

Women blocked from challenging outgoing Speaker of Parliament speak IS AMONG'S BUKEDEA DISTRICT WOMAN MP SEAT IN THE BALANCE?

BY VISION REPORTER

For years, Bukedea district stood as a symbol of political dominance by Anita Annet Among, a woman whose meteoric rise from district politics to the speakership of Parliament inspired admiration among supporters and fear among opponents.

But behind the image of political strength, three women who attempted to challenge her now say they were silenced, frustrated and emotionally crushed by what they describe as a system designed to protect one powerful individual.

Bukedea first drew national attention during the 2021 general election, when Among sailed through unopposed to retain her parliamentary seat. Her earlier victory over former internal affairs minister Rose Akol Okullu in 2016 had already shaken the political landscape in Teso, but going unopposed elevated her influence to unprecedented levels.

Yet, as celebrations filled her camp, another story quietly unfolded in the shadows; one of arrests, intimidation claims, blocked nominations and women who say they were denied the democratic right to compete.

One of the earliest casualties was Hellen Akol Odeke, who had shown interest in contesting against Among in 2021. Before nominations could gather momentum, Akol was arrested on allegations of operating an illegal clinic and selling government drugs.

The arrest badly damaged her public image. Months later, she was released before court could pronounce itself on the matter, but by then the political damage had already been done. Still, she refused to disappear from politics.

When the Electoral Commission (EC) opened nominations for the 2025 elections, Akol returned for a second attempt. This time, she was joined by Suzan Norma Otai of the Forum for Democratic Change and Florence Asio of the National Unity Platform (NUP).

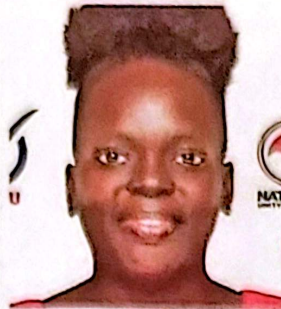
None of them made it onto the final nomination list. The controversy surrounding their exclusion deepened after Asio reportedly disappeared before resurfacing days later, saying she had withdrawn from the race due to pressure from her family.

Among later publicly claimed that senior figures in NUP had fronted Asio, whom she described as her relative, to contest against her wishes.

NUP hurriedly fronted another candidate, Mercy Alupo, but her



Akol



Alupo



Otai

nomination attempt also collapsed. Eventually, Akol, Otai and Alupo had their names removed from the national voters' register after parish tribunals ruled that they were not bona fide residents of Bukedea.

In affidavits filed before the High Court in Kampala, EC led by Justice Simon Byabakama defended the deletions, arguing that the parish tribunals had acted within the law.

But the matter became even more politically explosive after it emerged that the petition seeking to block the women had been filed by Zipporah Akol, Among's sister and personal assistant.

WOUNDS OF THE PAST

For the women who were locked out, the wounds remain fresh.

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

"As a sister, I am not going to celebrate," Hellen Akol said during a telephone interview.

"My advice to Anita is to repent and give her life to Christ. What has happened has brought shame to the women of Teso."

Hellen Akol, now a housewife, spoke with visible pain as she reflected on how she believes

power was used against her.

She accused several leaders, including Bukedea resident district commissioner (RDC), Wilberforce Tukei, of falsely claiming before President Yoweri Museveni that she was not a genuine resident of Bukedea.

"Our land borders that of RDC Tukei, yet they stood before the President and said I am not from Bukedea," she said.

"I chose not to argue. As a Christian, I decided to leave everything to God."

Despite the bitterness, Hellen Akol insists she finds comfort in what she describes as "the truth finally coming out".

"My only joy is that the truth has reached its destination," she said.

Otai, another blocked aspirant,

said she still struggles to understand how her political ambitions collapsed despite fulfilling the required procedures.

"Among is the one who blocked my nomination," she alleged.

"She used her power to stop us. We could not even access the Electoral Commission offices after making appointments," Otai said.

She recalled arriving for nominations only to be informed that the internet system had suddenly failed shortly after Among had completed her own nomination earlier that morning.

As confusion unfolded, Otai had already paid the sh3m nomination fee, money she says has never been refunded.

Her attempts to seek clarification from the EC headquarters yielded no response, pushing her to court.

But even there, she said, she felt abandoned by the justice system.

"The court heard my case in my absence and in the absence of my lawyer," Otai said.

"To our surprise, Among's lawyer was present. I honestly do not know what kind of justice system we are running in Uganda," she said.

For Alupo, the emotional scars remain too deep for forgiveness.

Her voice trembled as she described months of humiliation, intimidation and emotional exhaustion.

"Humiliation was too much," Alupo said.

"I wasted my time, my resources and emotionally I became

AMONG WRITES TO PRESIDENT OVER

Embattled former Speaker of Parliament Anita Annet Among will not attend the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Central Executive Committee meeting called by party chairperson President Museveni.

In a letter to the President seen by *The Weekend Vision*, Among cited ill health and lack of transport as the reasons for her absence. She explained that she is unwell and unable to move, noting that both her private and official vehicles have been withdrawn, leaving her without means of transport. Despite her inability to attend, Among emphasised in the letter that she will abide by the resolutions of the CEC.

drained. Forgiveness is not something easy for me right now. She paused before adding: "Maybe with time, I will heal and forgive. But for now, the only forgiveness I want is a by-election."

Like Akol, Alupo accused Among of denying her identity before God and before the people of Bukedea.

"My father comes from Kachumbala and my mother from Kidongole," she said.

"Between Among and my parents, who knows my origin better?"

To Alupo, the issue is bigger than politics.

"It is wrong for leaders to suppress opponents," she said.

Now, with investigations tightening around Among's political future, the voices of the women once pushed to the margins are returning to the centre of public debate.

For years, they say they were dismissed as weak challengers fighting an impossible battle against one of Uganda's most influential politicians.

Today, they insist their struggle was never simply about winning an election. It was about being allowed to stand.



Among