



Among (right) interacting with some citizens



Among meeting women Members of Parliament from Sierra Leone with the Prime Minister, Robinah Nabbanja

HOW AMONG WEARS

By Vision Reporter

Anita Annet Among is the second female Deputy Speaker in the history of Uganda's Parliament, after Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga, who served in the same position for two terms before rising to the position of Speaker for another two terms. As we mark Women's Day, Among is currently shouldering responsibilities for both positions, yet keen on ensuring that Parliament delivers on its mandate.

On March 1 – a bright Tuesday morning, Among, also Bukedea District Woman Representative, walks into her office at Parliament House.

The two waiting rooms, the boardroom and the adjacent offices that house her staff are all filled to capacity, the crowd ranging from Members of Parliament to other citizens from all walks of life.

Among wears a smile as she says hello to those she finds along the way and walks into her office, flanked by her Aide-De-Camp.

As she settles at her desk, several staff are standing in the office, waiting to give her briefs on different issues as her mobile phones and the office line ring endlessly. She has to juggle between the phone calls and the briefings.

TIGHT SCHEDULE

A busy day awaits her – she has to meet the guests, handle Parliamentary business and prepare to chair proceedings of

the House at 2:00pm and this forms part of her daily routine. It has been a tough welcome for her on the job. Shortly after being elected as Deputy Speaker, her boss, the Speaker of Parliament, took leave from office and she had to take on the mantle of running the legislative assembly.

"I prayed to God to be Deputy Speaker; I did not ask for two offices at the same time," she jokes as a guest is ushered into her office.

Asked about how she plans to handle the affairs of the institution together with the Speaker in order to avoid any tension between the two offices, Among smiles and then, in a serious tone, says: "There is one boss in this building and that is the Rt Hon. Jacob Oulanyah."

"We agreed from the word go that we would not waste time on useless fights, but focus on working to make our country better. We have lived to that promise," Among notes.

She says they agreed that they would work on rotational basis with one Speaker taking lead at a given time.

"Jacob is principled and a man of his word; that is why you have not heard about rumblings within the august House," she adds.

GRASSROOTS APPROACH

Among says since the elections for the leadership of the House, they have focused more on taking Parliament to the people and interacting with citizens at the grassroots.

"I am sure you have seen

BILLS

THERE IS A HIGH LIKELIHOOD THAT WITHIN THE FIRST YEAR OF THE 11TH PARLIAMENT, THE HOUSE WILL HAVE TRANSACTED MORE BUSINESS THAN ANY OTHER PARLIAMENT IN UGANDA'S HISTORY IN A SINGLE YEAR

Rt Hon. Oulanyah and myself in Busoga and other parts of the country, interacting with communities and listening to them. It is only when you know what the people want that you can properly address their needs."

Among says staying in Kampala means that many times one misses what is happening to the people in the countryside – the reason she is passionate about the oversight work in the villages.

When asked about her work method, Among says she believes in consensus building, even in legislation, so that Parliament and country, by extension is not polarised.

"Many times when Bills are in their early stages, I encourage the two sides of the House and the independents to engage on

the contentious clauses so that national interest takes centre stage. Many times, this has helped to lessen the tension in the House."

FOCUS ON CAPABILITY

Asked about what it takes for a woman leader to run Parliament, the Deputy Speaker says world over, women are taking their rightful places at the leadership table and Uganda is not an exception.

"Our country needs to focus on capabilities rather than gender. As leaders, we need to create an environment in which women are able to realise their full potential."

"As leaders in Parliament, we understand the fact that all our legislative reforms must place women and young people at the centre. That is why when we were considering Bills like the Mining and Minerals Bill, the Succession (Amendment) Bill and the many other motions, the issues that affect women were given thorough scrutiny, so that they are not left out of the places that matter," she notes.

Among says as a woman leader, her door is always open to all actors willing to share ideas on how best "we can make the country a better place for all."

Among, however, says as attention is given to the issues that affect the girl child, the boys need to be adequately prepared to fit in a world where they can co-exist peacefully with the girls and look at them as equals.

She adds that Parliament has to deal with the issues that affect the well-being of women.

Speaking during plenary on March 3, Among noted with concern that many women are still losing lives during child birth because of the absence of experts to attend to them. She argued that Government and Parliament need to do what is necessary to address the gaps in the health sector, especially the dangers that mothers face daily.

Among believes that attention needs to be paid to how women can become major players in the economy.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Among says all government initiatives, including the Parish Development Model, need to have special components that address specific needs of the women.

According to the Deputy Speaker, at planning level, deliberate efforts must be made to address women-specific issues. Among adds that in the few months she has been in charge, the legislature has had a candid conversation about other issues affecting women and the girl child, including female genital mutilation, which she says needs to be dealt with as matter of urgency.

As the country gears up for the final stage of the budget cycle, Among asks MPs to pay keen attention to the critical areas that need funding, asking the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association to take stock of the issues that concern women.

She says women took a bigger punch from the COVID-19 pandemic and all recovery efforts



Among (fourth-right) with Bishop Raphael Wokorach of Nebbi Diocese (fourth-left), members of the clergy and Hon. Lucy Akello

MANY HATS

must put that into consideration.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Among says the President and the NRM Government must be credited for creating an environment that has enabled transformation of women.

She says the President should be lauded for leading by example when deploying leaders to different positions.

"We cannot take it for granted that our Vice-President, Prime Minister and two Deputy Prime Ministers and several ministers and other sector leaders, are women."

Among says the country also owes a vote of gratitude to all the trailblazers who opened the way for women empowerment.

She says it is the work of such women which paved the way for her and others, to rise to the top leadership positions in the country.

NEW RECORD

Perhaps owing to her academic background and having achieved so much at a relatively young age, Among is determined to set new records for Parliament in terms of transacting business swiftly.

Among first earned national recognition in 2012 when, to the shock of many, defeated high sounding Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) stalwarts who included Salaamu Musumba, Augustine Ruzindana, Christopher Kibananga, John Kazoora and Ingrid Turinawe, to become the party's flag-bearer for the East African Legislative Assembly.

Among was, however, unable to go through when Parliament voted

BRIEF PROFILE

Born in rural Bukedea on November 23, 1973, Anita Annet Among says she shares her life story with girls at every opportunity to encourage them that with determination, they can achieve their potential.

The Deputy Speaker is an accountant and lawyer by profession. Among believes in sharing whatever she has with the community because coming from a humble background where life was a struggle, she knows what it means to lack.

In the 10th Parliament (2016-2021), Among, who had come to Parliament as an independent, served as the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Commissions, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises.

Among graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration in 2005 and in 2008, was awarded a Master of Business Administration by Makerere University.

It is also important to note that having noticed the importance of law in parliamentary work and political leadership in general, Among in recent years went back to study. In 2018, she graduated with a Bachelor of Laws from Kampala International University.

She briefly served as a senior lecturer at Makerere University Business School and Kampala International University.

In what could arguably make her an outstanding role model in never giving up on big dreams, Among, for two parliamentary election cycles – in 2007, when Bukedea district was created, and 2011 – lost the District Woman Representative seat to Rose Akol of the National Resistance Movement political party. When she contested for the third time as an independent in 2016, she won.

because the ruling NRM party at that time, decided to isolate FDC and backed candidates for the Democratic Party and Uganda People's Congress.

Among later joined the ruling party and, while contesting for the Bukedea District Woman Representative in 2021, she went through unopposed as the NRM flag-bearer.

The Deputy Speaker has presided over most of the Parliament sessions and has repeatedly directed committees to expeditiously transact assignments as part of her efforts of ensuring Parliament gets to greater heights in performance.

BILLS AND REPORTS

Within just eight months of the 11th Parliament, so many Bills and reports have been debated and approved by Parliament.

There is a high likelihood that within the first year of the 11th Parliament, the House will have transacted more business than any other Parliament in Uganda's history has ever done in a single year.

In the past Parliaments, there was a culture of committees taking ages to finalise Bills and other assignments given to them, which Among, with guidance from Speaker Jacob Oulanyah, has stopped.



Among appreciates women who have enabled her to get to top leadership