

SCALING HEIGHTS: WOMEN WHO SHATTERED BARRIERS

BY JOSEPH BATTE

For generations, African society decided where a woman belonged – somewhere in the kitchen, supportive but silent. Her role was to clap for her husband's success, not to build her own.

Yet as we mark International Women's Day on March 8, we are reminded of the courageous women who refused to be confined by those expectations. Over the years, some have torn that curtain down; not with rebellion, but with brilliance. They stepped out carrying the names of their husbands or fathers like family property and polished those names until they sparkled in Uganda's history books.

DR SPECIOZA WANDIRA KAZIBWE: THE SURGEON WHO MADE UGANDA SMILE

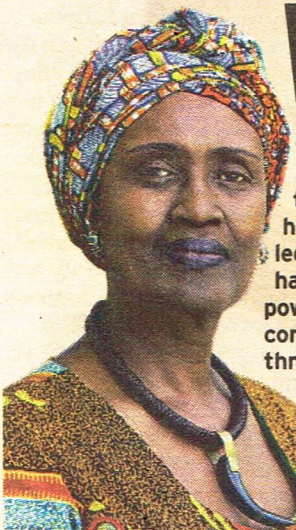
Specioza Wandira Kazibwe broke the glass ceiling. In 1994, she became Africa's first female vice-president, a moment that lit up both Uganda and her hometown, Iganga.

Before politics, she was a surgeon. Married to civil engineer Charles Kazibwe, she carried the Kazibwe name into rooms it had never been before. "That's my Wandira," Charles would proudly say whenever she appeared on TV addressing a crowd.

Their love story ended painfully with her filing for divorce in 2002, citing domestic violence. But by then, the Kazibwe name had already become a symbol of courage, intellect and determination.



BYANYIMA: DIPLOMAT WHO GAVE ACTIVISM A FACE



Winnie Byanyima's life reads like a novel. One that starts in the green hills of Mbarara district and stretches to the glass towers of New York.

An aeronautical engineer-turned-diplomat, Byanyima heads UNAIDS and once led Oxfam International. She has walked the halls of global power with the same steady confidence she had walking through Makerere's dusty lecture blocks.

Her activism was homegrown. Her father, Boniface Byanyima, chaired the

Democratic Party; her mother, Gertrude, taught her to speak up.

Married to Dr. Kizza Besigye, Uganda's most unrelenting opposition leader, Winnie didn't just carry her father's name; she elevated her husband's too. While Besigye fought for democracy at home, Winnie championed equality and justice abroad.

From *TIME*'s 100 Most Influential People list to world summits, Winnie is a rare woman who can challenge presidents by day and send a love message to her husband by night.

1994

Year when Kazibwe became Africa's first female vice-president

10

Number of years Kadaga was Speaker of Parliament.



JANET MUSEVENI: THE POWER BEHIND AND BESIDE THE THRONE

She has stood beside President Yoweri Museveni for nearly forty years and turned the title of "First Lady" into a full-time national assignment.

She could have easily spent her days in State House luxury, but instead, she hit the road running, founding schools and visiting rural communities. She also started the Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO). Later, she traded her charity hat for a political one, serving as a Member of Parliament and Minister of Education and Sports.

Her husband's name might be tied to politics, but Janet added to it a layer of compassion and service. In her hands, 'Museveni' became more than a surname. It became a brand with a heart.

REBECCA KADAGA: THE VOICE THAT COMMANDED THE HOUSE

Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga did not need to shout to be heard. Her calm, firm voice could slice through parliamentary noise like a knife through cake.

Born in 1956 in Kamuli district, she grew up under the watchful eye of her father, George Wilson Kadaga Madali, a teacher who believed that discipline and education were better than excuses. Rebecca followed that wisdom straight into law school at Makerere, then honed her craft at the Law Development Centre and later in Zimbabwe.

She became Uganda's first female Speaker of Parliament in 2011 and for 10 years, she ruled the House with a blend of steel and warmth.

Now, as First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for East African Community Affairs, Kadaga continues to lead with poise. Although deceased, her father must be smiling.



MARIA KIWANUKA: ELEGANCE MEETS ECONOMIC POWER

Maria Kiwanuka does not just balance the books; she balances life itself. When she married industrialist Mohan Kiwanuka, she could have stayed in his shadow. Instead, she turned his name into a symbol of modern-day economic grace.

Before becoming Uganda's minister of finance in 2011, Maria was already a business powerhouse, running Radio One and Akaboozi FM with precision. She had cut her teeth at the World Bank, crunching numbers for Asia and Africa, before returning home.

Today, she mentors entrepreneurs, while sitting on major boards.

