

HOW BUSH KILLED AFRICA'S DREAM

We can't trust USA when it blocks access to cheap Aids drugs

By Sandra Nyaira, Zimbabwe

It took just two hours for representatives of 144 countries meeting in Geneva to abandon the latest attempt to reach a consensus on whether the world's poorest people should get access to affordable medicine. The decision during a World Trade Organisation meeting dealt a major blow to the campaign against HIV/Aids in Africa.

It is hypocrisy of the highest order that George W. Bush, who marshalled all the resources available in his arsenal to fight Saddam Hussein, should block a deal that would have armed Africa to fight the pandemic on one of its weakest fronts. Africans are dying in droves simply because they cannot afford the anti-retrovirals – or even proper nutrition – that would keep them alive long enough to see their children into adulthood.

Against this backdrop, how can anyone take Bush's pledge of US\$15 billion to fight Aids in Africa seriously?

Bush's close links with the drugs industry were blamed for the failure of the talks aimed at securing access to cheap medicines for developing countries. The US again rejected a deal that would have loosened global patent rules to enable poor countries to import cheap versions of desperately needed drugs.

It is immoral that the United States should use its veto power to protect the lucrative patent rights enjoyed by its powerful pharmaceutical industry rather than the rights of the sick and desperate to afford

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Picture courtesy of the Nation Media Group

LOVE CONQUERS THE AGE GAP

Newlyweds 67-year-old Wambui Otieno and her 28-year-old husband Mbugua make a toast after they tied the knot. The wedding of the renowned freedom fighter and her young love created huge controversy in Kenya. Read all about it on Page 2

GHANA

Inside the agonising business of child slavery

By Christabel Addo, Ghana

WANT to buy a slave? Look no further than Ghana, where children as young as five are sold for as little as 100,000 cedis (about US\$12). They are sold to strangers right across West and Central Africa and are to be found fishing or working in the cocoa fields of Cote d'Ivoire. Unicef reports that over 200,000 children have been sold into slavery in the region.

In July 2001, the Ivorian news publishing company Knight Ridder ran a series of investigative articles that laid bare this modern day slavery racket. The articles profiled boys who had been tricked into slave labour for Ivorian cocoa farmers. Most were aged 12 to 16, though there were some as young as nine. The reports were riveting in their details of the trickery, threats and abuse associated with keeping

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MALAWI

Infected in the line of duty

By Wezi Phiri

DOROTHY Ngoma wants the government to provide nurses with free anti-retrovirals. "Nurses have a professional responsibility to care for the sick, but who will care for them?" asks the president of the Nurses Association of Malawi.

Though she has no statistics, Ngoma is certain that many of her members have been infected in the course of their work. Day in, day out, nurses here complain of lack of resources – drugs, cloth, cotton wool, nappies and gloves are constantly in short supply. "We don't even have soap at times," Ngoma says. "We suffer just like everyone else and we are also dying."

In the face of HIV/Aids, Malawi's hospitals are full to the brim. Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital is the main referral hospital in the southern region. Situated in the commercial city of Blantyre, the hospital's wards were designed to accommodate 45 to 50 beds; these days they take in 100 to 150 patients, with most sleeping on the floor.

Half these patients are critically ill and need to be bathed, turned, fed and comforted. All this work is often shared between two or three nurses, who put in eight hours of work each every day. The psychological pressure is intense, and the nurses must face this situation day after day. They must also contend with fear of accidental infection.

According to Ngoma, many of Malawi's nurses are quitting because of unfavourable working conditions as much as the poor pay.

Grace Chihana, principal of Kamuzu College of Nursing, considers it important for nurses to lobby the government for free anti-retrovirals for their infected colleagues. "Although we cannot pinpoint cases of nurses infected in the line of duty, it is important to give anti-retrovirals to those that go for voluntary testing and turn out positive," she says.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Health has no health care or risk package for nurses. Their salaries start from 4,000 kwacha (about US\$50) a month. Minister for Health Yusuf Mwawa says that the nurses' fears are valid enough to warrant a comprehensive health care programme, including care and nutrition for employees infected with the virus.

"We see our colleagues die from the disease, yet they receive no care or medication," Ngoma says.

POINT OF VIEW

Love conquers the age gap

Wambui must be admired for asserting her right to live with whoever she wants

By Grace Githaiga, Kenya

In what was billed as the marriage of the century, renowned freedom fighter Wambui Otieno married Peter Mbugua on July 11, 2003, in a lavish civil wedding. No big deal, you might say. Weddings happen daily all over Kenya. The difference: She was 67 and he was 28.

Predictably, this marriage would split both their families and the country. Controversy tends to dog Wambui, who in 1986 put up a marathon legal battle to bury her lawyer first husband against his clan. She may have lost, but she earned her place in history.

Back to the marriage. From the very moment that Wambui and Mbugua tied the knot, they became the subject of talk shows on radio stations and maintained a presence on newspaper front pages for four straight days. One comedy group even made it their prime topic of the day.

The majority of Kenyans dwell extensively on the fact that Mbugua married a "grandmother". This amounts to trivialising critical matters of the heart. What is wrong with a grandmother having a loving man around her?

Many argued that Mbugua was attracted by Wambui's wealth. The stonemason first met Wambui when he went to fix her chimney. Wambui further upset the apple cart when she said she would bequeath her wealth to her new husband. Mbugua says, however, that he was motivated by love and nothing else.

The man is over 18, I say. Where is the crisis, as long as the decision to marry was reached by two consenting adults? Society speaks vaguely of the right age for marriage. But what exactly is this right age? As one of Wambui's supporters put it, age is "just a depreciation of the body and body cells".

Wambui has the right to choose who to marry. Marriage is about companionship, not sex and age. It is a contract between two adults and an expression of love and commitment. As for age, the idea is completely irrelevant!

There are those who say that Wambui is a public figure and might therefore be sending the wrong signal to other young men. They claim that the morals of young men will be "corrupted". One clergyman even went as far as to declare the marriage "legal

public adultery". Another condemned it as unbiblical. Let the clergymen be specific and point out where in the Bible the issue of age is discussed. Moral posturing will simply not do.

Wambui had been widowed for 18 years and has a heart condition. Her children are all grown up and do not live with her. They crit-

"Marriage is about companionship, not sex. It is a contract between two adults and an expression of love and commitment. As for age, the idea is completely irrelevant!"

icised their mother's wedding but she retorted that they had abandoned her in her hour of need. Mbugua must have touched Wambui's heart by being there for her and taking care of her. Wambui has every right to leave her wealth to Mbugua – after all, he is the one tending to her needs at this point in her life.

Let Wambui's children know that their mother has her own life to lead. They should work hard for their own money and stop eyeing her wealth. They have no moral

authority to condemn her after abandoning her.

Wambui is being criticised because she went against the norm. Yet there was not a single voice of dissent when former Vice-President Michael Wamalwa tied the knot with a woman 26 years his junior. Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo of Zambia was never criticised when he "married" a Moonist half his age. Nobody raised a finger against President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe when he married Grace Marufu, who is more than half his age.

What Wambui did is revolutionary and liberating; it has given older women hope. Would it not have been immoral for Wambui to live in secrecy in this union? What she needs is understanding. At least she did not take somebody's husband and cause the other woman anguish and heartache. Older women who fear that younger husbands may be out to lay their hands on their wealth can always get them to sign prenuptial agreements.

Wambui is beyond the reach of her critics. She must be admired for asserting her right to live with whoever she wants. What more can anyone expect from life?

The shattering of Africa's dream

From Page 1

able drugs. The question that comes to mind when leaders like Bush attack tin-pot dictators like Robert Mugabe over governance issues is: "Do they really care about us or their own interests in Africa?"

Millions of Africans continue to die from a disease that has been brought under control in the US and the United Kingdom for the simple reason that Africa's needs are overlooked unless they interfere with the interests of the West.

A solution to the deadlock in the deal to accord access to cheaper drugs for poor countries like Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda and Ghana lay in America's hands. But the powerful links between Bush and the pharmaceutical companies carried the day and negotiations hit a deadlock.

WTO members had agreed more than a year ago that countries could override patent rules in the interests of public health and license local producers to copy essential drugs, but they failed to spell out how countries with no



SORRY STATE: Many African women will not live long enough to see their children grow into adults.

manufacturing capacity would gain access to the life-saving medicines.

A draft accord on imports was rejected by the US last December after immense lobbying from drug firms, which fear that relaxing the rules to allow poor countries to import generic drugs will help manu-

facturers in India and Brazil "steal" their markets. Developing countries rejected as too restrictive America's counter-proposal – limiting imports to drugs for a shortlist of diseases including HIV/Aids malaria and tuberculosis.

This failure certainly damages the WTO's reputation in Africa, especially when a Brazilian proposal to let the World Health Organisation decide which countries could import the cheap drugs was not even discussed. A South African plan that would have required countries to declare a national emergency also failed to win over the US drug industry.

Kenya's new trade minister, Mukhisa Kituyu, angrily said as the US refused to write the prescription for the world's poorest countries: "While you people are having this complicated debate, my people are dying of Aids back home in Africa."

The Geneva meeting ended without any hope for Africa. The time has come for African leaders to follow the example of Nelson Mandela, Kenneth Kaunda and Joshua Nkomo and talk openly about the

pandemic. These politicians have openly said their children and relatives have succumbed to the disease.

There are no easy answers for poor countries with small health budgets and even fewer doctors and nurses. Disease trends are shaped by human behaviour and politicians need to tell their people that prevention is better than cure.

GlaxoSmithKline's HIV drug treatment costs US\$ 12,000 a year – far beyond the poor. This even exceeds current per capita health spending in low income countries, which average \$23 per person per year, so aid from rich countries is certainly required to buy medicines to cope with such epidemics that threaten to overwhelm the nation states.

We may detest Bush for sabotaging the global talks that would have made a huge difference for Africa, but there is hope in the announcement by his administration that it would release US\$15 billion over the next five years to fight the pandemic in the developing world. The question now is: will he live up to this promise?

NIGERIA

Kerosene explosions hurt women the most

By Yinka Shokunbi

ANN BASSEY still remembers the events of October 21, 2001, with remarkable clarity. Now seven months pregnant, the 33-year-old only has to look at her scarred body to recall the explosion caused by adulterated petrol.

She recalls:

"I realised there was no kerosene in the house when I was about to prepare breakfast. I went across the street to buy a bottle and poured some into the stove, leaving a little for the lantern. I cooked without any problem and the family left for church.

"As I was about to prepare the evening meal, there was a blackout. I found the rest of the kerosene and poured it into the lantern. There was a big explosion as I struck a match. Before I knew it, I was burning all over. I had fainted by the time my neighbours rushed in to help put off the fire.

"I was at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital for three months. I was told I had suffered 50 percent burns. I am lucky to be alive. My left hand is stuck together and my fingers are so deformed that I can neither wash nor do any domestic chores. I pray that someone will come my way soon and I will get plastic surgery so I can regain the use of my hand."

Hideous injuries

Bassesey and others who suffered hideous injuries in the infernos caused by adulterated kerosene have yet to receive any compensation from the government and the oil companies. Only two of the survivors have been recommended for reconstructive surgery overseas. Though the Department of Petroleum Resources paid out some money between July 6 and 31, those whose relatives died must wait for letters of administration from the courts for their compensation to be processed.

A 2001 survey by a team from the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital showed that 75 percent of Nigerian homes use kerosene either for cooking or lighting their households. Though many city homes have electricity, they still buy kerosene because the National Electric Power Authority cannot guarantee more than six hours of power daily.

Due to high demand, getting petrol in most parts of Nigeria is akin to passing through the proverbial eye of the needle. Most of the supply is diverted from depots to street tankers rather than filling stations.

Kerosene has always been a source of discontent in this country of 120 million people.

When the government decided on June 30 this year to "sanitize" the petroleum industry by a 54 percent price rise, the Nigerian Labour Congress called a strike that was the epitome of the ugly side of life in the country.

Nigeria is renowned as a trading nation and street traders promptly mopped up the little kerosene that was available for re-sale at prices well beyond those approved, selling at 13 naira more than the official rate. Black market operators took advantage of the week-long strike to hoard kerosene, creating conditions for astronomical price rises. Nigerians were thankful for small mercies, however, when there were no accidents arising from adulterated fuel.

The fuel crisis dates back to 1998, when Nigerians woke up to massive air pollution from hazardous fumes from cars and buses that had been filled with adulterated petrol.



Olayinka Fadayomi on a hospital bed at Lagos State University Teaching Hospital.

The Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation would say only that the fuel was probably contaminated at the source of importation.

Series of explosions

In the past five years, a series of explosions have hit the country – from Lagos to Ibadan, Benin, Abuja and some parts of the north – and often occur in places where petrol pipes have been vandalised or in homes.

Though there are no precise statistics on the numbers of people who have died or been hurt in these so-called accidents, women have borne the brunt of the explosions by virtue of their domestic responsibilities. Of 200 patients admitted at the Lagos State Uni-



BETTER TIMES: Olayinka Fadayomi with her children before the kerosene explosion.

ported that Unipetrol – a Nigerian-owned oil company – should be held responsible for the distribution of tainted kerosene. Unipetrol distribution tankers had been contaminated and tankers used to supply petrol were the same ones used to deliver kerosene, thus affecting the quality.

The team recommended that Unipetrol be prosecuted and made to pay compensation to some 479 people believed to have been affected. The compensation recommended works up to about 70 million naira (\$84 million) divided into categories of \$400 to \$4000.

No responsibility

Lagos Commissioner for Health Leke Pitan has said that the government will not take responsibility for any more treatment for the survivors.

"We responded as expected in such an emergency to save lives. None of them paid for treatment as long as they went to government hospitals."

Joke Adisa, coordinator of the women's department at the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, is urging women to press for justice rather than leave the matter in the hands of men. "When they fail to fight on our behalf, we take it as an act of God," she said.

Even though many have been compensated by the Department of Petroleum Resources, which is directly supervised by the president, several questions remain unanswered: Who is responsible for their post-recovery surgery? Who should be held accountable for ensuring the safety of fuel used in the country? Should kerosene remain the major source of domestic energy?

versity Teaching Hospital, 140 were female. In Benin, 280 of the 467 people affected were female.

Explosions caused by adulterated kerosene have been reported in countries such as Ghana, Malawi, Papua New Guinea and Tanzania. According to the International Programme on Chemical Safety, kerosene turns dangerous at a flashpoint lower than 37 degrees centigrade. Nigerian authorities said this had dropped to 27 degrees where the explosions occurred. The lower the flashpoint, the more inflammable the product becomes.

Last March, an inquiry set up by the federal government and headed by Justice Ade Alabi to look into the cause of the explosions re-

EDITORIAL

Africawoman, P.O. Box 6064, Nairobi (00200) Kenya.
Tel: 254-2-2721429
Tel/Fax :254-2-2721439 / Email: africawoman@swiftkenya.com

Editor: Lucy Oriang (loriang@nation.co.ke/lucyoriang@yahoo.com)
Associate Director: Lesley Riddoch, BBC The Tan, Holyrood Road,
EH8 8JF, Scotland. (Lesley.Riddoch@bbc.co.uk)
Coordinator: Florence Machio (fmachio@yahoo.com)

Africawoman is produced by 80 women journalists from Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria who meet in a virtual newsroom once a month. The information produced is then linked to community radios throughout Africa to reach grassroot women.

Liberians do not need any more heroes

When Nigerian peace-keeping forces rode into Monrovia in August, thousands of civilians lined the streets of the Liberian capital to cheer them on. Waving white handkerchiefs and in full combat gear, they were here to put an end to the bloody battles that have left hundreds of thousands dead and millions others injured and traumatised.

The drums of war are still beating in the rural areas, however, and bands of fighters allied to the many rebel groups still unleash terror on ordinary Liberians. Former President Charles Taylor may have gone into voluntary exile in Nigeria, but this war-torn country's wounds are far from healing.

For the myriads of innocent victims of the war, the key question remains: when will the violence end? The Economic Community of West African States has promised about 3,250 troops for the peace-keeping mission. Nigeria has provided 1,500 of some 2,000 troops on the ground and 2,300 US soldiers are on the standby.

The war in this country, which Taylor himself started in 1989, has been particularly hard on women. Victimised by both government and rebel soldiers, the women of Liberia have been treated as the spoils of war. Take the case of a woman known only as Black Diamond. Only 22, she told journalists that she joined the rebel forces after being gang-raped by the notoriously indisciplined and unpaid forces loyal to Taylor in the northern Lofa county in 1999.

"There were many reasons, but that was the key one," she told Reuters. "It made me want to fight the man who caused all that, because if you are a good leader you can't behave like that."

Many of Black Diamond's female comrades have similar tales. Hundreds of thousands of other women who do not have the stomach for fighting have ended up in refugee camps or among the dead.

The West African states that have chosen to intervene in this endless nightmare are to be praised for their initiative in trying to find a homegrown solution to one of the most vicious wars to have plagued a region notorious for coup d'états. Democracy is well on its way to taking root once again in West Africa.

But there are lessons to be learnt from the US occupation of Iraq. It is one thing to get rid of a dictator gone berserk and another to bring about the cherished peace that has eluded Liberia for so long – and this despite it being the oldest independent country in Africa. Liberia came into being as a free nation in 1847 on the wings of freed slaves arriving from the US.

The challenge for Ecowas is to manage the transition in Liberia in a manner that heals the wounds and lays a solid foundation for democracy to take root. It is a task that will demand patience and a strong will on the part of the region's leaders. Bringing the warring parties to the negotiation table is difficult enough, what with the egos involved.

Disarming the many fighting factions and cleaning up the mess they have left in their wake will call for a great deal of international goodwill. And rebuilding the country's structures will take plenty of collective responsibility.

Despite its much-vaunted Shock and Awe expedition in Iraq, the US has learnt that driving away a dictator is the easy part: it is now grappling with the problem of wiping out remnants of Saddam Hussein loyalists who continue to put up a fight from within. The instability in post-war Iraq can, indeed, be said to have turned the country into a magnet for terrorists. The ripple effects are being felt in Afghanistan too.

The moral of the story is that mercy missions must be thought through carefully. Just as there is an entry policy, there must be an exit plan too. The West African peacemakers have their work cut out for them: They must disarm the warring factions as soon as possible and move quickly to set up democratic structures managed by Liberians themselves if the peace is to genuinely last. Should they fail in this, their mission will be reduced to just another Army of Occupation.

Liberians do not need any more heroes. All they need is the space to lick their wounds and rebuild their lives once and for all.

POINT OF VIEW

Too high a cost for having dinner

By Ruth Omukhango, Kenya

Desperate to arrest the decline of its economy, the Kenyan government appears to have decided to put the interests of business over worker rights in a labour dispute involving the country's Export Processing Zones.

Anticipating a freer environment with the change of government early this year, workers at several Export Processing Zones started demanding better pay and working conditions and eventually resorted to wildcat strikes to draw national attention to their plight.

But if they expected sympathy from the government, which itself rode to power on the strength of mass action marked by huge political rallies, they would be deeply disappointed. The new trade and industry minister, Mukhisa Kituyi, quickly moved to scotch the riots with his remarks that the worker revolt was "hooliganism and a primitive act of cowardice and irresponsible behaviour".

The status of workers in the EPZs was conveniently forgotten in the slanging matches between unionists and government officials anxious that the factory owners should not make good their threats to shut down.

Curiously enough, there was little to be heard from women, who comprise 70 to 90 percent of EPZs worldwide. Even though Kenyans glued to their television sets could see women workers running helter skelter during the riots, they were nowhere to be seen when

it came to addressing the Press or during the negotiations. The trade union movement in this country is top heavy with men and there are no women at all in the national leadership.

Because of the nature of their production techniques, EPZs tend to prefer women workers for their nimble fingers and diligent application to a production system that operates like a conveyor belt. About 85 percent of workers in Kenya's EPZs are women.

Mary Nduta, a casual labourer at JAR Ltd, a textile firm based about 10 kilometres outside Nairobi, says women workers go through harrowing experiences just to put food on the family table.

The mother of three narrowly escaped death after chemicals used at the factory affected her health. "We were sent to clean machines with powerful chemicals, but we were not provided with protective gear," she recalls.

Her feet soon started swelling as excess fluids accumulated in her veins. It transpired that she would need surgery, but she could not afford it and the company was unwilling to meet the costs. Ndu-

ta suffered in silence, taking herbal medicine that was infinitely cheaper. She smiles broadly, adding: "I recovered by the grace of God."

Jobs are hard to come by in a depressed economy, and she still works for JAR. "Even just a loaf of bread and a packet of milk for my children is better than nothing," she says philosophically. "I will continue working to provide for them."

Nduta's life revolves around the firm. She reports for work at 7am and leaves at 8pm. Night travel in the city is a risky affair but she chooses to walk home and save the Sh50 (US\$0.65) fare that would eat into almost half the Sh120 (US\$1.57) she earns daily.

"The only time I get to sit down is when I am on lunch break," she says. But quitting is not an option, no matter how hard the going. It took her long enough to get this job. "I was lucky to be allowed back after I fell ill. I have seen women who have never been taken back after recuperation."

Nancy Achieng, who earns Sh100 (US\$1.30) for a nine-hour day at the Sameer Group, protests that they are made to squeeze two days' worth of work

into one day. "It is like living in a different world altogether at the factory," she says. "We are not even allowed to talk to each other."

They are not allowed phone calls and risk forfeiting their day's pay should they answer mobile phone calls. With unemployment in Kenya at 40 percent, these tough conditions of work are a small price to pay.

According to the International Labour Organisation,

women in developing countries are generally paid less than men for the same work – at best, women average 50 to 80 percent of wages earned by men.

The Central Organisation of Trade Unions chief, Francis Atwoli, notes that EPZs have been out of bounds for labour inspectors. The government is, therefore, unable to ensure that labour standards and laws are respected. Unlike other workers, those in EPZ have no unions to represent their interests.

John Chifallu, spokesperson of the Export Processing Zones Authority – which provides "one-stop" service for investors – says that all the companies must comply with the Zones Act, which includes labour provisions. But when pressed to explain the terms of employment, he retorts: "You cannot ask someone how he runs his kitchen."

Other countries, such as Uganda, are keen to jump on the EPZ bandwagon in order to achieve economic growth through an export-led strategy. But African leaders must ask themselves whether mass exploitation of their people is the only way to grow their economies.

"African leaders must ask themselves whether mass exploitation of their people is the only way to grow their economies"



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Ordinary Nigerians have shown little restraint in expressing their pent-up feelings against the Obasanjos. They compare the First Lady's attitude with that of past military wives, who were accused of being co-dictators with their husbands

The First Lady Syndrome and all that jazz

By Ada Agina-Ude, Nigeria

First Lady Stella Obasanjo is on the warpath – not because of the price increases on petroleum products or even in response to the lawsuit asking her and the wives of other prominent leaders to account for money they have received for their charity projects.

She wants the wives of governors to stop calling themselves first ladies. There is only one First Lady in Nigeria. Period. Her edict came on June 24, just six days before a national strike that paralysed business and government in Nigeria. She was addressing the wives of governors of the 28 states under the ruling Peoples Democratic Party, who gathered in Abuja for training on etiquette and protocol.

None of the governors' wives has reacted in public to the directive, which has been widely interpreted here as a dangerous signal of a potential slide into civilian dictatorship. Mrs Obasanjo is not normally the voluble type, and her remarks coincided – unfortunately for the First Couple – with a time of tension for her husband, who has faced severe criticism for arbitrary and insensitive price increases.

Churning with anger at the price increases, ordinary Nigerians have shown little restraint in expressing their pent-up feelings against the Obasanjos. They compare the First Lady's attitude with that of past military wives, who were accused of being co-dictators with their husbands.

Not tactful

Mrs Obasanjo's rebuke was ill-timed for another reason: It is not tactful of her to place herself in the centre of controversy when there is a lawsuit against her, the wife of the vice-president and the wives of 22 governors in the immediate past government over funds for their charity projects.

The suit, filed in Lagos in April by human rights lawyer Chinonye Obiagwu, is asking them to "render public account of all the funds raised in their respective foundations and projects and to refund funds and properties not accounted for".

There are those who argue that she would be better off working with the governors' wives, rather than alienating them, to present a front against those who believe they are abusing their positions.

The position of First Lady has been controversial in Nigeria since 1985, when Maryam Babangida occupied it. She created an office for herself and set up what amounted to a parallel power structure alongside that of her husband Ibrahim. From that office, she controlled the wives of appointed and elected governors. She used that authority to execute her pet scheme, the Better Life for Rural Women Project.



Although Mrs Babangida made visible the First Lady position for the very first time in Nigeria, her achievements took second place when complaints were raised that too much public money was going into the project yet its accounts were never published. Other critics simply felt that she was attaching too much glamour to the position.

The widespread condemnation did not deter her successors. Maryam Abacha had her own office and launched the Family Economic Advancement Programme, which had similar goals with Mrs Babangida's, which had been renamed Better Life for Rural Dwellers.

Even Fatimah Abubakar, the career-minded wife of the military head of state who handed over to an elected government in 1999, found time to register the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative. She distanced herself from it and got more involved in her work as a judge – but not before substantial state funds were donated at the launch.

When Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired army general, assumed office in 1999 as an elected president, he said his wife would remain just that and not be known as first lady. It became clear that she had her own plans when, about a year into her husband's administration, she registered her own non-governmental organisation, the Child Care Trust Foundation, with the declared objective of supporting deprived children.

The Office of the First Lady has clearly come to stay, even though it is not provided

for in the constitution. Wives of governors have also joined the bandwagon and are hard at work on their own projects aimed at solving one social problem or another – projects that have received sympathetic media coverage despite the lawsuit.

The bad Press seems concentrated, for the time being, on Mrs Obasanjo. Pampered by the media during her husband's first tenure, her recent statement has drawn scathing comments. The governors' wives may have remained silent, but commentators across the board have not been tied down by protocol and they have let loose with a volley of criticism. There are any number of people uncomfortable with Stella Obasanjo's transformation from the president's wife to an unappointed and unelected office holder. And they are speaking out.

Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka describes the First Lady as arrogant and sarcastically refers to her as "Imperial Majesty". Writing in the *News*, a weekly magazine, on July 3, a columnist had this to say: "Mrs Obasanjo clearly has an ego bigger than those of the two Maryams. She is probably in the same league with Imelda Marcos ... and Marie Antoinette, wife of the last French Monarch."

There is no basis for comparing Mrs Obasanjo with the Maryams, given the fact that she has little influence over her husband, who is famously obstinate. Neither has she the tendency to acquire material things to the same level as Imelda Marcos.

The real problem with Mrs Obasanjo is

that, despite huge donations from private and public sources, not much is seen or heard of the work that her charity is supposed to be doing. In contrast, Rwandan First Lady Jeanette Kagame has led a high profile campaign Aids, drawing not only on local charity but also roping in other first ladies from other regions of Africa.

Opinions are divided, though, over whether or not first ladies should get involved in public work. Political scientist Okeke Anya argues that Nigerian first ladies – including the governors' wives, are "just opportunists trying to encroach on an area they have little or no knowledge of, in the main abusing the process with the use of state power".

But others feel that all Nigerian citizens should be free to carry out private and charitable work without having to account for any money involved, although there are concerns that the first ladies cannot be equated with ordinary citizens, especially since their projects receive state funds.

Centred around power

The controversy surrounding first lady charities also centre around power: Chinyere Asika, wife of the post-civil war administrator of the Igbo enclave started the Otu Olu Obodo project in 1970 to mobilise women to help rebuild schools and markets and keep the environment clean. Otu Olu Obodo did not disburse money directly, instead sending bills to local government bosses through the offices of divisional administrators. It nevertheless drew great criticism from people who believed the state administrator's wife had gone beyond her brief and assumed the position of deputy administrator.

Maryam Abacha is reputed to have continued in the same vein as Maryam Babangida, even though her husband's government indicted Mrs Babangida and took over many of her charity's assets alongside the imposing Centre for Women Development in Abuja that she had registered in her own name. With time, however, Mrs Abacha's excesses appeared greater – leading to her being accused of being an accomplice in the looting of the Treasury.

There have been suggestions that the office of first lady be streamlined and provided for in the constitution, with clear and precise laws governing how they raise and spend funds and also what should be done about financial and material gifts they may receive while in office.

But perhaps the greatest indictment of Nigerian first ladies and their pet projects is that they come and go without much to show for all the efforts and funds poured into them. For all the glitz and glamour, being first lady is a very temporary business. Will someone please point this out to Stella Obasanjo?

ZAMBIA

Incest: The campaign for justice gets under way

By Barbara Kalunga

FOLLOWING a sharp rise in incest cases, activists here have set up a campaign for harsher punishment for those who attack children in their own homes.

Less than 30 percent of reported incest cases that end up in court because the children are threatened by their attackers and their own relatives, according to Young Women's Christian Association Lusaka Regional Coordinator Lucy Masiye. Considered taboo in most African cultures, incest is no longer the hidden crime that it once was. During the first quarter of this year, for example, police received 209 complaints of child defilement, with the capital recording 146. Only 49 of these cases reached the courts.

Even then, these statistics are believed to be just the tip of the iceberg given the conspiracy of silence that usually attends incest. Families are reluctant to confront incest for fear of public humiliation and the possibility that acknowledging it may break up families.

Outside the courts

Some parents opt for compensation outside the courts – which they may consider more attractive because of the high poverty levels and the time it takes to settle matters through the court system.

Besides, there are no guarantees that justice will be done in the courts. Some insensitive judges have given an astonishing one-day jail sentence for defilement and the law is silent on instances where children are infected with sexually transmitted diseases, including

HIV/Aids. Worse still, the courts have a severe backlog of cases, leading to delays of years.

The Child Friendly Court was launched in 2001 as a pilot in Lusaka and aims to ensure that children's rights are respected in the administration of justice. It is expected to expand this year to Kitwe and Ndola in the Copperbelt and the tourist capital Livingstone.

Though Zambian law provides for a maximum life imprisonment for sexual attacks on children, this sentence is rarely handed down. "Right judges for right punishment are what we need," says Masiye. "Why should we allocate a low class judge to handle such serious cases, which leave children devastated and disturbed for life?"

Lapses in law have raised doubts about the courts' capacity for fair and just trials. Free representation by government lawyers is virtually impossible as the few lawyers in the legal aid wing are bogged down with cases in their chambers. Many of the cases cannot be sustained in court or end up being withdrawn.

According to records at the YWCA's Children in Crisis Centre, 49 percent of cases could not be prosecuted because some of the perpetrators were unknown. In some, there was no evidence to support the case and witnesses were sometimes unwilling to testify.

Child attackers therefore remain free to repeat the offence, especially since the majority of perpetrators are bailed out soon after arrest. Despite a high profile campaign, however, judges find themselves held back by professional limitations.

MALAWI

Netball team gets the short end of the stick

By Pilirani Semu-Banda

LONG neglected and under-funded, Malawi's sportswomen face a dilemma – they can continue to soldier on under their own steam or find international sponsors if they are to be all that they can be.

The situation is so desperate that the Malawi national netball team was forced to withdraw from the World Netball Championship held in Jamaica from July 11 to 20. The netball queens were shattered. And rightly so, considering they were the only other country besides well endowed South Africa to qualify from the continent.

Netball Association of Malawi General Secretary Ireen Mpinganjira says the team withdrew from the event because the association was unable to pay the participation fee of US\$13,700. Malawi ranks among the best three netball teams in Africa together with South Africa and Nigeria. But this was not the first the team had failed to participate in an important fixture.

Despite its fine performances, the team has been unable to attend eight international games since 1999 – and this despite a series of never-ending fundraising campaigns and events. Even at the local level, netball tournaments get scanty attention from both government and private organisations.

Not so the football team, which has a reputation as the continent's whipping boys and has barely made a mark at the regional level. Despite its dismal standing, the national football team gets steadfast support from President Bakili Muluzi and a host of other well-wishers.

As if to add insult to injury, the government managed to find the money to send the football team to Nigeria for an Africa Cup of Nations game just three weeks after it said there was no money to fund the netball team's outing at the

World Championships.

This was too much for the netball association, which promptly accused the government of favouring men's sports. Treasurer Florence Chakhaza said the netball governing body was shattered that the government, which ought to spearhead equal treatment for women and men, had given priority to sportsmen who have brought Malawi more embarrassment than glory. "We are stunned by the government's conduct," said Chakhaza. "This is painful."

Crestfallen Mpinganjira reckons that netball receives little attention because decision-makers believe that women's place is in the

"The government managed to find the money to send the football team to Nigeria for an Africa Cup of Nations game three weeks after it said there was no money to fund the netball team's outing at the World Championships."

kitchen, not on the pitch. If the policy-makers were to give priority to women's sports, she believes, there would be a significant shift in sponsorship for their teams.

Disgruntled netball players have resorted to petitioning the country's sports council with complaints of unfair treatment but it is early days yet when it comes to judging the impact of the sportswomen's activism.

They could borrow a leaf from 17-year-old athlete Catherine Chikwakwa, who is leaving the country to turn professional in Germany. Malawi's only female athlete

stunned the spectators at the 2000 Commonwealth Games in Sydney, Australia, when she took off her shoes and raced barefoot. When questioned, she said she was uncomfortable in shoes as she was used to running without them. She did not have running shoes because she had no sponsor.

Dubbed Malawi's whizz kid for sending tremors across Southern Africa after she won the 5000 metres race in record time during the athletics confederation championship in South Africa on June 5, 2003, Chikwakwa was never able to find local sponsors. On March 26 this year, she represented Malawi at the World Cross Country championships in Switzerland without a coach or official chaperon because she could raise no funding for them.

For someone who in July 2002 was one of only 10 athletes to have dinner with Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip during the Commonwealth Games in Manchester, this lack of attention from her country's sports governing bodies is unacceptable.

Malawi Sports Council Executive Secretary George Jana agreed that women in sports have been relegated to the back burner. "We are trying to find sponsors in both government and private institutions so we can pay greater attention to women's sports," he told AfricaWoman.

But Minister for Sports Henry Mabeti accused the netball association of failing to follow the right channels when soliciting government funding. "They fail to go through the sports council and only grumble," he said.

Mpinganjira promptly denied the accusation. Mabeti could not explain why Chikwakwa, for all her success on the track, could not get funding. Malawian must sportswomen leave home in order to get recognition, it seems.

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NIGERIA

Anti-corruption Amazon fights crime

Threats, abusive telephone calls, hate mail and mysterious items, including live animals, are common sights in Dora Akunyili's office

By Nkiru Okoro

WHEN President Olusegun Obasanjo appointed Dora Nkem Akunyili the new director of Nigeria's National Agency for Food and Drug Administration in April 2001, there was a chorus of protests. Her detractors argued that she did not have enough experience in the public service, having spent the preceding 16 years as a lecturer at the University of Nigeria Nsukka.

"I was told I was inexperienced, old and without capacity," she says today. The deeply religious pharmacist strode confidently into battle, however. She has not looked back since those disheartening early days.

Akunyili's key tasks would be to wipe out the counterfeit drugs that had flooded the Nigerian market and bring the food and drug industries up to international standards. She had the incentive to sweep into action: her sister Vivian, who was diabetic, died as a result of injecting fake insulin in 1988.

Speaking at a public gathering in Lagos on June 4, Akunyili had this to say: "Nafdac was in such a bad state that I was under intense pressure to perform. I transformed this into a sense of urgency in addressing counterfeit drugs and I brought this to my staff right from the first day I assumed office. Together we developed effective strategies, which have been instrumental in achieving improvements in regulation and control."

Drugs destroyed

Nafdac has destroyed counterfeit drugs worth US\$16 million. But Akunyili has not rested on her laurels. Bogus drug dealers have been forced into public confessions and warehouses full of fake drugs have been raided in Onitsha in Anambra state and in Lagos. Repentant merchants of death handed over half of more than 850 million naira worth of drugs for destruction in July 2001.

She and her staff mounted massive public information campaigns on the dangers of substandard drugs and messages were published through workshops, alert notices, publications and advertisements in national media. There were administrative changes at the agency and the war against counterfeit was carried to the overseas sources. Sur-

veillance was beefed up at all ports of entry, bogus drugs already on the market were mopped up and destroyed.

Within no time, the impact of this multi-pronged strategy was being felt far and wide. This was no mean achievement in a country that last year was ranked second only to Brazil as the most corrupt in the world.

Prior to Akunyili's arrival, it was common knowledge that unscrupulous businessmen would deliberately reduce the strength of drugs. Most of the water labelled "pure" contained either unacceptable chemicals or bacteria and patients

for Lagos in November 2001 for an unscheduled but important meeting, a gang of 10 armed robbers laid siege on her Abuja house for over two hours.

They disconnected the telephone lines and power and terrorised workers, threatening to kill them if they did not produce her. Threats, abusive telephone calls, hate mail and mysterious items, including live animals such as tortoises, are common sights in her office.

When Nafdac's biggest laboratory in Oshodi, Lagos, was vandalised early this year, she was so devastated that her last son, Obuneneme told her: "Do you realise that all this is happening to you because you are burning people's money and risking your life in the process? If it is because of these new cars that you remain in this scary job, drop it. We were better off with you in your previous job."

Money returned

Back in 1998, Akunyili was the zonal secretary of the Petroleum Special Trust Fund covering five south eastern states – Anambra, Abia, Eboyin, Enugu and Imo. The story is told of how she returned to the official kitty an unutilised 2.6 million naira (£12,000) that had been granted her for treatment overseas. Her doctors volunteered to provide her with false receipts and medical documents to show that she had surgery, but she would have none of it. This earned her a commendation from the fund's chairman and one-time head of state, Retired General Muhammadu Buhari. Her curriculum vitae

soon landed on the desk of President Obasanjo, who had put out word that he was looking for a credible candidate to clean up Nafdac.

For her industry, commitment to honesty, transparency and integrity, Akunyili has received over 90 awards and recognitions from governments and international organisations in Africa, Europe and America.

But perhaps the greatest honour that the 49-year-old has received is the gratitude of millions of Nigerians whose lives have been saved by a reduction in counterfeit drugs.

She believes the fight against corruption should not be left to the agency or the government. She looks forward to a time when other regulatory bodies like customs, immigration and police will be corruption-free.



OVERCOMING THE ODDS: Dora Nkem Akunyili, director of Nigeria's National Agency for Food and Drug Administration.

with chronic illnesses such as asthma, high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes died in large numbers even though their ailments could easily be controlled by medication.

Most soft drinks sold locally did not have the same content as those in the developed countries and expired processed foods were blatantly dumped in Nigeria. It was a case of big money for big time criminals and the last thing they wanted on their exploitative path was an honest, hardworking woman.

After all, Nafdac had become synonymous with the \$50 bill – which guaranteed automatic clearance for any imports, including even the sand in plentiful supply in the country.

Predictably, Akunyili's stay at Nafdac has not been without incident. Her office and home have been burgled several times. When she had to leave abruptly

TANZANIA

Care at home, but for how long?

By Jamilla Mwanjisi

THERE was song and dance when the 93 women and men came to the end of their home-based care training. But it was joy tempered by the knowledge of the challenge ahead: the new graduates from Arusha and Dar es Salaam will be expected to visit people suffering from HIV/Aids and nurse them; they will also comfort and counsel their families – all for free.

The training focused on caring for and supporting chronically ill people at home. Aids patients, especially, need a great deal of support – physical, emotional and social – if they are to effectively handle stigma and discrimination. Only weeks in operation, home-based care is already being praised generously.

"People tell us that the teams have reduced the burden on families," said Grace Muro, programme officer with Pathfinder International, which has backed the initiative in Dar es Salaam and Arusha. "Families can now get relief at least once a week and they have someone to share their worries with."

With the increased challenges of HIV/Aids and the subsequent strain on Africa's health systems, home-based care is crucial. It offers families a chance to care for and support their loved ones at home; the costs and stress of attending to a patient in hospital are also reduced.

Unfair treatment

"Our health system is overwhelmed," said Muro. "There are not enough medical staff and drugs and the hospital beds cannot accommodate everyone. Patients do not get the attention and care they need. Many terminally ill patients are released from hospitals so they can make room for new patients considered to need more attention. "This is very unfair," Muro added. "We can't just leave them to die because they have been sick for a long time."

According to research conducted in Tanzania in July 2002, people with chronic diseases occupied 60 percent of hospital beds. The quality of their lives was very low. Most had no access to medical treatment, counselling or any kind of support. The study also found that stigma and discrimination were rampant in many families. A total of 200 volunteers are expected to have been trained by the end of this year.

Home-based care originated in Zambia in 1987 when a survey at Chikankata Hospital showed that 90 percent of Aids patients preferred to be at home. The hospital arranged for teams of health workers to visit their homes once a month, covering a small area around the hospital.

The Zambian model has become popular as a strategy to ease the stress the health sector faces and also improve the quality of life for people with long term illnesses. "I have seen people thrown out of their family homes because they are HIV-positive," said Vumilia Omari, who spends her spare time counseling people living with HIV and Aids. "Some of the people I visit tell me they have not been cleaned for several days because the caregiver is scared to touch them."

HIV-positive herself, Omari believes people tend to discriminate against people living with HIV because they do not have the facts. "Surprisingly, some people still believe that you can get HIV by hugging or feeding a person with Aids," she said.

The home-based care approach is an excellent way of involving communities in health care. How long such projects can continue is open to conjecture, however. Even volunteers need a continuous supply of kits. They also need to be motivated to continue supporting the sick.

GHANA

Monkey dey work, baboon dey chop

By Charity Binka

IN a move that has been internationally acclaimed, President John Kufuor's government has cracked-down on public service officials who are involved in corruption.

Two former ministers and a senior civil servant have already been felled in Ghana's anti-corruption crusade, which kicked off with investigations into a rice farming scam that has left the country with a US\$20 million debt and little rice on the market. The US government has reciprocated by jailing Juliet Cotton, the African American at the centre of the scandal, for defrauding Ghana.

Also feeling the pinch is the youth and sports minister in the Kufuor government, who was sent to jail for four years after he failed to account for US\$46,000 meant for local footballers.

But while the government has received praise for applying the criminal law that makes it an offence for public officials to "cause financial loss to the country", there are those who have accused it of witch hunting. Ironically, the law was passed by the regime of former president Jerry Rawlings.

Criticism has come from the executive secretary of the Civil Servants Association, who argues that

the law is a disincentive to government officials who may want to take the initiative with projects. Others have questioned why it should have taken the executive secretary of the association almost a decade to notice this.

Former finance minister Kwame Peprah was sentenced to four years for his role in the conspiracy to defraud the government of US\$20 million through the Aveyime rice project in the Volta region. Ibrahim Adam, former minister for food and agriculture, and George Yankey, a director in the finance ministry, received two years each. Interestingly enough, there was no evidence that any of the three benefited personally from the funds. Cotton, the central figure in the scam, paid herself a \$2 million salary, bought a \$1 million house and two Mercedes Benz cars and paid her husband \$200,000 as executive secretary of the project.

Equally interesting was Rawlings' role: he was said to have flown Cotton to the Aveyime site and reportedly pressured the officials into giving her the loan. All these instructions were verbal, however, so he could not be pinned down.

The Aveyime saga began in 1995, when Cotton arrived in Ghana claiming to be an expert in rice production. She was single, young and

beautiful and was sufficiently eloquent to convince the powers-that-be they were on to a good thing.

Although she was unable to account for an initial loan of \$7 million, guaranteed by parliament, the finance minister guaranteed another \$12 million without reference to parliament. Judge Kwame Afreh said this approval could only have come from the president, but the accused would not say a word. Indeed, the defence team was careful not to refer to the invisible hand of the former president.

The judge was not amused, and he declared in court that the three government officials were going to jail for the simple reason that they failed to tell the court that they were following instructions from their former boss, Rawlings.

Referring to the saying "Monkey dey work, baboon dey chop", Justice Afreh said Cotton had taken advantage of her relations with government officials to "milk this poor country". He added: "It appears someone up there liked her."

All that Yankey would say was: "If I were asked to go and steal or kill, I would not have done that. I worked tirelessly for this project and if I should be sentenced for an offence I have not committed, I leave it to the Almighty." Not too many tears were shed for him.

The Ghanaian Quality Grain Company case is typical of corruption in Africa – except for the fact that there was a successful conviction. It has been difficult to prosecute perpetrators of corruption in Africa, even where there are laws, because of cultural respect for authority and traditional practices that make petty corruption acceptable.

Buying a government official a chicken or goat in return for free service is largely regarded as normal. It is only when corruption rises to grand levels, such as Kenya's Sh68 billion (about US\$900 million) Goldenberg gold export scam, that it becomes a matter of public concern. Corruption is estimated to cost Africa \$150 billion a year.

Most donor organisations have now tied aid to evidence of attempts to tackle corruption and the African Union and governments continent wide have been pressed into coming up with strategies to deal with this pervasive cancer in African society.

In Malawi, the Anti-Corruption Bureau has been charged with preventing corruption, investigating and prosecuting cases and undertaking civic education. Botswana has created the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime, which enjoys not only the re-

sources and manpower necessary to tackle corruption but also the political will to ensure that it makes strides in its work.

The fight against graft is not just about laws. The law has to be seen to be applied. The thousands of Kenyans who have been turning out to listen to the proceedings of the Goldenberg Inquiry are tacitly telling the Mwai Kibaki government that they want to see justice done in the case that involved irregular payments for non-existent gold exports by Goldenberg International Ltd in the early 1990s. The inquiry is also investigating how the Central Bank of Kenya paid US\$210 million in "fictitious foreign exchange claims" to Exchange Bank Ltd, owned by Goldenberg supremo Kamlesh Pattni.

But organisations such as Transparency International argue that corruption is not a one-way traffic. If Africans are guilty of corruption, so are the Western firms that deal with them. The Lesotho High Court, for example, has convicted Acres International, a Canadian engineering consulting firm, of paying bribes to win contracts on a multi-billion dollar dam project backed by the World Bank. Indeed, even World Bank officials have been implicated in corruption, notably in Kenya.

MALAWI

By Doreen Matonga

THE events at David Whitehead and Sons, Malawi's sole textile company, were surprising enough without the additional information: the chief executive was the strike leader! Only two years ago, the firm had over 4,000 employees, but this had dropped to 400 by mid-2003 and more jobs were in danger.

Within a week, Evelyn Mwapasa was a household name — not just because she had taken the unprecedented step of inciting her workers to lay down tools but also because she was challenging the entire principle of privatisation that has become the catchphrase in Africa. The sale of government firms have led to massive job cuts in countries as diverse as Kenya and Zambia but its benefits have yet to be felt either at the personal or official levels — chiefly because the firms have been sold at throwaway prices and in suspicious circumstances.

Mwapasa, 31, mobilised the staff at the Whitex factory to force the privatisation commission to either drop the sale altogether or to hold out for a better sale package. Through its own chief executive, Maziko Sauti Phiri, the commission had decided to go ahead with the hand-over of the company worth US\$4 million to an Asian consortium, Jimtex/Mapeto wholesalers and Jimtex, at a mere \$0.5 million.

With the workers threatening to seek a court injunction, Phiri said: "We will go ahead with the hand-over since all we want is for the company to make a profit."

No privatisation for us, thank you!

More than 30 state-owned firms have been sold since 1995, including the country's railway. Few have enjoyed a turn-around after a change in the management, which tends to favour foreigners, and retrenchment has hit the workers hard. David Whitehead is among the state-supported firms that have made losses, prompting the privatisation commission to advertise for prospective buyers.

First mistake

The commission's first mistake was to do all the groundwork involved in selling Whitex without consulting the management of the firm, which had already done its own assessment and come up with a price of 300 million kwacha.

Says Mwapasa: "We were just informed that the privatisation commission was doing the groundwork for the sale. We were never asked for things like company profile and valuation assets, which are the major determinants for this kind of deal. It was very shocking to hear that a company that posts almost

500,000 kwacha a month in profits was being sold. There was no logical to it since the buyer was to pay a deposit of \$1 million on hand-over and pay the balance in 10 instalments."

Much as she understood the essence of the privatisation process, Mwapasa was infuriated that the commission should sell a profit-making unit at what amounted to a throwaway price.

The government had injected millions to revive the company that once manufactured over 110,000 metres of cloth per month but which now produces 140,000 metres — meaning the production level had gone up despite the smaller staff. "I was convinced people were running away from the truth and I vowed to fight for the company till the end," she says. "Besides, the government undertook to settle the company's debts to bring it back on track."

David Whitehead had two main problems that initially warranted its privatisation: it was overstaffed, resulting in the government pumping in a lot of money to service salaries and benefits. It also had a lot of debts. Finance

Minister Friday Jumbe confirmed that the government would settle the longstanding debts but indicated that the company had to be overhauled if it was to regain its lost glory.

Trouble broke out on the day of the hand-over, when an English consultant of the privatisation commission, Arthur Stevens, was knocked unconscious as the workers protested. Over 50 policemen were sent to the firm to ensure security. "We told the commission not to sell the company," says Titus Nambazo, a worker at the company.

President Bakili Muluzi promptly halted the hand-over and established a commission of inquiry into the controversial sale. The report has yet to be released.

As if the drama was not enough for the workers and Mwapasa, Stanbic Bank seized the company assets 10 days later because of a US\$2 million debt, which Mwapasa said was being repaid slowly. Stanbic has put in place a receiver-manager to take care of finances until its money is recovered. Rumours were rife that Mwapasa would lose her job.

"I have not been dismissed," she says. "What has happened is that the bank wants its money back. As soon as they recover their money, we will get back to normal as an independent company."

Mwapasa has been vindicated by Privatisation Minister Justin Malewezi's admission in parliament that the process has not gone as per the government's plan. He noted some flaws and indicated that experts and technocrats may have to revisit the entire privatisation plan.

MALAWI

Democracy and censorship are a tough mix

By Caroline Somanje

AS it moves to repeal oppressive censorship laws dating back to 1968, Malawi finds itself in the uncomfortable position of being between the devil and the deep blue sea.

The Kamuzu Banda regime ruthlessly used the Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act to suppress dissent: one could be jailed for receiving and sending "objectionable" material through the post and these included simple works of art, literature, songs and plays. Many artists and journalists were either killed or jailed and others forced out of their jobs because the censorship board had decreed that they were guilty of "professional aggression" — and this without the benefit of a court hearing.

Even international pop music did not escape the censor's scissors. The song *Cecilia, You Are Breaking My Heart* could not be played locally as it was taken to cast aspersions on Cecilia Tamanda Kadzamira, the president's official hostess. Renowned poet Jack Mapanje was one of the early victims of the law. He had to seek asylum in the United Kingdom because the authorities thought his work criticised the old regime.

But if Bakili Muluzi's government thought it would be doing Malawians a favour by changing the law, it has learnt that there is no easy road to democracy. The problem? While the proposed new law will do away with limits on the creative arts, it will permit distribution of materials containing explicit and violent sex, child pornography, sex with animals, degrading sexual practices and extreme violence.

freedom of expression

The Malawian government argues that banning entertainment materials unnecessarily contravenes freedom of expression and people's right to information — especially adults.

The bill says the X-Rated material will be allowed for personal use only and not for public exhibition, but this has not appeased critics who see pornography writ large all over the country's many video shops that are largely out of control of the authorities.

The chair of the special law commission, Supreme Court of Appeal Judge Anastasia Msosa, believes the changes are to the country's advantage because "people will be able to explore their talents to the full" but expresses doubts as to whether Malawi has the capacity

to monitor the law effectively.

The bill provides for stiffer penalties for offenders. Theatre managers or owners who fail to comply with the law are now jailed for six months and fined 200 kwacha (about US\$2.17); in the new scheme of things, they will be locked up for three years and be fined 250,000 kwacha (about \$2,717). "The emphasis is on regulation and not control (banning), which is now the internationally preferred method of regulating entertainment, publications and films," says the commission.

But Emmie Chanika, executive director of the Civil Liberties Committee, describes the proposed law as unfortunate. Democracy has a price, she says, and the new law is just one of the many examples. Chanika brings a new twist

While the proposed new law will do away with limits on the creative arts, it will permit distribution of materials containing explicit and violent sex, child pornography, sex with animals, degrading sexual practices and extreme violence

to the debate when she says that the whole question of pornography should be looked at from a wider perspective since politicians constantly degrade women at public rallies.

She cites Muluzi's reference to human rights activist Robson Chitengo as having been caught red-handed "climbing" another man's wife. Chitengo had been campaigning against Muluzi's proposed amendment to the constitution to allow him to run for a third term in office. Muluzi's outburst came after members of the youth wing of his United Democratic Front were implicated in attacks on Chitengo.

Says Chanika: "Are we hills that should be climbed? The law should cover such issues as these, including explicit and intimate dances like the popular but suggestive kwasa kwasa originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Our local Chisamba dance, done by elderly women at initiation ceremonies to groom young women in readiness for marital obligations, is another example. These are not for younger eyes but, surprisingly, our local Television Malawi beams them without any age restrictions."

Chanika has a soulmate in Catherine Munthali, who heads the Society for the Advancement of Women: "Pornog-

raphy is not part of our society," Munthali argues, "and there are certain things that need not be entertained, even when dealing with the changing times. Pornography is demeaning to women. We feel betrayed."

Ngeyi Kanyongolo, president of the Women Lawyers Association, says pornographic materials are not a problem as long as they are viewed in the privacy of people's homes. Banning pornography is not a viable solution, she says, because people can still see it on the Internet and in small video showrooms. The key word is control, in her view — and this is where the problem lies.

The lawyer is wary about linking pornography to sexual abuse of women. "It is like saying wearing mini-skirts is a call for trouble, hence anyone raped or assaulted in a mini-skirt deserves it," says Kanyongolo.

According to the United States National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families, research has proved that pornography and its messages can shape attitudes and encourage behaviour that can harm individual users and their families.

"Pornography is often viewed in secret, which creates deception within marriages that can lead to divorce. In addition, pornography promotes the allure of adultery, prostitution and unreal expectations that can result in dangerous promiscuous behaviour," the organisation says, adding that it also leads to sexual addiction.

Other studies in Phoenix in the US indicate that sex offences were 506 percent greater in neighbourhoods where "adult" businesses were located. Mary Anne Layden, director of education at the University of Pennsylvania, adds that she has treated sexual violence victims and perpetrators for 13 years and has not encountered a single case that does not involve pornography.

As for the Public Entertainment and Publications Bill, the special law commission anticipates working "with the community for the public good". This will involve civic education, through the media, and voluntary community monitoring committees will comprise traditional, religious and political leaders as well as teachers and youths with the express purpose of "upholding cultural norms and values".

"As for failures, those will be experienced with practice," says Censorship Board member E. Galafa. "It is difficult to foretell a failure without trying a system first."

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“In Zimbabwe, it was grabbing land from the white settlers. For Zambia, it will be grabbing land from our own brothers because of being landless.”



Women stake their claim to land

By Brenda Zulu, Zambia

SPILLOVER effects from the controversial Zimbabwean land question have re-awakened buried land ownership issues in Zambia, with women taking centre-stage to ensure that their right to own land is enshrined in the constitution currently under review.

The national draft policy on land stipulates that women, classified as a vulnerable group, should have access to 30 percent of the total arable land.

But they argue that the 30 percent is not enough, especially taking into consideration that they are the majority users of land. Any policy reform must recognise the contribution they make towards food production and reduction of poverty in rural areas. Women also object to being grouped in the vulnerable and disabled people category.

Furthermore, the women are calling for clear land allocation procedures. They also want the operations of the Department of Land or Rural Land Management authorities to be decentralised and would like to have their views worked into the draft land policy and considered in the Constitutional Review Commission.

Agriculture consultant Bernadette Lubozya says that acquiring land in Zambia is a problem and there is need to improve the delivery system and make land accessible to as many Zambians as possible, especially women, who have been marginalised. “In Zimbabwe, it was grabbing land from the white settlers,”



she adds. “For Zambia, it will be grabbing land from our own brothers because of being landless.”

Lubozya called on the government to craft a land policy that would re-establish a Zambian rural society that “provides equal opportunity and security to any individual while at the same time

preserving the identity of the society”.

But while gender consultants such as Sara Longwe note that the proposed policy pays no heed to gender considerations and discriminatory practices, the average Zambian villagers are more concerned about land being grabbed from them and allocated to foreigners in the name of investors. “Their concern is that land in the rural areas remain under customary law,” says Godfrey Kumwenda, a community facilitator in Southern Province.

Customary law

Customary law has long been the bane of African women’s lives, and Kumwenda notes: “Some villagers still feel that there is no need to allocate them land since those who are married have access to their husbands’ land.”

At a land policy review meeting at Moomba Palace in Livingstone, men argued that there was no need for married women to be allocated 30 percent of land, which should instead be reserved for the vulnerable and the disabled. “In Southern Province, many people feel that there is no need for women to be allocated their own land, especially in the traditional set-up, because they got married and even if they divorced or they became widows they could go back to their parents and gain access to land there,” says Kumwenda.

Some men also argued that if women were given land they would be competing with their husbands and this would result in a rise in divorce. “The issue of

gender and land has come to the fore and, at every discussion, it was clear women marrying into other villages were literally compared to workers who should leave the area once their husbands died,” Kumwenda adds.

Allocating 30 percent of land to women would also pose serious problems where polygamy was in practice. Under customary land tenure, single women, divorcees and widows had access to land until they married or remarried — when they were expected to surrender the land to the headman. Widows who were not from the same areas as their late husbands were generally expected to return to their families.

However, those in support of the 30 percent rule insist that women need to supplement their income and to educate their children, especially when widowed. “Having access to land would enable women to continue living normally and supporting their families,” they argue.

In 1996, the government passed the Land Act to provide title deeds for land, including that held under customary law. The law also guarantees women, the majority of whom are in rural areas, security of tenure for 99 years.

But the procedures for acquiring land and title deeds are still cumbersome and bureaucratic, leading to unnecessary delays in processing applications for land. The system for granting title deeds remains mostly centralised, which makes the process cumbersome for people living in rural areas. Besides, poor women can rarely afford the fees.

WORKING THE FAMILY LAND: Zambian women are demanding equal rights to resources.

Inside the business of child slave trading

From Page 1
these young workers.

The Knight Ridder investigations revealed that the children are lied to about jobs and wages. They suffer beatings, insufficient meals, being locked up at night and work days lasting more than 12 hours without a break. They are separated from their families and live in constant fear.

Though some children do manage to escape, they often fear returning home and end up on the streets. According to Unicef, a thriving trade in human traffic has developed in many parts of Africa mainly because of grinding poverty. Slave dealers often trick parents into selling the children under the pretext that they are being taken away to get a good education. Ultimately, the children can be sold as far away as Europe. The child smugglers operate in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Nigeria.

Child trafficking experts say in-

adequate legislation, ignorance of the law, poor law enforcement, porous borders, police corruption and a shortage of resources help perpetuate child slavery in the region. Even though child slavery is illegal in Cote d'Ivoire, the government says the practice continues because the multi-nationals do not pay enough for cocoa beans, forcing farmers to use child labour – which is cheaper.

Signed agreement

The government has since signed an agreement with chocolate manufacturers and human rights organisations to ensure an end to child slavery.

For Ghana to witness such barbaric acts so many centuries after the slave trade was abolished is an abomination that reveals the level of poverty and insensitivity that some parents and families have been reduced to.

The International Labour Organisation's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour



CHEAP LABOUR: Children are often exploited by farmers seeking maximum profits.

describes the exploitation of children as a development issue and calls for its eradication. Child labour destroys children physically, emotionally, educationally and socially. Because Ghana has been identified as the gateway to child trafficking and other forms of slavery, the government has launched

Operation Bring the Children Home to help retrieve the lost children.

The idea is to end rural poverty and incorporate chiefs and opinion leaders in the campaign to promote formal education.

Through the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs,

the campaign will help establish income-generating activities to enable women become financially independent.

Will such efforts help save West Africa's children from the misery of slavery? Only time will tell. But it is worth trying, for the sake of future generations.

ZAMBIA

Selling state firms is no solution

By Grace Zulu

ONLY six years ago, privatisation was considered the silver bullet that would rejuvenate Zambia's ailing mining industry. Nowhere was the sale of mines celebrated more than in Luanshya, one of the seven mining towns.

The Binani group of companies set up the Roan Antelope Mining Corporation and 5,000 jobs were soon available. The company fell on hard times, however, and the Zambia Privatisation Agency was quick to move in. Locals who had relied on the mine for a living were left in limbo and employees were sent on vacation. Everyone lived in anticipation of the government's finding a new investor to put the mines back in gear.

It was not to be, however, and the small town of Luanshya has been the scene of riots and demonstra-

tions by miners demanding to be paid their dues by the government. Some protestors have succeeded in getting their outstanding dues, but the majority has ended up arrested – thus guaranteeing their compliance.

That was until over 200 women and children took to the streets to demand the release of the money. It took police reinforcements from well beyond Luanshya and a hefty dose of teargas to disperse the women, who protested that they were starving and their children needed school fees.

It all started with a meeting a day earlier at which the women blew whistles and chanted in preparation for the street action.

Come morning, the women and children marched to District Administrator Joseph Chilambwe's office and demanded that he call President Levy Mwanawasa over

the missing money. They detained him for over three hours.

Beatrice Mumba, of Roan township, told *Africawoman* that she could no longer bear to wait for the promises that the salary arrears would be paid. "I need the five months' salary arrears my husband is owed," she said.

"What does the government think we feed on? We can't live on empty promises and bouncing checks."

Her husband was sent on vacation two years ago after working for over 25 years at the mines as a contracts clerk. His salary has come in fits and starts and he has been forced to take a lower salary with a different company in an effort to sustain his family.

The mother of six says her older children have dropped out of school. "One of them is pregnant and I feel very bad as a mother be-

cause I have failed to provide for them. Hunger has led to her straying into other means of survival," she said. The situation remains volatile and the women have vowed to take to the streets again as this appears to be the only guarantee of government attention. They were tired, they argued, of visiting politicians who promised to solve their problems but left them in exactly the same situation.

Hopeless situation

Until the next buyer takes over, the situation remains hopeless. The ill go unattended; only those who suffer HIV/Aids, tuberculosis and diabetes receive help from the church.

Funerals last only a day as the bereaved have no food for the mourners. Local MP Cameron Pwele has received praise for helping out with his car during funerals. Said Mumba: "We have to walk

to the graveyard, which is very far away. The mining company used to provide us with transport, but it can no longer do so. The church is also struggling. We are all struggling to bury our dead."

Widow Chanda Mwila has moved away to neighbouring Kitwe as she awaits payment of her husband's dues.

She has a small makeshift stall at the centre of a busy market and is able to provide for her children. Not everyone is so lucky, however.

"Because my friends had nothing to feed their children, I gave them chickens on credit," said Given Kangwa. "They promised to pay back as soon as their husbands were paid. I have lost out because they were not paid on time."

She does not regret helping out and, though she is a widow, she joined the demonstrations in solidarity with her friends.

TANZANIA

It's not the law that matters, it's what's in the heart

By Dorothy Mmari

MARIA CHACHA circumcises up to 3,000 girls a day during peak periods. As an acknowledged expert in her industry, she simply depends on her reputation to bring in the

clients. They kept turning up on her doorstep even when she temporarily quit her job. "I do very little," she confides. "I do not cut all parts as some other women do."

Despite years of activism, non-governmental organisations are

meeting the greatest resistance to ending female circumcision – also known as female genital mutilation or cutting – from girls from the practising communities.

In the northern Mara region, Chacha says, the girls come to her

of their own free will for the simple reason that they believe it will boost their chances of marriage. She believes that circumcision will eventually die out – but it will die hard.

"To be sincere, I think those who announce in public that they are stopping female genital mutilation are only doing so because they are paid," says Emmanuel Maginga, co-ordinator of children's issues with the Aids Control and Community Development Organisation, which is based in Mara.

Samuel Nyadwera, public health officer at Tarime District Hospital, is just as cautious. "You can't tell an elderly tribesman that female genital mutilation is bad and expect him to change at the blink of an eye," he told *Africawoman*.

Despite the fact that Tanzania passed a law in 1998 to protect girls from this tradition, many locals are reluctant to take advantage of it for fear of being cursed by the older generation. Just as frightening is the prospect of being alienated or mistreated in their communities.

James Jengo, a gynaecologist at a Tarime dispensary, believes the situation has been improving steadily: last year, he received only three patients who bled extensively from the circumcision and had to receive stitches. Nevertheless, statistics from the same dispensary indicate that from January to mid-July this year, only six of the 33 women who came in for first deliveries were not circumcised.

At the government's Tarime District Hospital, 55 percent of women who delivered for the first time last



MARIA HAULE: Used to circumcise 20 girls a day

year had been cut. From January to June this year, 42.2 percent of the 246 had undergone the operation.

Clearly, the practice continues despite the campaign to discourage female genital mutilation.

When locals say they are changing their ways, according to Mara

Regional Doctor Costa Munilo, they simply mean they have changed the cutting style – and it is still unacceptable, no matter how little they claim to cut.

Female genital mutilation is a source of income for a number of elderly people, and the number of pupils drops dramatically during the circumcision season.

At the end of the day, it appears, the battle against female cutting will not be won through the laws of the land. Only a direct appeal to the hearts and minds of communities that practice it will put an end to it once and for all.



DYING CRAFT: Maria Haule hands over her circumcising tools to the village executive officer, Mohammed Omar.

LIVING IN AFRICA – A woman's perspective



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