

## Too old? Just don't mention age in Funyula

By OUMA WANZALA, Busia August 2007

Wrangling in the Orange Democratic Movement-Kenya is giving Vice-President Moody Awori a life line in Funyula constituency. The VP has coined a new slogan — *Ielo luno muli nafue* — meaning Awori and Kibaki, today is the day, are you with us?

He is going around holding harambees for schools and churches in a renewed flashy campaign to drum up support for himself and President Kibaki — thanks to the on-going confusion in ODM-K. When the *Sunday Nation* kicked off this series with Funyula last March, the VP's rating was so low; even his critics had begun celebrating his possible exit. Now, he is in the constituency every weekend.

Then came last week's shifting of alliances by Dr Julia Ojiambo. By welcoming ODM-K presidential aspirant Mr Kalonzo Musyoka to her Labour Party of Kenya. Dr Ojiambo, was seen as running away from another Mr Raila Odinga who is the pillar of the Orange group. She is herself an ODM-K presidential hopeful. If there is any politician Dr Ojiambo needs to win the Funyula seat, it is Mr Odinga.

Uncle Moody, as Mr Awori is popularly known, has moved fast to capitalise on Dr Ojiambo's blunder. He is back with his *Ielo luno* clarion call whipping up support towards the homestretch. But the VP should still expect stiff competition from his arch-rival Dr Paul Otuoma.

Others are Mr Edward Mudibo, formerly of Kenya Union of Co-operatives, Mr Levis Majale, who runs a chain of pharmaceutical outlets in Nairobi, Mr Patrick Afande and Mr Mathias Ogama. Mr Afande and Mr Ogama are seeking the ODM-K party ticket while Dr Ojiambo could choose to vie on her LPK ticket or line up in the ODM-K.

But it is the shifting of alliance in ODM-K that could easily boost Mr Awori's chances of retaining the seat. In the confusion, party supporters are getting disillusioned. And unless they put their houses in order soon, ODM-K leaders could squander the goodwill they enjoyed on the ground.

Mr Awori has now capitalised on the wrangles and he keeps on telling the electorate that they either choose development or retrogression. He is pleading with voters to give him another chance to complete development projects that he has initiated.

ODM-K candidates in Funyula started their campaigning on a high note. They presented a united front but later started to fight over the control of the party in the constituency, leading to two parallel offices. One side was led by Dr Ojiambo and another by the Otuoma-Ogama-Majale-Afande axis.

Mr Awori says that he is determined to re-capture the seat he snatched from Dr Ojiambo more than two decades ago and is dismissing those saying he is too old. He insists that he is still strong and energetic to have another five years. While voters may warm up to him as an individual, his biggest challenge remains on how to market his party, Narc-K and counter the ODM-K wave. ODM-K still has more supporters than Narc-K in Funyula. The VP is the latter's deputy leader.

The VP's close allies are, however, confident that even though Narc-K may not be the

party of choice in Funyula constituency the electorate may vote for Mr Awori purely as a person due to his campaign strategies that he has put in place.

Mr Awori has also the task of having to pull youths closer to him. Most of them are jobless and blame him for not assisting them to secure jobs despite his being VP. Mr Awori has changed tact as well. He is using delegations to his Funyula home to send a strong message that the VP's post is a coveted position.

He is telling his constituents to either vote for him or see the motorcade taken elsewhere in case President Kibaki wins a second term. His Cabinet colleagues who have visited Funyula constituency on many occasions have told the gatherings that if he is re-elected, Mr Awori will remain President Kibaki's principal assistant.

The VP hosted Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni recently at his Funyula residence. Mr Museveni's visit to the constituency presented an opportunity for the VP to send a strong message that his is a privileged position and that they will be seeing more of it if they give him another chance.

Mr Awori has also conducted various fund-raisers, which he uses as campaign platforms. He resorted to them when he discovered that political rallies might end up with poor turnout.

But his critics fault him on the use of CDF money. They argue that the cash has been directed to projects which have no direct bearing to the welfare of the people. For instance, they point out that some money has been used to construct an airstrip, and a court building and a stadium at Funyula trading centre.

Dr Ojiambo says she is optimistic that she will get back the seat she lost to Mr Awori in the 1983 snap elections. She is still assuring her supporters that ODM-K will remain united despite the recent re-alignments.

Mr Ogama, who has a strong presence in the constituency, could also present a strong challenge to the VP. He came second last time when he vied on a Kanu ticket. Though the ODM-K politicians have parallel offices in the constituency they still insist that they are working together. They are saying that they could back one among them to face off with Mr Awori.

Like Mr Ogama, Mr Afande insists that despite the conflicts in ODM-K the VP should prepare for a bruising battle. Dr Otuoma is also on the ground campaigning and says this time round he is not ready to lose.

Source: Nation Media