In 1969, after the general elections, I was appointed as a Minister of State, Regional Cooperation in the African Region of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, having previously been a backbench member for the period 1968 to 1969, in the National Resistance Council. The Ministry was majorly responsible for the Africa Region and Middle East. I was glad that I got to work as a minister.

The period in the early eighties to mid-nineties was volatile in the African Region, especially in the Greater East African Community (GEACO). As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I returned to the Rwanda/Ossea border,非洲民族主义 regime lasted several days, the turmoil in Burundi when an election was called, the negotiations and elections in Malawi, Nkhadaye was assassinated shortly after taking office, the instability and political upheaval after the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko, and President of the then Zaïre (today the Democratic Republic of Congo) and the invasion by the Angolan forces of then Zaïre amongst many others.

This kept us Ministers of Regional Cooperation on the move in the African region, as our leaders had instructed us to do some preparatory work for their summits. At the time, my colleague Ministers in the region were Col. Jakaiya Mihoro Kikwete, Minister of Foreign Affairs, later to become President of the Republic of Tanzania (2005 – 2015); the late Hon. Nicholas Biwott from Kenya; Hon. Kakazye Musyoka, then a Minister, who later became Vice- President of Kenya (2008 – 2013).

At the local level, in Uganda, there had been only one other foreign Minister, Princess Elisabeth Bagaya Twori in the Titoive era in the 1970s. Therefore, my appointment was a surprise even to the people of Uganda. There was no induction for the Ministers; we were sworn in and went straight to work. The work involved a lot of reading to understand the nature of conflicts, relations, outstanding commitments, of the different states that we had to interact with.

My first experience of a Cabinet sitting (then held each Wednesday) was a bit dramatic as well. I entered the Cabinet room and saw an empty seat next to the Chair of the Cabinet (the President) and sat down. Very quickly, someone came to me and informed me that the seat was reserved for the Deputy Prime Minister and that the hierarchy required that junior Ministers sit very far from the Head’s Chair. Apparently, the sitting went according to hierarchy and seniority. Of course, no one had guided me on this protocol.

I went about my duties with gusto, both in and out of the country. I was not aware that my visibility and exposure were making some of our leaders uncomfortable. Returning from a meeting of the East African Community Council of Ministers in Arusha, Tanzania, in April 1998, we had agreed to simultaneously launch the Draft Treaty of East African Cooperation at 11.00 hours in Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam and Kampala.

As I was writing my speech for the launch in the early evening, my phone rang and it was said that the meeting had been cancelled. I was in a dilemma, whether to proceed with our agreed plans as Regional Minister and launch the Draft Treaty or abandon the exercise. I decided to go ahead because the launch plans had been made in three countries. When I arrived at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the staff were equally downcast and uncomfortable and did not know how to relate to me. But we nonetheless went ahead with the launch, although my heart was not in it. Because the portfolio to which I was transferred had no budget, no office and no staff, I had no work to do. However, I was also told that I needed to return the official government vehicle to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Resolving my transfer took about three months during which time I undertook several important assignments. I hardly spent a year in the Ministry of Works, nevertheless, I had just designed an aviation programme to improve the airports and aerodromes in Uganda to promote tourism and had just started a review of the Civil Aviation Regulation. Parliament was transferred to the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs to manage the legislative and other programmes in Parliament. This continued until 2001 when after the elections, I was elected Deputy Speaker of the House, where I would serve for the next ten years (2001 – 2011) before being elected as Speaker of Parliament in 2011.

Joining Parliament Being elected to Parliament in April 1989, together with 39 other women Members of Parliament, was a new experience. This was the first time that Uganda had so many women in Parliament. We brought our professional experience to the Parly – that at the time we had no Committees. Again, unlike today where Parliament organizes an induction of all new Members, we were thrown in at the deep end; we had no role models, the last woman Member of Parliament was the late Talita Odongo-Odaga who had been a (then) Deputy Director of Parliament.

I was in for greater shocks when I visited the schools. For the first time in my life, I saw school children sitting on boulders (stones) and using their knees as ‘desks’ for writing (e.g. at Panyol Primary School – Gadamwure Sub-county in Kamuli). These students would be expected to compete at the Primary Seven Leaving Exams with students in the urban areas who sat at desks and had proper chairs.

I also witnessed a signpost for ‘Yiga Primary School’ but there was not a single building at the school only several large trees. I lodged the Ugandan Ambassador to Uganda for funds to construct a girls’ dormitory that accommodated over 200 girls; and I lobbied MTN, the telecom company, to supply 100 double-decker beds for the girls. The Government of Uganda came in to construct laboratories and some classrooms.

Many students have been able to access university education through government support. In the last 7 years, my campaign and focus in addition to the above has been the provision of clean drinking water to the communities (with over 75 boreholes installed), additional classroom infrastructure to over 28 schools as well as the completion of seven classroom buildings for three sub-counties that didn’t have any infrastructure to the Uganda Ministry of Education.

I also purchased seats and desks for over 100 primary schools. It was a small drop in the ocean, taking into account the magnitude of the problem, but it was the start of positive action as a Minister of Parliament. These experiences inspired me to continue to lobby and speak to the Ministry about the need to address the status of social services in my Kamuli Constituency as well as rest of the country.

I also supported the construction of a new girls’ secondary school in my constituency to assist the children in the district in which I served to access secondary education. Today, Kamuli Girls College has grown to national status. Along the way, I lobbied the British High Commissioner to Uganda, Mr Michael Cook, who donated £650,000 to construct a girls’ dormitory that accommodated over 200 girls; and I lobbied and lobbied, the telecom company, to supply 100 double-decker beds for the girls.

The Government of Uganda came in to construct laboratories and some classrooms. Many students have been able to access university education.
engaged to facilitate the necessary changes in the Constitution, the electoral laws, as well as the party structures. I have just returned from Ghana in 2018, where I engaged the National Leaders, Speaker of Parliament, the majority and minority levels to address the appalling situation in terms of women’s representation; they will be holding elections after two years. I also had the opportunity to serve as the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians International Chair (in Women’s Regional Group – Caribbean Region, British Islands and Mediterranean Region, Canada Region) which has relatively good record for representation for women and parts of West Africa, on the same mission of improving the representation of women in Parliament at the heart of the CWP’s work.

Speakership
I served as Deputy Speaker of the Uganda Parliament from 2001 to 2011 (two terms). During that time, I also undertook a Masters Degree Course in Women’s Law at the University of Zimbabwe. This degree course and the 1st Class Diploma that preceded it gave me further exposure about the law and its social impact. I was so enthralled by the need to create awareness for women’s rights; I began by proposing to my senior female colleague to serve as a standing Committee on Women issues in Parliament. The matter was sent to the Attorney-General for advice by my senior colleague. I received the following reply from the Attorney-General: ‘was that the Committee was not necessary, and that it had nothing to do with my area of work; moreover, she advised to ‘ignore the debate.” I am however, very happy that we now have an all-women party’s caucus, that has been instrumental in crucial legislation.

In 2004, when I indicated that I wanted to contest for the top seat, there was a rebellion from within my party; I was told that my candidacy was disrupting the social and religious stability in the country as we was seeking to replace a senior Catholic in the national hierarchy! Another Member of the Party told me boldly that ‘the post of Deputy Speaker was enough for me’ and I should not expect any support. I reluctantly abandoned my campaign and waited for an opportunity after the 2011 General Elections. In February 2011, as soon as the results were declared, I went to meet the President of the country, who also happened to be the Party Chairman (National Resistance Movement Party) and briefed him on the difficulties that I faced during the last time, last but one. I was determined this time to vie for the position of Speaker of Parliament. I also went to court to seek legal redress, but was unsuccessful.

The other major achievement of my office as Speaker of Parliament was to enhance in the rules and practices that ensured that at least 40% of the leadership of the Parliamentary Committees of the House were headed by women. This was after repeated requests to the Whips to nominate women and they had declined and forwarded the names of 44 male MPs for the posts of Chair and Vice Chair of the Standing and Sectoral Committees.

During my tenure as Speaker of Parliament I have been engaged in skirmishes with the Executive and the Judiciary in my quest to promote the independence of Parliament and the doctrine of the separation of powers.

I have been dragged to court by my party in order to ‘name me’ and cease my correspondence that I would not be prepared to continue to discuss ways to increase female representation in Parliament and the country. However, in my role as DEO for the CWP, I have continued with the work that I was engaged in.

At the conclusion of my term as Speaker of Parliament, it was a unique achievement. We have intensified advocacy for women’s rights and economic rights of the population as a whole. I have also spoken out on the excessive use of force, abuse of human rights, economic rights and other issues.

Above: Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP gives a speech at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

In the aftermath of World War II, clear that they had more than an equal voice in the self-determination given their indubitable contribution to the resolution of that global conflict and the one preceding it, the colonised peoples of the world intensified their demand for freedom from the manacles and restraints of European occupation and oppression. The British Empire’s Crown Colonies in the Caribbean went from adamantly as that they would govern themselves, and Jamaica became the first of them to wrest its independence from Great Britain, on 6th August, 1962. Less than a month later, on 31st August, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was born. The men who are credited with having ushered in this new state are, quite deservedly, deeply celebrated in the Caribbean. The recognition of great renown in the region and elsewhere – Alexander Bustamente in Jamaica, Eric Williams in Trinidad and Tobago and from 1966, also Forbes Burnham in Guyana and Emel Barrow in Barbados.

In much the same way that these brave and illustrious men. It is not at all surprising that historians and commentators, even today, speak of the men named above as having led their countries to independence, in language that often seems to suggest that they accomplished this feat very nearly single-handedly.

Women in the Anglophone Caribbean are known to have been very politically active down through to the present day. According to Ann Marie Bissessar, in Challenges to Women’s Leadership in Ex-Colonial Societies; “Women’s participation took less conventional forms” compared to men. Women took part in “urban crowd actions, organised campaigns and petitions and undertaken activities congruent with women’s identities.” Bissessar writes, “generally, females were expected to provide ‘support’ rather than participate in political discussions.”

As recently as 2016, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that in Jamaica, for example, “While women often make up the majority of party membership, they perform low-level jobs as held and election workers and campaigners that seldom translate into leadership positions,” and that, “Even after being elected to Parliament, women struggle to take leadership positions. In the last Jamaican Parliament, no Committees were headed by women.

In 1901, Catherine McKenzie spoke to the People’s Convention Congress about women’s rights, and in 1938, Audrey Jeffers was...