

HOW AMONG ENDED UP UNOPPOSED IN BUKEDEA

By Vision Reporters

A decisive turning point in the political journey of Anita Among came in 2020 when she defected from the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) to the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM), firmly aligning herself with the country's political establishment.

Her rise began reshaping the political landscape in Teso after she defeated former Internal Affairs minister Rose Akol Okullu in the 2016 elections.

However, Among's political dominance became more pronounced during the highly-contested 2021 electoral period when she was declared unopposed as Bukedea district Woman Member of Parliament.

One of the earliest figures affected by the unfolding political contest was Hellen Akol Odeke, who had expressed interest in challenging Among for the parliamentary seat. Before the nomination process could gain momentum, Akol was arrested on allegations of operating an illegal clinic and selling government drugs, accusations that dented her public image.

Although she was later released before court could pronounce itself on the matter, the political damage had taken its toll. Nevertheless, Akol remained active in politics.

When the Electoral Commission (EC) reopened nominations for the 2026 elections, Akol returned for another attempt. She was joined by FDC's Norma Suzan Okedi and National Unity Platform's (NUP) Florence Asio. However, none of the three appeared on the final nomination list.

The controversy surrounding the race deepened after Asio reportedly disappeared before resurfacing days later, claiming she had withdrawn from the contest following pressure from her family.

Among later publicly alleged that senior figures in NUP had fronted Asio, whom she described as her relative, to contest against her wishes. The party subsequently introduced another candidate, Mercy Alupo, but her nomination bid also collapsed.

In the end, Akol, Okedi and Alupo all had their names removed from the national voters' register after parish tribunals ruled that they were not bonafide residents of Bukedea district.

What outwardly appeared to be a seamless political triumph for Among later evolved into



Justice Kinobe



Norma Okedi



Hellen Akol



Mercy Alupo

one of eastern Uganda's most disputed electoral episodes. Courtroom battles and EC rulings became central to the Bukedea district Woman MP race.

Election records and media reports indicated that several aspirants had expressed interest in challenging Among's candidature, but many did not make it on the nomination list.

Despite the controversies, Among's political stature continued to rise. On May 24, 2021, she was elected Deputy Speaker of Parliament in the 11th Parliament after securing 415 votes, defeating Yusuf Nsubambi, who garnered 35 votes and Muhammad Nsereko, who received 24 votes.

Following the death of Speaker Jacob Oulanyah in March 2022, Among was elected Speaker of Parliament, while Thomas Tayebwa succeeded her as Deputy Speaker.

COURT BATTLES

But behind Among's uncontested victory as Bukedea Woman MP lay a bitter legal battle, controversial judicial orders, and an appellate court rebuke that exposed cracks in Uganda's electoral justice system.

In 2021, Bukedea voter Umar Okodel petitioned the High Court in Soroti to block Hellen Odeke Akol's nomination, citing inconsistencies in her name.

Subsequently, Justice Wilson Masalu Musene (now deceased) issued an order restraining EC from nominating Akol for the Bukedea Woman MP seat and Among cruised into Parliament uncontested.

FIGHTING BACK

Determined to fight back, Akol challenged the decision in the Court of Appeal, arguing that the discrepancies cited by the petitioner were baseless.

In a scathing judgment, Justices Catherine Bamugemereire, Stephen Musota and Muzamiru Mutangula Kibedi

Among's rise began reshaping the political landscape in Teso after she defeated former internal affairs minister Rose Akol Okullu in the 2016 elections.

condemned the trial judge who handled the matter. The trio have all since been elevated to the Supreme Court.

The justices ruled that there was no discrepancy between the names "Akol Hellen" and "Akol Hellen Odeke," describing the disqualification as bizarre and unjustified.

"I find that it was erroneous for the trial judge to find as he did. The decision of the trial judge led to Akol getting disqualified in a bizarre manner," Bamugemereire ruled.

The appellate court ruled that the names referred to the same individual and faulted the process that blocked Akol's nomination.

However, despite criticising the trial judge, the justices declined to issue an order compelling EC to degazette the declaration of Among as an unopposed candidate, noting that it would affect a person who was a non-party to the court proceedings and who had not been accorded a hearing.

The court held that granting the orders sought would have been in breach of and derogation from the right to a fair hearing enshrined in the

Constitution.

The court, instead ordered petitioner Okodel, whose application had resulted in the injunction, to pay Akol's legal costs.

Akol was represented by lawyers Jude Byamukama and Desire Mulindwa Muwonge; while Okodel was represented by lawyers Caleb Alaka and Alex Kamukama, who held brief for counsel Joseph Kyazze.

SUPREME COURT

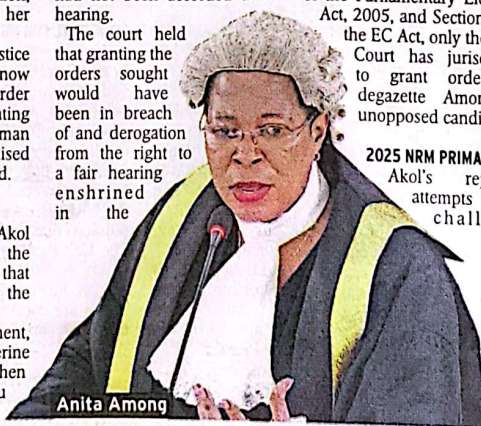
The Supreme Court upheld the decision of the appellate court, but dismissed the appeal with no orders to cost. The justices stated that granting orders to degazette Among as an unopposed candidate would occasion a miscarriage of justice to her, who was not a party to the suit.

Justices Alfonso Owiny-Dollo (retired), Faith Mwendha, Percy Tuhaize, Mike Chibita and Elizabeth Musoke explained that under the provisions of Section 14 and 16 of the Parliamentary Elections Act, 2005, and Section 15 of the EC Act, only the High Court has jurisdiction to grant orders to degazette Among as unopposed candidate.

The court heard that the orders sought would have been in breach of and derogation from the right to a fair hearing enshrined in the

2025 NRM PRIMARIES

Akol's repeated attempts to challenge



Anita Among

AMONG'S RIVALS SPEAK OUT

Speaking to New Vision after joint security agencies launched investigations into Among over allegations including corruption, money laundering and abuse of office, Hellen Akol Odeke said the developments had left her emotional, not triumphant.

"As a sister, I'm not going to celebrate. What has happened has brought shame to the women of Teso," Akol said during a telephone interview.

Norma Suzan Okedi, another aspirant, said she still struggles to understand how her political ambitions collapsed, despite fulfilling the required procedures.

"We could not even access the EC offices after making appointments," she alleged.

Okedi recalled arriving for nominations only to be informed that the Internet system had suddenly failed shortly after Among had been nominated.

Okedi had already paid the sh3m nomination fee, which has never been refunded.

She said her attempts to seek clarification from the EC yielded no response, pushing her to court.

However, even there, Okedi says she felt abandoned by the justice system.

"The court heard the case when I was not present and in the absence of my lawyer," she said.

For Mercy Alupo, the emotional scars remain too deep for forgiveness. "I wasted my time, resources and emotionally I became drained. Forgiveness is not something easy for me right now," she said.

administrative remedies.

In the end, all of Among's opponents were struck off the voters' register, making them ineligible to run against her.