

[News](#)
[Editorials](#)
[Sports](#)
[Business](#)
[School Times](#)
[Magazine](#)
[Insight](#)
[Letters](#)
[Cartoons](#)

Social Scenes

By LUCY ANAYA

In love with prisons

Her efforts saw the Langata Women's prison scoop the Human Rights Awards for the best prison in Kenya. She is highly ranked in the prison sector and now she is in charge of Mombasa's Shimo la Tewa Men's Maximum prison. Wanini Kireri is her name and she does not mind speaking to us despite her interest in the prison games from which we have plucked her. TRENDS' LUCY ANAYA has pulled her into this dialogue:

What really is your job description?

Wanini: I am the Assistant Commissioner of Prisons in the country.

Which entails?

Wanini: Administrative duties at the prison and rehabilitation of inmates. I am also in charge of Shimo la Tewa Maximum Men's Prison. Earlier, I worked at the Langata Women's Maximum prison.

What difference have you noticed between female and male prisoners?

Wanini: Female inmates talk about general issues like children, family and basically what they left behind. Men on the other hand are very aggressive when agitating for certain issues. When there is delay in their cases they will complain. They also complain about food, accommodation and other issues pertaining to judiciary.

Do you enjoy working with male prisoners?

Wanini: It is interesting! Initially prisoners were so excited I could not walk around without tight security. With time, most started asking me to do for them what I did in Langa'ta. Now I'm adapted to the environment and I walk under security of only two guards.

How are prisoners categorized?

Wanini: There are those referred to as lifers. These are meant to serve life sentence. Others are on death row, long sentence, short sentence though we send them to open prisons. We also have remandees awaiting trial.

What is the highest crime committed in this country?

Wanini: I am not in a position to answer that, especially based on the kind of inmates we keep here. Any maximum prison cuts along different cases ranging from murder, robbery, petty offences and many more.

How have you handled cases of homosexuality and sodomy in the male prisons?

Wanini: That is discreet. Its a very delicate issue and I cannot talk much about it. It is something done in secrecy. The guards move up and down throughout the night but they cannot be everywhere to know what is happening and be in a position to tell who the culprits are. But in case I get to hear such, I would handle it like any other indiscipline case in prison.

For how long have you been in this profession?

Wanini: Twenty four years. I have been rising through ranks from Chief officer II Cadet, Chief officer I, superintendent of Prisons, Senior Superintendent and now Assistant Commissioner of Prisons.

What have you achieved in the prison department?

Wanini: My biggest achievement has been bringing reforms to prisons. Whatever I did at Langa'ta Women's Prison left me satisfied because I worked on humanitarian grounds.

Was this what you always wanted to be?

Wanini: Not really, I always wanted to be an air hostess. Every time I board KQ, I admire air hostesses. I hold a higher diploma in Psychology, counselling and currently doing my masters.

What are the common challenges you face in your job?

Wanini: Inadequate facilities. Currently the prison has a population of more than 2,000 inmates and the facilities are old and less. Prisoners lack beddings and even uniforms.

Who is the right person to approach over congestion in prisons?

Wanini: Congestion is in every prison and we cannot blame the judiciary or police force. Don't you realise that crime rate is on the rise?

What are your future plans for the prison?

Wanini: I want to renovate the prisons to suit the standard of living of inmates. I want to eradicate idleness by involving inmates in different activities such as cultural festivals, pageants, dances, acrobats and education curriculum to make them feel at home. Mine is to leave the prison better than I found it.

How have you made your way up in this male dominated field?

Wanini: I attribute my success to my boss, Commissioner Gilbert Omondi who has been motivating women and realizing that they have potential. As officers, we also face interviews at the Public Servants' offices and I pass. Women officers have shown that they have the zeal to step where men can and I thank my boss for realizing this.

How many women are in your position in the country now?

Wanini: Currently five women are heading male prisons and one is Provincial commandant of Prison Nairobi area. We would still be very proud if we are given other positions.

How do other women perceive you?

Wanini: Many appreciate and encourage me. Some tell me they have read and heard about me and this makes me feel I'm on the right track.

What has your job done for you as an individual?

Wanini: This job has nurtured my individuality and made me excel in my career and personal life.

Are you married?

Wanini: No, I'm not. I am a single mother of one Ian Kireri, now a form three. I am not complaining, just comfortable.

How is your leisure time spent?

Wanini: I like being myself so I go out, enjoy myself, and when I'm at the Coast I go to the beach. Mugithi dance is one my favourites. I also visit relatives.

Go

Copyright © 2006 Times News Services Ltd. All rights reserved.