof. Gachukia: I did education because that year I interrupted my studies and got married. So I actually took a break for one year and then I went back to study education.

But it is important, and it tells you what I was telling you: you need to know this man (pointing to her husband sitting next to her). This man is the man. Yes, he actually moved from Kagumo (High School in Nyeri, where he was teaching) to Uganda so that he could make it comfortable for me to attend my classes, rather than leaving him and going to live in a hostel. So we moved to Kampala and stayed there for two years. He was teaching at a school in Uganda while I completed my two years in education. That same year, he taught me how to drive. Even today he says; “Show me any husband who has taught his wife how to drive.” But he did and I got a license. So I used to drive myself to the university and back.

Prof. Kimani: We want to hear the story where you drove in a lorry to go to church during your wedding.

Prof. Gachukia: Again? That is in his book, "Homecoming: Through the Eyes of Three Generations." There is a little chapter there, chapter three. Actually, we met at a railway station. He tells that story in a very humorous way.

Prof. Kabira: Where did you meet her?

Prof. Gachukia: He saw a girl at the railway station.

Prof. Kabira: *(Mr. Gachukia nods his head in agreement)* He has confirmed.

Prof. Gachukia: Going to Makerere.

Prof. Kabira: *(To Mr. Gachukia)* We are not going to ignore you because you are part of this story. We are talking about you. He is 93. In October, he will be 94 years old. That is called God's Grace.

Prof. Kimani: He has come to stay with you, he has taught you how to drive

Prof. Gachukia: And I got a very good grade. I can't remember what it was called but it was a very good grade which is very good when you have such a kind of certificate which is probably not a first class but the second level best. That's what I got.

Prof. Kabira: Is it an equivalent of Second Class Upper Division? Maybe that's how we adopted ours.

Prof. Gachukia: Yes. *(Pointing at her husband)* Why do I call him my mentor? Even long before, I remember having difficulty with the character of Hamlet. When we were given homework to write about it, and I was kind of stuck and struggling with it, I happened to mention it to him and he said, "that is an easy thing." You know, he had done literature too. So he advised me and we discussed Hamlet in a very deep way and I got an "A" in that paper. So he was a good mentor. And he definitely supported me throughout, especially the two years in teaching. He was very proud of my path.

Well, from there we came back to Kenya and we were looking for a job placement. It was very easy for him to get a job but at the same school, I couldn't get a job because they were not sure that a woman could teach boys. He writes about it in his book. You will have to read it now! What happened there is that I was posted to teach at Machakos Girls' School, but we lived in Thika. At that time Makerere teachers were very much in demand, very much in demand, so Thika High School had picked him but they were not sure that I would be able to teach the boys. So we said no. He said, "If she can't teach here then I will apply to go to Machakos Boys High School." So the school gave me a job also to teach the boys.

I think he'll be the first to tell you that I got on so well with the boys. They would probably have rated me a first class teacher. I was teaching mathematics and English, I did not teach history which was my other subject. There were also subjects that lacked teachers, so we rotated.

Prof. Kimani: You taught Maths and English?

Prof. Gachukia: Maths and English. And you can go and talk to Ngengi Muigai. You can talk to Eunice Mathu's husband, Kimani Mathu. You can talk to Nduati Kariuki, who is the speaker of the County Assembly of Murang'a. You can talk to Justice O'Kubasu. You can talk to David Wajenga, the former Deputy Commissioner of Police, or Major General Dedan Gichuru, the first African commander of the Air Force, and I can give you many others. I taught the "Who's Who" of Kenya.

Prof. Kabira: How about Paul Muite, was he in your class?

Prof. Gachukia: Paul Muite was there, yes. This was one of my brilliant boys. Little boys, you know. I loved teaching in high school. It was during that time that the air lifts to America were going on. And we are wondering whether we should be pursuing further education since we did not study for a degree course at Makerere. So we were applying for all kinds of scholarships that were available at that time, and there was a French government scholarship that appeared very attractive to us. We both qualified and we applied. However, by this time we had two children and so we calculated the value of the scholarship allowance and we thought it would not be enough to feed our children in France. If we were to leave them here, well, you know my history: my mother died when I was six. His mother was over 80 years old at that time. You know very elderly, we couldn't leave our children with her.

My sister had offered to take care of them, but that wasn't going to be good enough for me. So we agreed that he should go and I'd stay. That's how I stayed at Thika High School longer than him, and taught more and more of the boys. Okay, so he went off to France and I was left in Kenya with the children. Fortunately or unfortunately, by the time he left I was expecting our third child. I had Tony on my own. That was quite something because I was teaching and I had to teach as much as possible before going on maternity leave. Because I wanted to come back to work as soon as possible, I couldn't afford to take maternity leave. So I sacrificed the leave.

The day I went into labour I had boys in my sitting room and we were revising. They would never forget that. Having a baby is a big deal but these boys were future husbands. After they left my house, that same night, I had to ask one of the cooks (who worked for a European teacher and who had just gotten a driving license) to accompany me as I drove to Thika Hospital. I then gave him the car to park. I had my Tony and the following day I got discharged and went back home. That is how I had to send two of the students to look for someone to help me at home with the children. And they proposed this lady here. ***(Pointing at the lady who has been working in her home)***. She has stayed here from 1962 up to today. This is the story of my life. But I am not sure this is what you set out to find out.

Prof. Kimani: Yes. We have been having a discussion informally, but it is part of it. We just talked a bit so we had not started on how to move about your story line.

Prof. Gachukia: One thing I want you to know, after one year away, Baba Alan (***her husband***) was able to come back from France for holiday.

By that time I had applied for and gotten a British Council scholarship to go to Britain's Leeds University and I had three children. So at the Ministry, the assumption was that I was going to leave the children. I went to the Ministry of Education, I saw a woman who was very supportive. Her name was Mrs. Brothenton and she is the one who had closed our school suddenly in 1953. Do you know that our school, the African Girls' High school was closed for one full term during the emergency? She is the one who came to the school and said that the school had been closed and all of us were to go home. But that is a story for another day.

She was the director of women's education. When I saw her I said, "Mrs. Brothenton I have qualified for this scholarship and I have three children." She says "Oh, you will leave them with their grandmother." I told her, "Mrs. Brothenton I have no mother. My mother died when I was six. And I'm not going to leave my children." I told her I'd heard from a friend that there was a family that could take care of my children while I was going to school. She appreciated that kind of dilemma and said that if I could organise to take them it would be fine. The beauty about the British Council scholarship was that you not only got support for yourself there, but the teachers' body - the equivalent of the current Teachers' Service Commission - paid you sixty percent of your salary every month.

That's why I tell you that God has been on my side. God has been at the centre of my life. I talked to the friend who had told me about this family, and I realised that they could support my three little children. Here is the scholarship but it could only support the student and nobody else. So I was allowed to take it. So it now was a question of how to get there since I didn't have the money for air fares because I had been supporting three children. I sold everything I had: the bed and all furniture.

I sold my teaspoons, but I had nice plates that had been given to us during our wedding but I sold them to the staff at Thika High School and elsewhere. My family came, I remember my sister buying my wardrobe. Finally I had enough money not only to pay for the air tickets for children, but to buy them the little clothing they needed for a completely different climate. I needed more than just that little dress that I'd been making for Suzanne (*her elder daughter*), so I also bought warmer imported clothes which you could get here. I was foolish because I could have waited until I got there to buy them because they would have been cheaper. Anyway, I think I had the guts to do all this, but it was also a question of being young and adventurous. So we all went. Baba Alan was learning French to come and teach it here. We had people in the diplomatic service who could not speak French. So he was told by the President **Mzee** Kenyatta to go and study International Relations.

Kariuki Njiri is the person who was, I think, either the secretary to Kenyatta, or Comptroller of State House. I think he is the one who told **Mzee** about a young man who was in France who was writing letters to The East African Standard Newspaper protesting against the colonial government. You see Baba Alan wrote letters which were very political when he was in France. Some of those letters are produced in his book which I mentioned earlier. I used to send him the newspapers. So he kept in touch with what was happening in Kenya and he would write letters to the editor.

Prof. Philomena: How were you sending those newspapers to France?

Prof. Gachukia: I used to buy the newspapers and send them through the post office. The colonial postal office was very efficient. So I used to send the newspapers at the end of every week, but I didn't know I was contributing to his politics.

So anyway, he then gets summoned to State House. And he's told he should drop French now because he knows it and he should now study international relations, because Kenya was intending to open an embassy in Paris. That's what happened. We were going to leave the children in Sussex. And I was going by myself to Leeds, while he was going to France. Anyway, it is exciting to remember. And the fact that God was on our side. How do you plan that kind of life? I mean, people now almost have a strategic plan for their lives. I've come across young women who do that. I planned nothing. Things just happened to me and I moved whichever way. At Leeds University, people from many continents of the world had been brought together to learn how to teach English as a second language. And that's a chapter I like to talk about quite often: teaching English as a second language. Because you are a teacher. Okay. And you're going to teach English to children who already have another language which you know or don't know, and you're struggling with it, even in Kenya. My teaching practice was in Bradford, which is the next city North of Leeds. I used to travel there every morning. There I was given a class of Indian and Pakistani children who didn't speak a word of English. That's the kind of training we went into. And with it came all the intricacies of teaching a language to children who spoke different languages. So you are teaching language and also teaching concept development, because you are taking children who are eight, nine, ten years old, you cannot assume that they don't know anything. They know a lot of things, only in a language you don't know. So you put yourself in their place. It was very challenging. That is the time Indians and Pakistanis were flocking into Britain from Asia, Kenya, Uganda etc., either because people wanted jobs or citizenship. That kind of thing brought a lot of immigrants to the UK, and the UK was quite open because these were her former colonies. That was quite challenging. I think I passed well. I had a thesis which I wrote. We have tried to look for it but can't find it.

I think it was titled, “Challenges of Teaching English literature in Kenyan Secondary Schools.” You know in those days there was scanty written African literature. Oral literature was totally considered as literature until later when the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi was under the leadership of Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Anyumba Owuor was the oral literature expert.

Prof. Philomena: So these were challenges of teaching English literature in Kenya?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes, in Kenya. One of my challenges was, for example, what to call a drawing room. When I am teaching the students, what is a drawing room to an African child? It is the room where you go to draw. Okay. These are some of the challenges of teaching English as a second language because you can’t take literally the meaning that you can get from the word itself. I was told when I came back here that they were saying that if I had stayed on in Britain, my thesis would have given me a master’s degree. It’s interesting, it’s not on the record. But it was good. And I sent it to France to be bound. Baba Alan saw to it that it was done, and sent it back. So I submitted it. I think we have the certificate from Leeds. I came back to Kenya but by this time, my beloved here (**pointing at her husband**) had been appointed chargé d’affaires at the embassy in France. When you are appointed as chargé d’affaires, it means you are not the ambassador but you are the person in charge of the embassy. It was because the ambassador was in Berlin, Germany, but accredited to France and other countries. The French of course did not like that because they believed they were important enough to be given an embassy, but that would happen much later because Kenya was still very young. So he was in charge of the embassy and here I am on my way back to Kenya.

Do I take a job or don't I? Because now, it seemed like I had to organise myself to join my husband in France. I actually came back. I was posted for a while to the Moi Girls' High school in Nairobi where Rebeca Njau (the writer) was the head. I taught there for about two to three months. I remember I was staying with my sister all this time. So after about a month or two, I gave up, I prepared myself and then left with the children for France. That's where I was from 1963 to 1965. For two years, we were in France and I will not hide from you: I was a housewife.

Yes, I tried to get jobs. I couldn't get any, first of all because I didn't know the language. I needed to take classes every afternoon or two afternoons a week, which is all we could afford. Because you know that *chargé d'affaires* does not mean that you are the ambassador, you are quite a junior civil servant. I would get students to come and stay with the children when I went for a one or two hour session in Paris to learn French. I will share with you that it was quite challenging learning a new language at that age. I talk about it because my children learned French very quickly. I mean, Alan was in school for one term and you could hear him conversing on the phone with his friend in French. It was a struggle for me learning a new language. I'm not sure it was worth it because when I needed to go shopping I had to ask Alan to tell them what fish I wanted, what piece of meat I wanted and so on. Children pick a new language very easily, whereas for me at home conversing with nobody and going for a class for one hour, oh my goodness that was a challenge. But soon after -1965 we were back here in Kenya and we were happy. Paris was okay. If I were to go there today I would enjoy myself but when you have little children - and I actually had another baby in Paris (*her daughter, Juju*) - it was quite a challenge.



Prof Eddah Gachukia (3rd left) posing for a photo with the first president of Kenya, the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and a delegation from maendeleo ya wanawake organization. They are from left: Hon Taaitta Arap Toweett, Mrs Mary Opiyo, Prof Eddah Gachukia (leader of the delegation), the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Mrs Jane Kiano, Hon. Phoebe Asiyu, Prof Julia Ojiambo, and Mr Siboe



Prof Eddah Gachukia (right) and Jane Kiano (left), officials of maendeleo ya wanawake organisation.

When my baby was six, seven months old, Maendeleo ya Wanawake - which I had gotten in touch with when I was at Thika - wrote to me, copying the organisation Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), asking if I would be able to represent them at an ACWW meeting in Dublin.

We weighed it out: it would take about four or five days away and I had a baby who was seven months old. And finally we agreed that it may be good for me to go to Dublin. I then met with a friend at High School, the late Monica Kabeberi, who passed away last year -2021 when I was in hospital. She had been sponsored by the Voice of Kenya to study librarianship at the BBC. So the two of us went to Dublin to represent Maendeleo ya Wanawake and I think it's important because when I came back to Kenya I was invited to give a report to the Maendeleo Annual General Meeting on that conference.

I think it was 1966 when I went to address them at the AGM. Most probably, it must have been 1966. They were having their AGM. I think Jael Mbogo was the chair. I left my job at the Curriculum Development Centre (which I had joined in 1965 when we came back from France) just to go and deliver that report and then I went back to work.

But during their AGM, the challenge Elishiba, is that I was talking in Kiswahili. When did you last talk to an audience in Kiswahili? And I had to put the report in context because it was written in English. I thought that I had done a shoddy job that day but going back to my office the following morning, somebody called and asked me, “What are you doing there? You should be here. You were elected Vice President.” That time, heads of organizations were called presidents. Jael Mbogo was the president of Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization.

Prof. Kabira: That was in 1960’s when you gave the talk in her absence?

Prof. Gachukia: That was in 1966 because I was addressing an AGM. I talked a lot in English and not in Kiswahili which the majority members would follow. The following morning, somebody is calling me, saying that I should be there chairing the meeting and the minister has already come. Apparently, I had been elected the vice president of Maendeleo ya Wanawake. So, I had to leave what I was doing to get permission from my boss Dr. Gilbert Oluoch who had been my classmate at Makerere. I went and tried to chair a meeting in Kiswahili that was being addressed by Minister Ronald Ngala who hailed from Kilifi in the Coast Province so very fluent in Kiswahili.

Prof. Kabira: Why was Jael Mbogo not chairing the meeting? You said that Jael Mbogo was elected the president and you were the vice-president.

Prof. Gachukia: I was the vice president. You know, the programme is usually very clear. I did not know why I was chairing the session of the meeting where the minister was going to be. I can't remember why, but I came to learn later that elections for new officers had taken place. The new president was Elizabeth Mwendar but she had not arrived. Elizabeth had been my classmate at the African Girls' High School. She was part of that group that was chopped off to do P2 teacher training when we were at the African Girls' High School so she was somebody I knew.

Prof. Kabira: She could have been the president because there was the president and the vice.

Prof. Gachukia: I can't remember clearly but during my term she was the president taking over from Mrs. Mbogo.

Prof. Kabira: Sorry, I may ask you again. So in 1966 was when Jael Mbogo became the president of Maendeleo ya Wanawake?

Prof. Gachukia: Jael was the President around 1962 and 1963. I was vice president of Maendeleo in 1967.

Prof. Kabira: When was Phoebe the president of Maendeleo?

Prof. Gachukia: Phoebe Asiyu was there long before. She took over in 1958 from the colonial founder, Nancy Shepherd in 1952.

Prof. Kabira: So it was around 1961?

Prof. Gachukia: Maendeleo was created during the colonial days -1952, and Phoebe and others were fighting to take over and to influence the agenda. It was long before Jael Mbogo had been there. Jael is the one who actually recruited me in 1963, because she came to Thika and asked me to get in touch with all the women teachers in Thika, and then she talked to us about joining Maendeleo. She was starting to expand the organization so she wanted to create a branch of Maendeleo in Thika, which we actually did.

Prof. Philomena: Prof, I want to ask a question so that we can have a link: after you came back from Paris and had been invited to address the Maendeleo AGM, were you working at the Curriculum Development Centre then?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes, When I came back, the officials at the ministry already knew that I had done a course in the teaching of English as a second language at Leeds University. When I came back to Nairobi I was posted to Nairobi Girls' Secondary School (today Moi Girls'). I then had to get a leave of absence, to join my husband in Paris. We came back to Nairobi and he was appointed the Chief of Protocol and we had never heard of a Chief of Protocol like this before. Both my sons wanted to be Chief of Protocol, I had to seat them down and tell them, "You know, there is only one Chief of Protocol in the whole country. So you better think of other careers." (**Pointing at her husband**) He tells me that it was just a role. I wish somebody had done a profile of him, because it was a very colourful job.

The ministry officials are the ones that decided that the course I was doing at Leeds would fit in very well at the Curriculum Development Centre. Gilbert Oluoch was the Director and the rest of the staff were Europeans. The entire inspectorate at the Ministry of Education was comprised of expatriates.



Prof Eddah Gachukia introducing members of the maendeleo ya wanawake organization to the first president of Kenya, the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta at the Nakuru State House.



Prof Eddah Gachukia at a National Council of Women in Kenya project Fundraiser

By the time I came back in 1965, English had been adopted as a medium of instruction in education as a government policy throughout the country. It was a life changing experience because here we were, we were now going to advance the teaching of English as a second language. We visited schools in Eastlands, I can't remember the exact school. The use of English medium was the new way of teaching. It was called the New Primary Approach. This is where the teacher gives children assignments to do, activities to do, and the children are supposed to now talk about what it was that they were doing and in that way, develop their language competency. So I go to a group and children are very busy and a boy tells me, "This is my chart. I'm drawing a fish and this is the sea or the ocean or the lake." Then I ask, "Where is the fish going?" He tells me, "The fish is going to look for food!" So I say, "What does a fish eat?" He responds by saying, "A fish eats... I don't know." You know I'm reading the body language but at that time the bell rings and so they all go out. When they come back the first five minutes are spent with children reporting one another.

“Teacher, Wanjiru was speaking Kikuyu,” and Wanjiru will be punished. Children were not supposed to speak any other language apart from English whether in class or outside. I start taking deep breaths. Then when we are back trying to organize ourselves for the next lesson the little boy comes and says to the teacher, “Teacher, a fish eats this.”

This boy is carrying a worm in his hands. “A fish eats this.” So I ask him why he had said he did not know. He responds that he didn’t know the word in English. I beg your pardon! To me it is like “to hell with the English!”

If you’re going to force a child to say that he doesn’t know when he knows, then we have a problem.

Prof. Kimani: So that was the New Primary Approach?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes, NPA. I turned to tell my director that I think something is very wrong here. I’ve written about that incident severally. And I’ve talked about it. I needed to go into the issue of language teaching, to know how it is that you can introduce a new language without making the people feel that they don’t know anything. That’s why I take exception when I said that the aunties who used to carry me to school when I could write on the ashes a,e,i,o, u, or imwe, igiri, ithatu, inya (one, two, three, four in Gikuyu), then it ends with “they knew nothing.” No, that’s offensive to me. Teachers had to learn how to articulate what it is that my aunties knew. That is the teacher’s business and not the learners. I’ve had a situation even in Riara, where a teacher says, “you know this child came without a language.” In other words, the child cannot speak in English. I had to turn that around and tell the teacher that I didn’t realise that the child’s language is not a language. You are here as a teacher to teach them but don’t tell me they don’t have a language.

They have a language. So that's why I'm telling you I was at a crossroads as far as language was concerned.

I had very strong views about this issue; so strong that I was taken to the Director of Education Kyale Mwendwa, and fearfully I took him through my experience in France and how my children had learnt French easily. I still can't speak French. I told him that it was wrong for the whole country to move to an English medium where even the teacher is not that confident in English. He listened. I had also told him that I would like an opportunity to test a situation where I teach in the mother tongue but teach English as a subject, not as a medium of instruction. Do you know they allowed me to do that? Mwendwa gave it a thought and my team and I selected some schools and I was given staff. We selected some schools in Kiambu - not too far from the Kenya Institute of Education - we took more schools in Nairobi where we assumed the "mother tongue" would be Kiswahili, because when children are not in class, they are chattering in Kiswahili. In other words, what language do the majority of the children use? This was a difficult concept for the expatriates to swallow but it worked. We were teaching every subject in the mother tongue, but we had several lessons of English every day. We started in standard one, then we moved to standard two. By the time we moved to standard three, we were ready to switch over to English as the medium of instruction and our children did very well! But by that time, I had decided I needed more education to advance my own knowledge and reflect. In 1968 I had a discussion with the Chief of Protocol and we agreed that I should apply to go back to school. You know you reach somewhere where you feel a little inadequate? That's the way I felt. I felt I needed to freshen my mind. So I went back to school, but of course that school didn't help me with the problem I had because I had to follow the established 3.2.1 or 3.1.1 programme at the University of Nairobi.

This meant that a student would take courses from three different departments (e.g. sociology, philosophy and literature) for the first year. During the second year the candidate would drop one of the subjects and do two in the second year (3.2.1), or specialise in one subject from the second year (3.1.1). And there you were now focusing on your performance rather than how it would impact on what you will be doing.

After I had left and gone back to the University of Nairobi, the ministry had agreed that not every child had to learn in English as a medium. In other words, if you are in Nyeri and the majority of your children are Kikuyus, you could teach in Kikuyu, while teaching English as a subject, so that by the time the children get to standard three, they should be able to switch over to English as a medium of instruction. To me that is the policy that should be in Kenya.

At the University of Nairobi, in the first year, I chose English, French, and Education (3). By the end of the second year, I thought that I was doing very well in literature, I decided to drop the other two. I had other reasons for wanting to drop them, but in the exam that I did, I would probably have scored 75% in literature, about 60% in education, and scored 55% in French, I'd have been very lucky. Being a mature student you want to do well and because I could drop subjects and do 3.2.2, or 3.2.1, or 3.1.1., I dropped education first because if you had studied education at Makerere, any other person wanting to teach you could not do what professor Lucas had done. He was fantastic. Most of the time we were being critical of our [education] teachers, which was too much of a struggle. So I dropped education, I dropped French also and I chose literature. I had a wonderful time.

Prof. Kabira: Was it an undergraduate degree?

Prof. Gachukia: This one now yes. It was at the undergraduate level. I was taught by good teachers, my goodness! Professor Gurr, head of the English Department: fantastic in English Literature. Ngugi wa Thiong’o on African Literature. Taban Lo Liyong. Okot P’Bitek, both on African Literature. They were so buried in the subject, it was incredible learning from them. That was the best part of my life. In my essays, I don’t think I ever got below a B plus. Actually, it was fantastic and I got a first class degree. I was so happy. I was so satisfied. That was going to be the end of my education. I’ll tell you why, we used to live on a farm near Kamiti. If you were Chief of Protocol for Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, you were a 24-hours-a-day employee because Mzee didn’t travel. You know how they say that **Mzee** travelled only once to Ethiopia and never again. He never travelled out of Kenya. The heads of state came to Kenya to see him.

Prof. Mwaura: There is still something, just one more thing about Maendeleo ya Wanawake in 1966 when you became the Vice President. Tell us more about Maendeleo.

Prof. Gachukia: I’ll be very brief. So where were we?

Prof. Kimani: You had just completed your first degree at UoN.

Prof. Gachukia: As soon as I finished, got this first class degree, I went back to the Curriculum Centre. I found out that there was a course organized by the International Bureau of Education, that is a UNESCO body on curriculum, research and assessment in Sweden. And that was going to take a week. The Director said he had already enrolled me. Now, after working and getting exciting results at the UoN, I was challenging my children. Alan said, “I have to pass KCPE because I have no option.” So for me it was just like they were giving me leave to go and relax a bit.

I went to Sweden for a week and a half. We went through very thorough training in the proper way of developing curriculum, assessing it, particularly the assessment to make sure that it is successful. When I was there what does my beloved here do? (**Pointing at her husband.**) He goes to the University of Nairobi, and fills in an application form for a master's degree. I was so upset because "who told him I wanted to do a master's?" But when I came back, they're calling me from the university and they say, "We have your application forms here, but they are not signed." So I had to go to the university to sign.

So that is where my reluctance also features. I wasn't keen to go back to school. Actually, I felt I was running around like a first year student. I forgot to tell you that going back to school as a much older person, I found some of the students I had taught at Thika [High School]. We were in the first year together. So during the lectures, I am sitting next to somebody I taught in high school. That was not funny to me but they say they enjoyed it very much because I was one of them. So there I am enrolled for a master's degree. Do you know I even forgot to go to the Teachers Service Commission to seek for leave?

So the TSC wrote in my file that I had deserted my responsibilities. Can you imagine these are people I knew? How could they say that I'm a deserter? That I didn't report? In other words, I should have reported a month before. Wanjiku, I lost my 10 years in the Ministry of Education: my pension for 10 years gone because I forgot. Yeah, we didn't think about it. But the university was exciting. And I couldn't care less because once you were accepted for the master's degree at the University of Nairobi, then you were guaranteed a scholarship and we were only paying 20 shillings per term as school fees for each child.

While at the university, because I had done very well in linguistics, they allocated that dullest and most difficult subject to me to teach. I used to teach linguistics and East African Literature at the University of Nairobi's Department of Literature and then drive all the way to Kenyatta University College's Department of Education to teach the same subject. It was kind of nice, because I was improving on what I taught at the University of Nairobi and refining it. This was from 1971 to 1974, when Kenyatta was a college of the University of Nairobi. That's how I taught Bishop Nzimbi (former archbishop and primate of the Anglican Church of Kenya) at Kenyatta College. He used to tell me, "you are my teacher." Imagine a Bishop telling you that you are their teacher. Oh, my goodness. There were so many types of students.

Prof. Kimani: You know, just to tie here nicely. After now, you lost the 10 years after deserting TSC because you forgot.

Prof. Gachukia: Yes I deserted and I deserved it! (Laughs) I agree I was a deserter because I didn't request for a study leave as required. A master's student, doing my first year but also teaching linguistics. They said that I should be able to teach it because I had learnt it at Leeds University. I needed some money to eat and even to survive as a student, but it gave me the pocket money that TSC had denied me by calling me a deserter.

Prof. Kabira: That was a graduate assistantship now.

Prof. Gachukia: Yes. I'm supposed to be doing a master's degree but at the same time, I'm in some of these cases, you can see them as challenges now, but in those days, you just accepted and went to teach because you were already a trained teacher. I don't know.

I didn't see them as anything to write home about. First year, second year and by that time I'd written my master's proposal, but I had to defend it. I was with Prof. Chris Wanjala, the two of us.

Prof. Kimani: Can you remember the year when you joined the master's degree programme at the University of Nairobi?

Prof. Gachukia: You are going too fast. By the time I got to the second year or third year, my thesis was upgraded. Apparently I had done well. I don't know whether this is true or whether it's my imagination, but both my and Chris Wanjala's master's theses were upgraded to Ph.D. So instead of completing the master's degree, we were now working towards a Ph.D. Apparently the research that we were doing, the chapters that we were handing in were too superior. You know that it's quite flattering, but also very challenging. So by 1974, I was a Ph.D student, no longer a master's student. There was no course work then. We would be given a chapter, we'd go and research and write it, then discuss it with our tutors. It was then up to them to decide whether the kind of work Chris Wanjala and I were submitting would pass anywhere else for a Ph.D.

1974 is also the year we started the Riara group of schools. That is the year I was nominated to Parliament. That was the year I was appointed to lead the Kenya delegation to the United Nations Women's Conference in Mexico, the first conference on women by the United Nations. As a government appointee I was going to read a government paper. So 1974 was quite a turning point, a significant year in my life.

We will come back to the school later on, but basically it came about because somebody had called Daniel Gachukia and said, "Oh, there's a kindergarten for sale, we are wondering if your wife would be interested."

Note: it is not "you" who would be interested, but "your wife." I don't know how they knew I was teaching. Of course, he (Daniel) forgot all about it until two weeks later, the same man called - it was our friend Mr Nanji - and said, "You know, there are other people who are interested in buying this kindergarten, did you talk to your wife?" Daniel then said, "I'm going to talk to her." And so he called me then, and when he told me I was like, "How could you forget?" We went, we saw the kindergarten, and we got on so well with the owner, who was a European who wanted to leave Kenya. There were very few children; I think there were only two African children and the rest were all European. It was called Balmoral Kindergarten and it was quite something. I don't know what drives me because I then took it up myself and we never looked back. We bought that kindergarten in August 1974.

At this time, I was also a national secretary of Maendeleo ya Wanawake. Jane Kiano had been elected president in either 1970 or 1971 and I had resigned as vice president because I had gone back to school and I needed to focus on studies. But I remember her pleading with me to at least take up the role of secretary. A national secretary was actually a very important position. And after a lot of persuasion, I agreed. I served for about two years and then when I was nominated to Parliament, I couldn't handle two responsibilities.

Prof. Kabira: So that is what we wanted to tie from the time you were elected vice president.

Prof. Gachukia: For vice president, I served under Elizabeth Mwendar. It was only for three years.

Prof. Kabira: So we wanted to come all the way to 1974 when you were resigning. What happened with Maendeleo Ya Wanawake?

Prof. Gachukia: I would like to believe that 1967 was when I was elected in my absence as vice president of Maendeleo. That would mean I still had three years. So 1970 would be the end of my role as the vice president. The national secretary comes later but it was a controversial election because it became very political. You had Jane Kiano and you had Nyiva Mwendwa. It became much politicised. And I remember even Muthoni Likimani calling me and telling me that “women want you to stand as the national chairperson.” I said, “Muthoni, I am just a student at the university and I can’t manage anything extra.” But then I don’t know what Jane did because she persuaded me to become a national secretary. It was not an elective one, I think you just met with the executive and then they decided who would be who. I didn’t stand for that position, I was invited to be.

So by the time we were going to Mexico, I was not just the national secretary of Maendeleo, I was also a nominated Member of Parliament. The president didn’t just nominate me to Parliament, he nominated me to represent women’s interests. And it appears like it was well received, because there were a lot of women travelling from rural areas to come and celebrate with me, women inviting me to their places to celebrate. The salary of an M.P. was not much but I managed to visit many of women groups in the rural areas. I think the advantage was having such a clear mandate: that I was not just a national Member of Parliament, but that I was specifically representing women’s interests.

Prof. Kabira: Were there any other women in Parliament then?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes, there were. Grace Onyango, who had been a mayor of Kisumu, was the only elected woman Member of Parliament. The other one was Jemimah Gecaga (a co-founder of Maendeleo), who had been reappointed as a nominated Member of Parliament.



Prof Eddah Gachukia with Mama Ngina Kenyatta (left), Dame Nita Barrow, and Dr Muringo Kiereini at a dinner she hosted.



Prof Eddah Gachukia (left), Grace Ogot (middle) and Rose Waruhiu (right)

You can see the connection here; the fact that they're actually coming from the women's movement, because if you have been associated with Maendeleo, then the women out there being told, "now you have an MP, you can't come complaining but you can channel your complaints and issues through her."

That day I felt - even today I feel the same - that the women believed that they owned you, you belonged to them, and you should be at their beck and call. And it was good. I travelled so much. I had a lot of support. And when they saw something wrong, people would come and talk to [my husband], telling him, "Tell your wife to go slow on this kind of thing." So yeah, I had to develop shock absorbers because I was young and quite radical, actually, coming from the Department of Literature. At one time, [Vice Chancellor] Dr. Karanja wrote to me telling me that they had noticed a conflict of interest and I should resign from the university. You see, I used to go to teach then go to Parliament and participate. And then there was a problem at the university and the students went on strike. We have copies of the *Hansard* here, and I've been looking at it, they gave it to me. And yes, I did say I sided with the students. And I said, surely, all the vice chancellor has to do is to send his representatives to the students' *kamukunji*.

And if he feels that they have said something wrong, he can correct it within the university without involving the police. Did I get into trouble? Because we hated that police, I can tell you that we hated them because they were brutal people. But for a mature student who is coming from outside, you don't even know there was a Kamukunji last night, which decided ABCD; you are just coming to school as normal, and finding the whole university surrounded by police. So with that kind of innocence, I was defending the students. I didn't accept that students would take stones to throw at police or passersby and so on. I had that feeling that police should not get involved in educational institutions.

Prof. Kabira: But the police, particularly the GSU, were also doing horrible things like raping the girls, right? So it is true they were very brutal.

Prof. Gachukia: [Fellow Member of Parliament and Assistant Minister] G. G Kariuki came and sat next to me and he said, "That story being written in the paper: Is it true? I told him, "it is true. I saw it with my own eyes. They have been beaten in the classrooms and there's even blood on the floor. You can't deny that because there is blood on the floor. What caused it? It's not my business but it's your business to find out." To make a long story short, I was asked to resign from the university. I wasn't going to resign so I asked for a leave of absence because I didn't feel that there was any clash between the two, my career as a lecturer and parliament.

Prof. Kabira: So which year was it when you led the delegates to the first UN conference in Mexico? Was it 1974 or 1975?

Prof. Gachukia: The Mexico Conference was in 1975. Later in 1979, there was the mid-decade conference in Copenhagen, and then in 1985, there was the Nairobi conference. I told you 1974 was quite something. We were buying a kindergarten, which meant I now had a school to run.

I'm teaching at the University of Nairobi, I've been nominated to Parliament, and I'm also in that capacity leading the Kenya delegation to the Mexico Conference, which meant a lot of involvement in the women's movement. I was already involved in the women's movement., but the Ministry of Housing and Social Services was the one mandated to organise the delegation and I remember discussing this with the Minister Hon. Taita arap Towett and I said, "Now we have an assistant minister, why isn't she leading the delegation?"

Prof. Kabira: Julia Ojiambo?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes

Prof. Kabira: An Assistant Minister?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes, Julia was an assistant minister in the same ministry. So in my simple thinking I thought she should be the leader of the Kenyan delegation. There was a conflict, I don't remember what it was, and I would rather not even refer to it. That was all it was: that you go there and read a paper that had been prepared by the government. There was Esther Wandera, head of the Women's Department at the Ministry of Social Services; Terry Kantai, of course, who was working at the Provincial Headquarters in Nyeri and other officers from the provinces. They had organised seminars throughout the country in all the provinces in order to establish the priorities of women in Kenya. I was involved as a Member of Parliament to present the women issues. I saw those reports. And from every province, women's priority number one was water: give us water closer to home, then we can do the things that you want us to do in terms of hygiene and health. It's only Nairobi that didn't have water as a priority. And I think I made a comment on that one, because when in Nairobi even if you're buying water, it's coming on a *mkokoteni* [handcart].

Women were not traveling 10 kilometres to fetch water, I mean, those days, I couldn't even imagine what it meant to fetch water, and how much time it took for women to get water until I started moving around as a nominated MP. That's why it hit me because I would have said education was the priority, that women being able to read and write was a priority. But all provinces apart from Nairobi had said water was their priority. So we needed to get back to that when we came back from Mexico. In Mexico many couldn't understand what we were talking about –why water was a priority. That's why when it came to 1985 here in Nairobi, we organised a day out for the delegates and we made sure they visited Narok in Maasailand, they went to Baringo, Kitui, parts of Machakos and Makueni which are arid for them to appreciate why Kenya had presented water as a main item at the Mexico conference.

And you know, the theme for the Mexico conference was Equality, Development and Peace. We felt that women in Kenya were very involved in development.



Prof Eddah Gachukia addressing delegates at the 4th FAWE General Assembly held on 2002 at the Mt Kenya Safari Club, Nanyuki



Prof Eddah Gachukia with some FAWE members and former Cabinet Secretary in charge of Foreign Affairs, Amb Monica Juma (seated at the centre) who was an invited guest.

I mean in that area, it's like we didn't need to do any research because I thought back to my mother: my father didn't know what we cultivated in the shamba (farm). It's my mother who was in charge of that, it was my mother who was in charge of food security. So, some of these issues were clear to us, that development may not be a major issue to focus on, but water definitely would make a lot of difference in providing women with more time to devote to development. Equality, we didn't want to emphasize because it seemed offensive in Kenya and we were even called names for including it. Although we played it down also in Mexico, we said that women in Kenya don't want to be equal to men. Actually, today we are afraid or ashamed of our denial. But in Mexico, equality didn't make much sense. As for peace, no, Kenya was at peace with everybody. Okay, the *Shifita* had been mitigated and so we had no issue with peace. We had not realized that peace is not the absence of war only.

But in development, that's where we wanted to focus, that we wanted women to have more time to devote to development activities. That's how we interpreted it in Mexico. Of course, we were not invited to the NGO conference. Some organisations were invited: Catherine Mboya (representing the Bahá'í International Community) had been invited, the Kenya National Union of Teachers had also sent a representative. So there were NGO meetings taking place in Mexico, but we were not part of them because we were a government delegation. And we were: Mary Gichuru (National Council of Women) Jane Kiano (Maendelo ya Wanawake), Justice Effie Owour, Elizabeth Wanjui from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and of course Esther Wandera from the Ministry of Social Services.

When we came back to Kenya, we went in a delegation to report to the government. I don't know whether we saw the President before we went or whether we saw him after we had come back. That is hard to remember. But I remember leading a Maendeleo delegation to his home in Gatundu where we pleaded for women to get paid maternity leave.

And **Mzee** gave it to us, just like that. Maternity leave! I think for one month or two. We were asking for more but still, this was a success for the women's movement. We were using that political door to seek not favours but the rights of women. I mean, maternity leave would never have passed through the Parliament at that time.

We tried it later but you should read The Hansard, then hear some of the comments that were being made, like "why should the private sector pay for maternity leave?" And that's where even somebody like the Attorney General was talking about women bearing children like rats. Very bad language was used in Parliament.

Prof. Kabira: Saying women were bearing children like rats?

Prof. Gachukia: It was a very powerful, yet demeaning statement. Anything to do with women was sarcastically treated. I think during the second term, that is when the first Marriage Bill came. Oh my goodness, you need to read the contributions so that you see what men said about childbirth and so on. It is just very sad.

Prof. Kabira: You are giving us a lot of information that does not appear in other stories because your story of Maendeleo has a lot of information which is not in the stories of Phoebe Asiyo, Jael Mbogo, Julia Ojiambo who were part of that story. Some of that story. You have more information even in terms of education. We never heard of stories like that of African Girls' High School.

Prof. Gachukia: I was in Maendeleo, deep inside Maendeleo and interacting particularly with the provincial chairs. Nduta wa Kore was the provincial chair of Maendeleo in Central Province and a freedom fighter.

She had been in Hola with her husband when he was killed during the Hola Massacre together with ten other detainees..

You know people like that have a deep way of looking at the politics of a country. The Nyakinyua women's group in Kiambu, as they called themselves, they came from Githunguri, Kiambaa, from Kikuyu, and from Lari. After detention they decided they wanted to buy land because when they came back they found that their land had been allocated to other people. So they went to Mzee and said they needed money to buy land in Mai Mahiu.

Mzee Jomo Kenyatta called John Michuki, at that time the head of Kenya Commercial Bank, and told him; "These women want to ask for some money from you. What will you tell them? Will you find a way of helping them?" That was a very strong way of putting it. Michuki had no choice but to loan them money to buy 15,000 acres, these former detainees. And they paid back that loan. Later, they invited the then Mayor of Nairobi, Margaret Kenyatta, to issue the title deeds to members.

Then there was the Mabati Women's Groups. We must talk about the Mabati women. That was my first experience in Parliament. Mabati Women Group where women decided that they had had enough of living in grass thatched houses. They said there was no grass anyway because it had all been cut during the state of emergency, so that the Europeans could get rid of all hiding places of the Mau Mau Freedom Fighters (terrorists). Mabati Women's Groups converted Murang'a entirely. I would go to Western Kenya and find grass thatched huts. In most parts of Murang'a not one because most women were members and they were going round sharing contributions to cover all.

And they had never stopped because that is the same way they even did with the water project to every home. They burned a lot of mitungis (water cans). We celebrated the burning of mitungis to symbolize the relieving of women from carrying water on their backs. I can tell you that even today my borehole here receives water from the Kandara water scheme because water flows freely from the Aberdares.

I am a member of this shamba group that I joined but I'm not a beneficiary because I wanted to see how they operate. They wanted me to help them to raise funds for what they call "table banking." Must have been about 30 women here. We asked ourselves: if we're getting a salary at the end of the month, why don't we put some away and help each other buy what we want to buy? Because they're here all the time, and have no time to go to the river they asked, "Can we help with a water tank in every home?" And so we started. Covid 19 interrupted us, but they had bought water tanks for more than half of the members and they are now registered with the Constituency Development Fund office.



Prof Eddah Gachukia with H.E Margaret Kenyatta issuing title deeds in Naivasha to the Nyakinyua Women's Group where they had bought a 15,000 acre piece of land.

I was here one day when the then MP and CDF officers came and gave the groups a cheque, you know government money. So that period is still there, it will be revived after the Covid 19 devastation. Even some men decided to join the women on this one. In this house, the people who work here in this compound have a Sacco [a savings and credit co-operative society] and they contribute 2,200 shillings every month. They have a way of giving to every member, like when somebody has an emergency they are given a lump sum. This is something that it is not only in Murang'a. It is not only in this household, but everywhere in the country. In Taita Taveta, they bought a bus. Unfortunately, the women could not run it because a lot of them were not literate. So the people they hired ran it down and ran off with the money. I don't know if it was Baringo women who also bought a bus. Women had started really getting involved. And it is a question of picking up from where they had gotten and then pursue that and get them to think bigger. I can't think of anything bigger than 15,000 acres with a lot of cattle and a farm manager who is a man. And a lot of the women who cannot go through accounts, those are the challenges I will turn to especially in education: emphasising serious literacy. That could have been my contribution while I was in Maendeleo.

Prof. Kimani: Let's go to FAWE

Prof. Gachukia: I think the NCWK is important.

Prof. Kimani: Yes, even FEMNET.

Prof. Gachukia: NCWK - the National Council of Women of Kenya - was created after independence. It was an effort to unite women's organisations in the country. We therefore usually describe it as the umbrella organisation to which all women's organisation are or should be affiliated.

It was created by women like Margaret Kenyatta, Phoebe Asiyo, Damaris Ayodo, Hannah Rubia, and I'm sure Mrs. Gecaga would have been one of them. These were the founders. The government also normally had a member there because they said "if we want to deal with women who do we deal with?"

The founders were definitely Margaret Kenyatta, Phoebe Asiyo, Hannah Rubia, (Charles Rubia was the mayor of Nairobi). I think Jemimah Gecaga must have been there, and then of course there were organisations like the East Africa Women's League, Mrs. Jean Anderson and Ismaili women's organizations. We are talking about a women's league that was European, then we had Ismailia women's organizations led by Zuli Muhammed was with them. There was the Hindu Women's Association led by Kamla Sikand, that is how she became active nationally. There was the Association of University Women which was very active, and of course Maendeleo, a national grassroots organization was there in a big way. During my time as the chairperson, there were 25 organisations. The religious-based organisations were not just Ismaili and Hindus, there was also the PCEA Woman's Guild, Anglican Mothers' Union, Seventh Day Adventist Women's Association and of course the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). There were also the Business and Professional Women's Organization, the Kenyan Girl Guides Association (an important team because many of us had been Guides in school), the National Nurses Association of Kenya, among others. There were 25 and more during that stage of development.

This is the time I was in France. I celebrated our independence while I was at Leeds University. So these activities were going on in Kenya, with the government insisting that women have one organisation.

NCWK used to meet once a month and during that meeting there was a representative from all these organisations. Each group selected a member and forwarded a name to the National Council of Women of Kenya indicating that "this will be our representative." So at the time I was being elected Chairperson, I was also a Member of Parliament representing women's interests. So these are very critical times in my life.

Prof. Kabira: Tell us more about how you worked in NCWK.

Prof. Gachukia: Yes. So you float an idea. Your idea is accepted by so many organisations, they go out, they decide what they can do, and they report that in the next meeting. And that's what happened with the UNICEF/ NGO Water for Health programme, which was born after the Mexico conference. That's what happened with the Green Belt Movement. When Prof. Wangari Maathai started talking about the importance of planting most trees or sponsoring some of the seedlings in all the places that the trees were being planted. It was the members that were planting most trees or sponsoring some of the seedlings in all the places that the trees were being planted. It was a wonderful *harambee* effort that I'm not sure has been recognised even today. But if the records of NCWK had not been destroyed in fire cases, we would dish out bits and pieces from whatever information that we had in our drawers. It's important information.

Now, I was telling you about the water on the other side of Ngong Hills in Oloshobor where women used to climb up the hill to the water source. This was ridiculous to us. For example, whereas in Central Province, you walked down to the river, and then you walked up with the load. In other words, you climbed down without a load and climbed up with a load. That was my experience from childhood.

Beyond Ngong Hills, it was opposite experience for women. Now imagine people with weak knees like myself. I mean, it was incredible and it's not far from Nairobi, it's just the other side of Ngong Hills. The mobilisation that came! I remember the Australian High Commission joining and saying "we are going to give you eight water tanks." That meant placing one water tank around several manyattas, and bringing the water down to the tank in pipes. Even the Member of Parliament gave us water tanks. Do you know that was like a huge ***harambee effort?*** So it was very exciting, with different organisations assuming different aspects of the water project.

I talk about water because UNICEF had agreed to come on board, that is why it was called the UNICEF - NGO Water for Health Programme. And the concept paper was written by Dr. Muringo Kiereini, for the National Council of Women. You know, we were just sitting around the table and we said we want a paper that we can sell to anybody willing to donate. And Dr. Kiereini, Chairperson of the National Nurses Association, offered to write one. She wrote the paper and analysed how important water is to the home, and why women needed that support. We then tabled it, showing the members what impact it was likely to have and, my goodness, people and organizations started donating. The first one was to Turkana - Lodwar - where one water pump was donated by the East African Women's League. They'd already paid for the digging of the well so now they were going to hand over the machine to the District Commissioner and it was not just the women who are benefiting, but even this Commissioner himself, who met us.

That's what the National Council was all about. At the time we didn't have much money. I mean, they were not raising a lot of money. With 1,000 Kenyan shillings, you could buy a lot of seedlings and sponsor a whole school to plant trees.

I wish I had time to drive you around Murang'a for you to see the tree planting programme and how well received it was, especially by the churches. In Murang'a it was the PCEA Woman's Guild. Mrs. Priscilla Meroka was the Guild's National Organiser and she came and talked to churches all over Murang'a and the women really bought the idea of planting trees. If you drive around here you can see this particular tree (mukima or mubariti), I don't know what it is called in English. It does not affect grass or the crops, which is why we needed Prof. Wangari's Science knowledge because the land is scarce. Women were coming with a lot of interesting ideas and development concepts. A lot of the time we tend to talk about Eddah Gachukia, Prof. Maathai, Dr. Kiereini, but it is the women at the grassroots who were undertaking the projects. Very important. We would just go to launch, but after the launch we would leave it to the women to undertake the rest.

Prof. Kabira: Who was the first chair of the National Council of Women of Kenya?

Prof. Gachukia: Margaret Kenyatta, she was the chair for three years from 1963 to 1965. Three years.

Prof. Kabira: So whom did you take over from?

Prof. Gachukia: I took over from Mary Gichuru.

Prof. Kabira: Was she the first one?

Prof. Gachukia: No, There was Ms. Kenyatta and Phoebe Asiyo, Then after me came Damaris Ayodo, then Wangari Maathai, then Lilian Mwaura.

You know the trouble with politics Elishiba? If you are also trying to achieve academic goals, the academics suffer because during that period of 1974 to 1979, the women's movement really came alive, not because of an individual but because of that togetherness of women's organisations focusing on this or that issue. When you decide on an idea, it echoes the idea of others, you know, even within the churches. I remember being invited to the PCEA General Assembly by Reverend John Gatu, the Secretary General and I went and told them, "you know what, some churches have now appointed women as ministers in the churches" but PCEA is still lagging behind." I was accused of taking politics to the church. But they did something about it. The following year Rev. Nyambura set off to America to study and after that she was appointed a secretary general to the head office of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. So it pays to know that you have a voice here and there but the voice is not mine: if you pray to God and you are believer, God will guide you on what to say where and how. I remember particularly the issue of family planning. Because of my mother's death in child birth, I was committed to child spacing. And I went and talked about it in parliament with passion. We were not talking about fewer children, but we were talking about spacing. Even the language used matters.

Prof. Kabira: Prof, I know you played a major role in 1985 United Nation's Women's conference. Can you tell us about this conference?

Prof. Gachukia: Of course. I think it is the birth of FEMNET (The Africa Women's Development and Communication Network). FEMNET was just an idea we had during the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa conference, the regional meeting that was held in Arusha in 1984, in preparation for the 1985 World Conference.

It was a UN and government meeting and those of us who were included in the government delegation felt that if we were going to have an NGO forum in Nairobi, then we needed to ensure the participation of African NGOs to Nairobi. There would have been five of us, including Njoki Wainaina, who was working for the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Sarah Longwe from Zambia, Rose Chege from UNICEF, Nairobi, and another delegate from Tanzania. We were all members of the government delegations. We were invited by our governments to understand what was going to happen in Nairobi or what was expected of NGOs. We recognized that in other African countries, women didn't know anything about the forthcoming 1985 conference. So we thought we must put a secretariat together that can mobilise and communicate whatever information that was coming from the NGO Forum in New York because the NGO New York committee was not in touch with Africa. It was in Arusha where the whole idea was born and when we came back to Nairobi, we found that actually, women particularly in the East African countries, wanted to come to Nairobi, and were planning to hire buses for travel if they couldn't afford airfares. Why not hire buses and drive to Nairobi? You know, we were very impressed that the message of the NGO Forum was received so well. That was in 1984 during the Arusha preparatory conference for the Africa region towards Nairobi.



Prof. Kabira: Is that where FEMNET was born?

Prof. Gachukia: FEMNET had not been formed yet. FEMNET was born after the Nairobi conference.

It was at the Nairobi conference where African women saw what NGO's can do because there were all these workshops organised by NGO's from different countries and especially the Tech and Tools skills workshop, which was staged at the University of Nairobi, showcasing the kind of technology that can assist women to lighten their workload. That was very impressive. The NGO forum in Nairobi actually proved to be bigger in attendance than the U.N. conference. You know that we were at the University of Nairobi, and the government delegations were at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC). NGOs from the world had come and all together, over 15,000 delegates attended the NGO Forum.

Prof. Kabira: Having talked about the National Council and Maendeleo and so on and so on, what was the role of the women's organisations in preparation of that NGO Forum, in 1984?

Prof. Gachukia: There was quite a bit of animosity against NGOs, because I remember we originally were operating from KICC. Then, when we came back from the preparatory meeting held in Copenhagen, Denmark, we were told we had to move out. I walked to the head of the civil service, Geoffrey Kareithi's office and told him that the U.N. was not willing to hold any meeting in Kenya unless the government was also willing to host the NGO Forum. We were accused of all manner of things, sometimes, you know, almost face to face. I don't like to think about it because at that time, I had to really put my foot down. I said that I was not willing to lead an initiative that was not recognised by the government.

Prof. Kabira: How did you come to be the leader of the NGO Forum?

Prof. Gachukia: How I came to be, I don't even know how this happened, I wasn't there at the meeting where NGOs or NCWK were called. NGOs were called together for a meeting at the Ministry of Social Services. I was not there because I was very busy at the university. They met and somehow they decided that I would be the chair of the organising committee for the NGO meeting. Some friends came to tell me what had been decided. They were even telling me who was opposing my proposal saying that I was too busy at the University. That was the kind of thing that makes you get into an assignment with bad a feeling. My problem started when I was hired as a consultant by the Swedish Embassy to evaluate the government's performance on gender issues. Wanjiku, you and I worked on this project, with Wangui Njau, we drafted the questionnaires and sent copies to all ministries. They sent back their replies to what the government had been doing and what they would like to see. So we sat late at night, and put a whole document together. We sent the report to the Women's Bureau for forwarding to the Minister. The report was to be discussed by a team of government officials that met at Kericho Tea Hotel and we were invited. The Permanent Secretary was there then and he told us, "We are not discussing this document, we have come up with another report because this one reflects the government in a bad light." I left the same night and I asked you Wanjiku to hold the fort and present the process that we had followed that had yielded our report.

Prof. Kimani: So which year is this?

Prof. Kabira: I think this one Prof. Gachukia, was actually an evaluation of the government performance, which you led and was done through the Women's Bureau. We visited all the ministries. Remember this? That report is the one we tabled at Kericho. And actually Grace Ogot was an Assistant Minister.

I remember she called the government team at around 2.00 am, you know when they agreed that they were not going to accept the report because it was anti-government, but we were only saying what the same government had said, things they had done and things they did not do. The team decided to spy and write their own report. I think it was a report to be presented somewhere in some of these international conferences such as the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW). So you left that day. So I'm trying to remember whether it was in 1984 or when it was.

Also let me ask you something: you chaired another meeting in Njoro, a pre-conference meeting. I'm not sure now if it was in 1985, but it must have been a meeting about the NGO forum and I think it became a bit controversial because some people came to report you to Moi the President. In fact, Grace Ogot publicly dissociated herself from the meeting and the decisions that were made there. What went on at this Njoro meeting?

Prof. Gachukia: The meeting was in preparation for the U.N. conference that would later be held in Nairobi in 1985. People would come from the meeting and go straight and report to the government. By the time we got back, there were headlines in the newspaper with the title, "What do these women want?" On one side, the paper is saying, "Women demand 50% of the seats in parliament." I really wanted to hide under the bed because of being attacked right, left and centre. That was at the national preparatory meeting for the UN conference and the NGO Forum.

Prof. Kimani: Were you the chair of the NGO Forum?

Prof. Gachukia: What was I? No, we had a chair from Barbados. Dame Nita Barrow, appointed from New York by all the NGOs in the world. She was the chair while I was the chair of the Kenya NGO organising committee.

Prof. Kabira: In fact she was the convener at the international level, and also coordinator for the NGO Forum.

Prof. Gachukia: The Forum had a special section at the University of Nairobi and we were very impressed by the amount of money the government spent to renovate the university for the whole meeting. The government meeting was taking place at KICC. There was a lot of attention from the media - local and international - in the Forum. That's where people were actually expressing ideas, translating ideas into action. Kenneth Matiba was the Minister of Culture and Social Services and officially opened the forum, representing the president. I can tell you that it was a wonderful meeting. For me, it was challenging yet very successful and its activities popular. NGOs were displaying what strategies were worth emulating. By the end of the Forum, I had decided never to lead women again.

Prof. Kabira: You are still working with women now.

Prof. Gachukia: I meant it. Someone would just come and listen to the meeting at Njoro Egerton, okay, then later we would hear that she is in State House. It was too much. In fact when we went to see the President, he told me, "Eddah, thank you very much for a job well done." I cried. I had suffered so much. The President was to come to officially open NGO conference and he delayed. People were sitting everywhere such that there was nowhere to pass.

We had to move people so the minister could have somewhere to pass so that he could officially open the meeting. But it was a huge meeting, and it was difficult to contain. I was accused of inviting lesbians. You know, every other meeting you go to throughout the world, there are lesbians and homosexuals, be it a meeting for the World Bank, United Nations or any other meeting. They don't wear labels. So you can't tell them that you don't want them to come. But there were women who were accusing us in front of everybody. And that's why organisations like FAWE made a lot of sense because I was now being tasked in an area where I knew there would not be too much controversy.

Prof. Gachukia: After election to Chair the NGO Forum 85 Committee, I went and wrote a letter to the Vice Chancellor to release me as Chair of Literature Department for three months so that I could now prepare for this conference properly, the NGO Forum. The Vice Chancellor gave me a letter releasing me. Two days later there was a headline in a Leading Daily, "Gachukia Sacked from the Chairmanship of Department of Literature." And who was being cited? A deputy Vice Chancellor. But how would you deal with that level of politics? It is me who had asked for permission! So I was given three months. I came back after the Forum and I was still the Chair of the Department. The same people said nothing. God's anointed life continued. I have never understood where all the hostility was coming from –whether it was ethnic, gender, or personality-based.

After 1985 I had been prepared for whatever came, because that's when I became a consultant kind of expert. I did a lot of work: organizations which wanted their projects to have gender dimensions detailed invited me. Everybody: the development partners like the World Bank, the Netherlands Government which supported the National Youth Service, etc.

So I visited very many National Youth Service projects ending up in Yatta just to see how they embrace gender issues, how they determined the level of participation of girls, qualifications needed from girls, and all that kind of thing. I was to submit a paper so that back home they would know how to encourage more girls to participate in the projects that they were funding. I went from Kenya to Zambia, I went to Zimbabwe, you know, going to other countries to assess the incorporation of gender issues in donor funded programmes. It was during that time that UNICEF also gave me a part time consultancy. After teaching at the University of Nairobi, I would spend about two hours every afternoon at UNICEF guiding them on how to improve education programmes for women, deciding what kind of education would be empowering. They were giving me their projects, to evaluate the gender components and that kind of thing. It was during that time -1999, that I was sent by UNICEF to West Africa together with Madame Fay Chung, who at that time was the Minister for Education in Zimbabwe. Okay, so we went to West Africa, the idea was to sensitize African countries on the importance of a major conference that was coming; the international conference on Education For All (EFA). Development partners including UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank were involved. It was held in Jomtien, Thailand. Our mission was to alert African countries on the importance of this conference. But for me particularly, to sensitize them on the issue of emphasizing girls' education in their country papers, whatever they were going to present in Jomtien. So we went and held that regional meeting in Senegal, and this is the idea we put forward to the African ministers that were there. Hon. Peter Oloo Aringo, Kenya's Minister of Education, was there. It was almost automatic then that I go to Jomtien. Fay Chung was of course going as a minister since it was a Ministerial Conference. I went there with Njoki Wainaina from the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

The other person from Kenya was Leah Kipkorir from the Institute of Curriculum Development, a childhood Education expert. The heads of state were attending and I remember our president came with a large Kenyan delegation.

I was elected among the rapporteurs while Fay Chung was the chairperson of the ministers' caucus. So both of us were serving in the secretariat. That meant collecting all the recommendations, all of the reports, checking what is common and what is not common and compiling a report for final approval. On behalf of the people who had sponsored me, UNICEF, I was focused on girls' education, putting together data that the World Bank, through UNESCO and UNICEF, put forth from the countries in which they operated. So it was a very important assignment, very important. We come back to Kenya and I am still doing my two hours at the UNICEF. Dr. Namazi was the country director. Then I get a telephone call, "Eddah this is Fay, we met at the African Women Ministers meeting in Manchester and we agreed to form an organization so that we can focus on girls' education. Can you write a concept paper for us?" I said yes! but after I put the phone down, I realized that I didn't actually know what I was talking about. What is a concept paper?

I talked to a couple of friends like Wanjiku Kabira, and Mike Savage at the Rockefeller Foundation and what they were telling me was, "imagine you are an African woman minister of education, what would you do?" that was easy: I had done that with the national language policy. Now here we are with girls and we have the data not just from UNICEF, but also from the Jomtien on education world conference. So I got down and within a few weeks, we had a draft concept paper.

Prof. Kabira: So you sent the paper through FAWE?

Prof. Gachukia: No, this paper was proposing the creation of FAWE. This is what I am telling you: if you were an African woman education minister, what you would do in order to address all the issues that were hindering girls' education. I sent it to a few friends, I think including you Wanjiku, I believe you read it.

Prof. Kabira: I did not, but I remember when you invited the ministers to come and discuss the concept paper. The meeting was at Windsor where you presented it.

Prof. Gachukia: I sent it to Fay Chung, Katherine Namuddu at the Rockefeller Nairobi office, Joyce Mook who was the director of the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, and a few other people who would give it a bit of panel beating without sympathy. Then I produced a final paper. And then Fay Chung said, "I liked your paper very much, would you now convene a few women ministers of education?" I went to the UNICEF regional office, I went to the Economic Commission for Africa, I was just asking them, "Please tell me because we want to convene a meeting of female African ministers of education". That was a nightmare because nobody had reliable data. I went to the UNICEF regional office, I went to the Economic Commission for Africa, I was just asking them, "Please tell me because we want to convene a meeting of female African ministers of education" I got quite a few. I had suggested, "because there are very few ministers, why don't we include assistant ministers where there are no ministers that are women?" So the number was growing. By the time I was organising the first FAWE meeting at the Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio Centre in Italy, there were maybe twenty something African women education ministers and assistant ministers. The meeting was a resounding success.



*Prof Eddah Gachukia with her husband
Mr. Daniel Gachukia at the Riara
University Graduation ceremony*



*Prof Eddah Gachukia with her husband Mr. Daniel
Gachukia, and daughter Juju Gachukia*



*Prof Eddah Gachukia with her husband
Mr. Daniel Gachukia and Prof Micere Mugo
at the Riara University*



*Prof Eddah Gachukia with her husband
Mr. Daniel Gachukia and some pupils
from Riara Primary School*

I had to present that paper that was an important draft. They thoroughly to discuss it. The trouble with African politics is that, the ministerial positions can be short lived, for example, we had invited Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the then Education Minister in Rwanda. She was very focused and impressive. However, by the time of the second FAWE meeting, she had been killed at the beginning of the genocide in 1994. We had a Minister from another country who was memorable by her impressive dressing and accessories; bangles, rings on every finger, earrings, make-up and so on, definitely wealthy. The next time we met, she was wearing none of these decorations. She had just been released from imprisonment for political affiliation. At that level, we were dealing with not just women's politics, but with politics of individual countries and the impact it left on individuals.

In Bellagio, participants agreed to the agenda, which was to address policy issues and budgetary allocations so that when countries are allocating money for education, they should make sure girls will benefit just like, or even more than boys in order to wipe out visible discrimination and disparities. The issue that was common to all countries was equality in education. This had to be prioritized. After Bellagio, I was appointed executive director. I had never been the executive director of any organization. So again, it was a question of scratching my head wondering, what do I do? Where would I get the money from, how to write proposals and send them to identified development partners to sponsor FAWE? You know there was reference to the World Bank. When you have women ministers and vice chancellors, that's a very strong force that you have. These are women who you can't just treat any old way; you need to be serious about what you're saying to them.

It appeared like the World Bank had worked with governments, not with NGOs. We were told that FAWE was the platform to get a grant from the World Bank. Ruth Kagia was there and she helped us to talk to individuals. So we went to the World Bank and talked to them. Once the bank president is on your side, others have to follow. Another standing partner was the Rockefeller Foundation, who even forced me to move the FAWE office from our house in Riara, where I had set it up because we had no money. I had no money to hire any staff, but the Rockefeller Foundation facilitated that too. What happened was that Joyce Mook, (director at the Rockefeller Foundation) asked to visit our temporary office which was a little back room in our house. She said, “No, you can’t have African ministers of education coming here. You have to be at the centre of town; a proposal that was supported by the Regional Director, Dr. David Court, who also identified an office for FAWE at the International House, where the Rockefeller Foundation was also located

That’s how we moved to International House. The Rockefeller Foundation offices were a floor below us and from the way we were being treated, we began to grow and could begin to dream about what we could do for girls. The only other thing I would like to add is that FAWE was very well received. Women ministers and vice chancellors were few, but they were very powerful. We’re talking about people like Prof. Grace Alele Williams, she was the first woman to receive a Ph.D in mathematics in Nigeria. People like her when they say something, it is authoritative.

Prof. Kabira: And the one who came from Ethiopia? And the Vice Chancellor of the Cape Town University?

Prof. Gachukia: Mamphela Ramphele was Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town. Oh yes.

You should have heard her at the World Bank. My goodness. Yeah. She's the one who told them, "Talk to us about what you've been doing in Africa. We come from Africa so we know. We can't continue weaving baskets just because they (donors) like giving money for *kiondos*. We know we have bigger ideas on development so give us money and you will see what we can do." You know people who speak without any reservations to convince on their mission. They were credible speaking for African people. In Ethiopia we had Hon. Gennet Zewide as Minister. Others were Vidah Yeboha from Ghana and Aicha Bah Dialo from Guinea. Increasing girls enrollment in school was not enough as a goal.

We then realized that there was a serious problem of girls dropping out of school. We deliberately convened a meeting on the issue. We wanted women ministers and vice chancellors not to work as an isolated group when there were male ministers of education who could also be addressing the same issues. If you wanted to move Africa on female education, you needed to bring male ministers on board. So we organized a meeting in Mauritius. We identified researchers to provide credible data on the rates of wastage in education.



Prof Eddah Gachukia with some students from the Riara Girls High School



Prof Eddah Gachukia at a tree planting ceremony with students at Riara Girls High School

Other people who were interested in issues affecting education were Wangui Njau from the University of Nairobi's Department of Sociology and Sheila Wamahiu who was the chair of the Women Education Researchers of Kenya (WERK). Dr. Wamahiu was really interested in research and kept emphasizing the importance of research to impact action. So when you hear people with ideas like that, just like with Wangari Maathai, I told her, "you come and join us in the NCWK and FAWE and you can talk to everybody.." So she and Wangui came and prepared a paper for us on Female school dropout in schools as the issue of focus. Wangui was very interested in adolescent issues as a population concern.

In Mauritius, at first you could see male ministers wondering why we had called them, why they had left their offices to come to a women's meeting. Then Sheila and Wangui presented the data on school drop outs in Kenya. I remember their paper was based on some research that had been compiled by the African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF) that highlighted that in Kenya 10,000 girls had dropped out of school the previous year due to pregnancy. I thought this was shocking and being the frank speaker I am, I wondered if I were a head of a ministry where 10,000 students dropped out for any reason not just pregnancy, would I sit back and do nothing, or just let them continue to have more babies. Most of them came from poor families, which meant the families would become even poorer because now they have been landed with an adolescent who cannot support herself or her baby. FAWE members trained the researchers in making the subject very passionate. By the end of the meeting the male ministers were all saying that the conference had been worth it, and that they were going to address the issue of school drop-out in their countries seriously. We were delighted. We had the president of the Rockefeller Foundation attending and at the end of it he

actually wrote me a personal note saying, “I think this organization (FAWE) would go very far because of the leadership that was being provided in Africa.” We were very happy and from there, you would hear Minister so-and-so “has made a decision,” on issues affecting girls and women that FAWE had initiated. When in Kenya the minister announced that girls who got pregnant would be allowed back to school, there was a newspapers headline: “The one person who must be very happy is Eddah Gachukia.” You know, personalizing the issue was not proper. It was a national issue, it wasn’t about me. It was a multiple victory because we had won for the girls, for country, and for FAWE. It meant that male Ministers of Education would now join hands with us in looking at every other policy that may not be favourable to the participation of girls in education.

You have read about FAWE and you know, right away we decided to establish national chapters because a minister or vice chancellor cannot really achieve too much working alone.



Prof Eddah Gachukia with other delegates at the 4th FAWE General Assembly held on 2002 at the Mt Kenya Safari Club, Nanyuki.

So they formed national chapters. In some countries the chapters were very strong and then not so strong in others. But today, if I recall the last time I was in touch with FAWE, there were 35 or more chapters, with a presence in most African countries.

One thing FAWE achieved was to get governments to look at their own statistics, because at one time we were accused of manufacturing figures, and yet whatever information we were using we had retrieved from the government's Bureau of Statistics. Nobody was using that data, but I think they started taking it more seriously due to FAWE influence.

Then the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD) which Prof. Philomena Mwaura chairs now - was created in 1996 and you know I took advantage of its data analysis. FAWE commissioned Prof Kabira and Masheti Masinjila to develop the "ABC of Gender Analysis: A Framework of Analysis for the Education Sector." It was a framework that we could use to test whether official education policies were benefiting all, not just one section or sector of the community. I have been associated with many initiatives, but let me tell you, it was not me doing the work. I wish I could list the people I have worked with throughout life because even when it comes to gender training, you know where we started after Forum 85': Njoki Wainaina (IPPF) and Rose Chege (UNICEF) who were trying to initiate and organize formal gender training. We in collaboration with CIDA (Canada) got into it and we received very good training. We agreed we cannot train women alone. We needed to include men in the training since gender refers to all. So, it was very important to bring in people who would have impact wherever they were and people who could intellectually analyze all matters relating to development –planning, budgeting, implementation, and assessment using credible facts.

Prof. Philomena: So then we have tied very well the CCGD but now I wanted to hear about FEMNET.

Prof. Gachukia: For FEMNET, I cannot really say a lot because once the organization took form, I didn't participate anymore.

Prof. Kabira: We are asking about how it came to be.

Prof. Gachukia: Okay, I can say it was in Arusha, at the 1994 regional preparatory meeting for the mid-decade conference on women that we realized that although a critical world conference was going to take place in Nairobi, women in Uganda and Tanzania didn't seem to know about it and they were right next door. What about Zambia and Zimbabwe? What about South Africa? If a UN conference is taking place in Africa, we wanted to see African women present and participating effectively. Who was going to facilitate that if we don't have a nucleus? That was the driving force but thank God, UNICEF was working through Rose Chege and Virginia Hazzard who were very much part of our thinking. They had great support from regional office. When Virginia went back to the office, she raised the matter with the NGO office in New York saying the report was discussed and it was important to identify other NGOs in other African countries, because we didn't even know which organizations would be invited from other African countries. We wanted women's organizations to be part and parcel of any decisions that were going to be made in Nairobi. Even the regional conference in Dakar for organizing the way towards Beijing was very different indeed because people were very much aware of the issues and expectations. We talked, we wrote to people, copying others and forwarding new addresses, to New York indicating the organizations and key individuals in each country. Sarah Longwe and Njoki Wainaina were very critical in this process and because they also needed some support from an organization, they used the IPPF office to facilitate this besides our NGO committee office.

To reach out, you needed that kind of back-up support from a solid organization, not just a few scattered individuals.

Prof. Kabira: So was FEMNET formed in 1987? I think the reason I am asking is that we did that gender training either in 1990 or 1991. The training organized by FEMNET led by Njoki Wainaina and with great support from Rose Chege in UNICEF.

Prof. Gachukia: The idea of FEMNET was floated in Arusha in 1984 but it was formalized in 1986. The registration of FEMNET as an organization was well after 1985. Before that, it was very informal. I think in 1986 is when we called for the first committee meeting but let me check for you the exact date. It is 1988. I remember the committee; it was a very small committee called to brainstorm on the FEMNET creation proposal.

Prof. Kabira: The first chair was you and then Njoki Wainaina was the coordinator. The other key members were Rose Chege, working with UNICEF, as a support as well as a partner. But then there was Joyce. Who were the other members?

Prof. Gachukia: Yes Joyce Umbima and there was also Sarah Longwe from Zambia

Prof. Kabira: FEMNET was really the first one to start pushing for professional gender training with very clear tools and a focused curriculum when you were the chair and Njoki the coordinator.

Prof. Gachukia: You know the first formal agenda training was in Nyeri. It was a very powerful gender training programme. Some of the trainees were Peter Ondieki a senior official from the Ministry of Planning. Masheti, you, and I from the University of Nairobi.

Otherwise I would have been working all day and all night. From morning I had people calling from all over the world wanting to find out how they can get a visa, whether there will be somebody to meet them at the airport and all that kind of thing. He was very involved in that. The children, the same. I don't know who I was talking to the other day, and I was talking about the time Dr. Sheila Wamahiu and the research committee wanted to undertake a social programme to sensitize organizations in girls' education and how to popularize the subject. Before I knew it, they had already contacted Suzanne (***Gachukia's daughter, a musician***), and told her to compose a song on how to promote girls' education. It was only when I was invited to the studio when I realized that Suzanne, in the company of fellow group members –Joy Mboya and Susan Matiba (Musically Speaking Band) had already composed a song titled “Send your girl child to school.” We started dancing and I thought, my goodness this is incredible!

The song was performed in front of dignitaries and presidents and was translated into about 25 African languages. Joyce Mook told me that at one time they played it at a Rockefeller Foundation board meeting and everybody stood up and started dancing. I mean, where would I have gotten that idea from? It was all due to Sheila translating, putting research into practice, and so on. I mean that kind of imagination! I wouldn't even have thought that in my own house I could have somebody who could help advance FAWE's agenda so powerfully. It was just wonderful and really good. It was really the cooperation of everybody. I only give myself credit for being able to work with everybody. You can hate me but if you are contributing, then thank you very much. We accommodated everybody who had an idea that would promote the advancement of girls and women.

Wanjiku Mbugua, a journalist, Miriam Gachago from cooperatives, and Sarah Wanjohi in the ministry of Social Services. We had support from CIDA (Canada) who sponsored a high level trainer. From Nyeri, we were able to convene other gender training and sensitization meetings involving government ministries and NGOs.

Prof. Philomena: Now you have tried, you really tried. You really helped us to connect how you moved on to work with FAWE while Njoki Wainaina and others continued with FEMNET.

Prof. Philomena: So Professor Kabira are you the one who coordinated that and formalised the professional gender training programme?

Prof. Kabira: Yes! with Njoki Wainaina, Prof. Eddah Gachukia, Rose Chege, Miriam Gachago and others who joined like Leah Wanjama, Masheti Masinjila, Peter Ondieki of Ministry of Planning, John Njoroge of Ministry of Education, Sarah Wanjohi among others.

Prof. Gachukia: Thank you very much. This is one thing that was wonderful. I will answer your last question by going back to my first comment. This guy (*pointing at her husband*) was my mentor, my intellectual companion throughout. I am sure he suffered as a result of being my companion. He was the one sent when the wild bears were thinking I was talking too much, to the left or to the right and he would defend me, or come and tell me, “You know what, you need to adjust your language.” During the planning for the 1985 UN Women’s Conference and FORUM 85’ time, people from around the world were calling all day; you know people calling from outside Kenya don’t realize the time difference. He would pick up the phone and say, “She’s sleeping” and put the phone down.

Mr Gachukia: Very important: how you organized different constituencies to come together occasionally.

Prof. Kabira: And as baba Alan said, which I witnessed, women used to come into your house and share views, even from different organizations. There were women in your house very often, just like women used to meet in Kamla Sikand and Jane Kiano's homes. Do you think women's organizations can recapture the kind of spirit that you and other women had at the time, whether it is the NWCK, FAWE, FEMNET, all those? How do you think they can recapture that kind of a spirit?

Prof. Gachukia: It is a good question. For example, as an individual, it is the humility to know that I don't know everything, and that what I want done, or what I need done, can be done, because there are so many of us who can contribute to the issue we want to focus on. Not always imagining that I am the only person who can do it. It's recognizing that if you accommodate other views, even you, the leader, will benefit. I think it's just the corporate way of thinking about issues, about organizing together. If we bring everybody together, we can achieve more. And we should continue documenting the way all these organizations adopted projects like the Green Belt Movement because it's very, very important. I don't know if that has been documented well enough for people to realize that actually, it wasn't Wangari alone. Wangari Maathai had the idea, she had the scientific knowledge and point of view, she had a lot to contribute, she was devoted, she was brilliant, she had the charisma, but on the ground, it was everybody: it was the heads of schools getting the children to bring a seedling, or getting an organization to bring seedlings to schools. It was about getting children to plant, and telling them about the benefits here in the school and at home, and the parents would buy that kind of thing very easily.

When it comes to multiplying an idea it takes all of us, not just a few people in an organization. For example, the government had promised in a development plan that they would provide water to every home by the year 2000, but where are we today? Nobody comes back to evaluate that development plan to say, “this is what we achieved, we still haven’t achieved that, or we were more successful here and it was because of ABCD.” The government does not have that kind of machinery but NGOs can do it because they’re on the ground and they’re in touch with *wananchi* directly.

Prof. Kabira: Now you can tell us how to move forward?

Prof. Kimani: First of all I want to appreciate Professor Gachukia for her good memory. As I was listening to her, I was just asking myself: who can have all these things in her head? You must be very passionate about all these things you have done.

Prof. Gachukia: I have forgotten so much. Last year I almost lost everything I couldn’t even read.

Prof. Kimani: We are very, very grateful. We have learned. I did not know how to tie Jomtien with the meeting in Ghana and the whole story on girl child education and how it came about. So we are very grateful for your time. We have captured so much.

Prof. Gachukia: Thank you. What is in this story is not just for me, it is also for you and for my mother. I am looking at these ashes in the fireplace and remembering my mother. My mother had run away from home when she heard that "Giteru" [L.S.B Leakey] had opened a school for girls. She ran away from home to go to school. She was called Wanjiku wa Bibi. This story is also for her.

The End

“What is in this story is not just for me, it is also for you and for my mother. I am looking at these ashes in the fireplace and remembering my mother. My mother had ran away from home when she heard that "Giteru" [L.S.B Leakey] had opened a school for girls. She ran away from home to go to school. She was called Wanjiku wa Bibi. This story is also for her.”

Prof Eddah Gachukia



University of Nairobi



INITIATIVES FOR WHAT WORKS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (IWWWEE)



African Women Studies Centre

University of Nairobi
African Women Studies Centre
Women's Economic Empowerment Hub
Email: awsckeny@uonbi.ac.ke; weehub@uonbi.ac.ke
P.O. Box 30197-00100, Nairobi | Kenya