

BY KITHURE MWINGIWA

NASTY memories of political interference by corrupt bigwigs still linger in her mind. But she has learnt not to let the past worry her, although the malevolent and vindictive ghosts of corruption still stalk her.

Evelyn Karungari Mungai, a founder member of the Transparency International (TI) Kenya chapter and its second chairman after Joe Warjui, has stepped on countless toes of powerful individuals during the course of her delicate work of exposing graft.

Eve, as she is commonly known, will be stoking political trouble because she has put Paul Muite, the immediate former Kabete Constituency MP and other politicians in the area on caustic notice; give way or she will whitewash them on December 27.

Influential people

Eve was born in Cura Village, Klamubu. She says in the 10 years she has worked for TI she has been in the thick of things.

"It was a challenging undertaking. Dealing with sensitive documents on insensible but influential people and having a duty to tear their images and characters apart in the full glare of local and international media was not easy," she says.

Prior to her resignation last year together with other TI Board members, corruption had assumed alarming proportions. "I left when the Government was sinking under grand sleaze and the Anglo Leasing scandal was then threatening to bring the Kibaki Administration to its knees. And TI was not helping the State in any way by frequently releasing Press statements and the TI Corruption Index that obviously irked many in the ruling clique," Eve recalls.

Her tenure, she says, was one of her most challenging times. In some quarters, she recalls, the TI Board was perceived as partisan and sympathizers of the Kibaki regime. "Pressure was mounting on us from donors, civil society, the public and media. We were accused of bias and not being objective," she says.

But how did Eve end up at TI? "You can't run away from your brainchild. I was part of the team that founded the organization," she says. Just before she called it a day at TI she knew Parliament would be her next destination.

Eve graduated from Kianda College in 1962. Her industrious nature can be traced back to her working years at the then East African Common Services Organization, the precursor to the original East African Community.

Eve is an adventurous go-getter who in

Anti-graft crusader puts Muite on notice

1970 started a personnel selection agency, the first in Kenya. "It was baptism by fire, but I excelled, fueled by the burning desire to prove to skeptics that it was possible to succeed against all odds," she remembers.

She was young and had married Arthur Waitaha, now deceased. "Our marriage lasted 15 years and together we got a son and a daughter who are now both grown ups and employed," she says.

In 1976, Eve founded the first school of design in East Africa—the Evelyn College of Design. She wants to be Kabete's next MP because she thinks her experience as a civil servant and private investor will help to transform the electorate into an economically independent community.

Her experience at TI, she says, has equipped her with resilience, understanding, lobbying skills and problem-solving strategies.

"I know politics is a dirty game characterized by unnecessary publicity stunts, melodramatic theatrics and non-issues. But I am sure there exists a way of operating beyond this," she says.

But she regrets that her work at TI was affected by the web of national politics. "It's unfortunate that everything in Kenya is screened

through political lenses."

Asked whether she is really ready to lock horns with the populist Muite and other wealthy politicians, she replies philosophically: "Politics is like sniffing tobacco. You must be prepared to sneeze!"

Cavalcade of achievements

She believes the support she gets from Mike Eldon, her husband in a second marriage, is enough to push her through. "He's a very supportive husband. I have his full blessings in my looming political battles," she says proudly.

Eve has a cavalcade of achievements. She has been awarded the Lincoln University President's Award for Excellence in Business and Finance. She was once the chairperson of the Nairobi Business and Professional Women's Club and vice-chairman of the African Business Roundtable, which is chaired by the President of the African Development Bank.

Eve is also a member of her Board of Advisors for the Africa Project Development Facility, which is part of the International Finance Corporation, the private sector development arm of the World Bank, and a founder member of the powerful Nairobi Central Business District Association.

She is a trustee of the President's Award Scheme, and chairs its fund raising

committee. Recently, she ventured into the world of property markets, as the chairperson of Speedway Investments.

One of her greatest moments of joy and stardom is when she was garlanded by the Head of State in 2005. She was honoured by being awarded the Order of the Grand Warrior (OGW) by President Mwai Kibaki in recognition of her numerous and significant contributions to national development.

She is also a gender activist of sorts. "I know a lot about women. I know their fears and aspirations," Eve says. She is the author of *Kenya Women Reflections*, a book celebrating the women who were prominent in the independence struggle.

In her village Eve is known for introducing tissue culture banana farming, transforming the lives of many families. Women make great leaders, she says, and proceeds to name her great grandmother, Wanjiru Rara, who, she says, once owned the land on which the legendary Norfolk Hotel stands, as her greatest role model.

"She was an astute entrepreneur. Hardworking and God-fearing. Although she was finally deprived of her land by a colonialist called colonel Grogan, her fighting spirits and success as a single mother speak volumes about her steel-like characters," Eve says fondly of her mother.

Eve knows only too well that venturing into politics, especially for a woman, is laden with many dangers. "As a woman a sharp streak of fear often strikes my heart when campaign violence or political goons are mentioned. But it's a match which is unstoppable and anyone who fears to venture never wins," she says.

She also knows financing campaigns is not child's play, especially in Kabete where many powerful rich men are in the race. But she has a few friends who have pledged to bail her out—just in case.



GOLDENQUOTE

Giving hungry people computers is kind of a sick joke. But why are these people poor? Why don't they have electricity or water?

Kamau blogger