Polygamy may be biggest factor in forcing women into poverty

Do men need kids for status?

By Nabuasyi L. Wamboka

There are two sayings among traditional Ugandan men: “The hands of one wife are not enough for prosperity and secure living,” and “The more we are, the bigger I am.” This thinking means more children and more wives and therefore more respect for men in society.

Polygamy in Uganda is legally acceptable and today many men have a town wife, village wife and social wife. Because infertility is still considered a curse, women compete on the number of children they bear.

According to Matoov E.D. Veru, a researcher with the Department of Women Studies at Makerere University, “It not only proves to the people the man’s sexual prowess, it gives men the assurance of economic and social protection.” But polygamy – once considered a God-given right – may be the biggest factor forcing women into poverty.

The newly-released State of Uganda Population Report 2001 says the fertility rate is high and increasing, with the average rate at seven children per woman.

There is little women can do as they have no sexual rights and no access to family planning.

Lucy Alebo, of the internally displaced peoples camp in Katakwi in Eastern Uganda, has five children, is pregnant, and supports three brothers and four in-laws. “My husband forbids me to use family planning. There is not enough food to feed them but ‘what can I do’?”

Ogwer Silver – also of Katakwi – sticks to the traditional Ugandan man’s attitude, “We can’t allow women to go astray and get diseases like AIDS, family planning spoils them. We must make them pregnant and have children until they are too old for other men.”

Last year non-governmental organisations launched a campaign to involve men in reproductive health programmes since they are the decision makers as well as bread earners in most homes. The campaign has been given urgency by the spread of AIDS in the camps.

The woman who may have made the difference – See page 4

Nigeria attacks West as Safiya escapes stoning

The Nigerian Women’s Minister described Safiya’s acquittal as “the greatest day of my life” and promised to give her accommodation and training for a new future.

Hussaina Tungar Tudu, the Nigerian Minister of Women Affairs said “Her victory is not just for her alone, but for all the women in this country. If she had lost the case, the guilt and burden of adultery would have rubbed off on the womenfolk in this country.”

Appeal Court

The Appeal Court said the lower court erred in convicting Safiya by not ascertaining her sanity and confirming whether she understood the meaning of Zina (adultery). But moments after Safiya’s acquittal, Gov. Attahiru Bafarawa said “Let me explain that the agitators for the immediate release of Safiya without the law taking its course are the ones who have prolonged the case because of their ignorance. He said she could not have been stoned to death without her own permission.”

“The Sharia system allows people to be free even when they are found guilty of any offence. You would see that she went to court from her house not from any government detention. I want to appeal to you gentlemen of the press to help us enlighten the entire world about the positive aspect of Sharia law.”

Never detained

“Even when the lower court passed judgement, Safiya was never detained by either the police or the law court, thus guaranteeing her rights under Islamic law. In Safiya’s acquittal a triumph for human rights campaigners or a triumph for Sharia Law?”

New cases due to be heard next month in the Northern territory of Sokoto, of women facing adultery charges and the same death penalty, will decide that.

Kiosk demolition: Political game to silence women?

An Archbishop has called on the Kenyan government to stop demolishing food kiosks or risk sparking chaos. The Catholic Archbishop Zachaeus Okoth suggests the small wooden shops – most run by women – have been targeted for political reasons in the run-up to the Presidential election. The same pattern seems to be emerging in Uganda and Zimbabwe – all countries with Presidential elections this year.

Are the grassroots women of the markets feared by African leaders?

Inside

2. Kenyan women take bull by the horns

6. Zimbabwe women want food, not isolation

7. A giant tree has fallen: Tribute to Esther Ocloo
Kenya women take the bull by the horns

By Florence Machio and Ruth Omukhango, Kenya

WOMEN in Kenya have taken the bull by the horns and are pulling down illegal drinking dens across the country. They do not have guns or any powerful weapons, but earlier this year 500 women in the town of Muranga in Central Province destroyed several huts, chased away potential clients and even tore up licences.

Mary Njeri Murithi, leader of the Muranga group said: “We decided to use force because we are afraid many lives are in danger.”

Police have been doing little to stop the brewing of the dangerous brew known locally as ‘kumi kumi’ (ten ten) – a reference to its selling price of 10 shillings (about 13 cents.) Made from sorghum, maize or millet, the drink is then laced with a poisonous chemical used to preserve dead bodies.

In January, police in Nairobi seized 15,000 litres of the illicit brew together with bottling equipment and machines used to package it into polythene bags. Ingredients used to manufacture the brew included jet fuel, hydrochloric acid, salic acid and detergents for cleaning toilets and bed sheets.

Two years ago, ‘kumi kumi’ reportedly killed more than 200 people and left dozens blind in Mukuru kwa Nyongu and Mukuru Kayai, shan areas. This forced the government to form a task force to look at the issue.

Kenyans are still awaiting its recommendations.

An activist to the cause is said names women are ashamed of their husbands behaviour after hours or even days at these drinking dens. “I have to hang out my tress and bed sheets outside in the sun to dry every day as my husband wets the bed after visits to the dens.”

In the 2000 incident, 12 middle-aged women faced a variety of criminal charges including causing death through recklessness and negligence – many widows run the dens. “I take on our mar-ress and bed sheets outside in the sun to dry every day as my hus-

Wives stay with dangerous men – is it time for new laws?

Severe daily beatings from Miriam’s husband nearly killed her. Today, she has a broken arm and several bruises to remind her of the suffering she went through at the hands of the man she’d always believed loved her. Jane shared a home with a man for 12 years before he decided she was too old and threw her out replacing her with a younger woman.

In the first, Joseph Tetteh Quaynor, 51, shot his 35-year-old wife, Jane Abena and her 28-year-old sister-in-law. The marriage was lifelong and rely on the income to build ing with one another to produce the most powerful brew.

Doctors do not see very small quantities of methanol can bring about blindness, while more extensive expo sure corrodes the stomach lining and causes kidney and lung failure.

According to Dr. Callistus Omon di, Acting Director of Kenyatta Na tional Hospital (KNH), the victims “suffer from severe blured vision, nausea, stomach ache, headache, vomiting and diarrhea before dy ing.

But kumi kumi is far cheaper than any brands – a half-litre bottle of conventional legal beer, costs 55 shillings (nearly 70 cents). “I would say that in a country that outlawed traditional beer 20 years ago, people are better off taking alkohol under dangerous conditions,” says Mukoma wa Ngugi, a Kenyan poet studying in the US. Given the extremely poor status of the econo my, very few people can afford more ‘sunny beer’.

“Kumi kumi is far cheaper than any brands – a half-litre bottle of conventional legal beer, costs 55 shillings (nearly 70 cents). “I would say that in a country that outlawed traditional beer 20 years ago, people are better off taking alkohol under dangerous conditions,” says Mukoma wa Ngugi, a Kenyan poet studying in the US. Given the extremely poor status of the economy, very few people can afford more ‘sunny beer’.

Check out the latest issue of Worldwoman

Download your copy at: www.worldwoman.net
Food shortages are new plight for African women

By Sifanelo Ndlovu in Bulawayo.

By Sifanelo Ndlovu in Bulawayo.

Aid agencies report a million people in post-election Zimbabwe are facing starvation as critical food shortages bite. Women are almost unable to work in the near-constant quest for food and the death of one old woman in a food queue prompted aid agencies to warn of a crisis ahead. Wholesale land seizures of white-owned farms slashed maize production and national grain reserves are now down to just two days’ consumption, but President Mugabe says the situation is under control.

Since the shortage of basic commodities started, she was always on the streets looking for either sugar, mealie-meal or cooking oil and had no time to rest or spend with her family. "The 10 kg packs that they make nowadays can only last for one week and that means you have to be back in the queue almost as soon as you get it. There is no time to rest. To make matters worse, it is not just mealie-meal that is in short supply. What that means is that immediately after you get mealie-meal you have to join another queue for cooking oil or sugar. I wish they would at least make 20 kg packs so that we can get some time off to rest. These 10 kg packs are no use."

The pressure that comes with having to queue for basic commodities, is taking its toll on the family as partners end up quarrelling, sometimes leading to the break-up of relationships. According to Mrs Gertrude Nyakudze, director of CONTACT, an organisation that specialises in family counselling, the pressures associated with eking out a living under the harsh economic climate is leading to quarrels.

"Imagine the man coming home from work. He expects food but the wife, who just spent the day running from one queue to another looking for mealie-meal has not yet cooked. Tempers easily flare in that situation."

She said when pressures mount, men usually vented their frustration on women, leading to domestic violence. Women in turn snapped at their children leading to a generally unhealthy family relationship and even family break-up. "When the going gets tough, the man usually runs away leaving the woman to fend for the children alone," said Mrs Nyakudze.

Whenever a commodity is in short supply, it tends to surface on the black market at prices beyond the reach of many. Some use it as currency to exploit the weak. "As they say in street talk, ‘nowa-lokuku’ which means ‘one opens’, said Gary Cole, the magazine’s photography director. "Playboy is offering the women of Enron an exciting opportunity that they need to see down a new career path."

But few women appeared keen to reveal their assets. "I’ll be interested in seeing who ends up in it - I can’t imagine anyone I worked with doing that," 25-year-old Enron employee Beth Miertschin told the New York Post. Jennifer Gallion, 30, said: "I want to look at my intelligence, rather than for my naked body and the fact I got screwed by Enron.”

CZECH REPUBLIC

Woman trouble for Vaclav Havel

The Czech president Vaclav Havel has clashed with Justice Minister Jaroslav Bures and the opposition Civic Democratic Party (ODS) by appointing two women to top legal jobs. Eliska Wagnerova, hitherto chairwoman of the Supreme Court, is Constitutional Court deputy chairwoman today. She was replaced by Supreme Court judge Iva Brozova.

Havel said, “I firmly believe that looking at your life experience, your professionalism, your wisdom and your female sensitivitiy will strengthen the authority of both these top court institutions.”

SAUDI ARABIA

King calls for probe into student deaths

King Fahd has called for a high-level commission to probe the deaths of 15 young students at a public girls school in the Muslim holy city of Mecca. The girls died in a stampede after they tried to escape from a fire that broke out at their school amidst suggestions that teachers obstructed escape efforts by fear of “exposing females to male strangers.”
U M B E Y A

NOT THE OFFICIAL NEWS

The braids clinch it: Cameroon captain Rigobert Song is the answer to an editor’s dreams.

Margaret Ziribaggwa’s rewrite of her February Cameroon v Senegal match report – when the ladies in green won the Africa Cup of Nations for the fourth time – caused a bit of a stir.

The Africa woman editor had suggested more of a woman’s angle on the game – little did she realise what a well of thinly repressed longing she had tapped into.

The report changed from a sober consideration of the German playing techniques brought in by new coach Winifried Schaefer to a poem of praise for “the sexy, muscular and nice looking lads set to make history by bidding for an international treble after triumph in the African Nations Cup and the Olympics.”

It seems the team known to men across the world as the Indomitable Lions is known to women of the Africa as “the sexy team.”

Why? Here is Margaret’s intellectual reasoning; “Women always want to associate with success and for a winning team, they can’t go wrong but just support it.” Anything else? Well … “The physical fitness and muscular looks of the players also made them a big tick for ladies. Ladies wish to have strong men who they think can be protective. They look at well-built men as best not just for the public image but because they would also feel secure with them.”

But clearly it’s the braids that clinch it … “Captain Song leads a back line that can at times be formidable and at others permeable. He is powerful physically and has braids.”

Women and men of the world can come to their own conclusions when Cameroon take on Germany in the World Cup later this year.

Clearly some Ugandan sisters will be unavailable for the duration for him and God for her to have those children. One only child died in infancy, while his younger is 13. She has 8 boys and 22 girls.

“In our time, men made all the decisions,” Ziribaggwa said. Her husband, Kassita, is against family planning, has never educated his wife, has been against family planning, has never educated his daughters who live in one room because they have one-roomed houses.”

Urban housing has very high room occupancy with an average household of four people. Half the population live in one room but family planning is almost non-existent and NGOs contraceptive services have been threatened by the removal of cash by the U.S. Bush administration.

Dr. Specioza Wandira Kazibwe, the female Vice President of Uganda, says education is the key to improving women’s lives. “It keeps them longer in schools and enables them to raise healthy children and manage their families.”

The government’s main strategy has been free primary school education for four children per family of two and ‘who must be girls’ – but there are limited funds to achieve this. “Rapid population growth and high fertility pose major challenges to poverty eradication. We must adopt a manageable family size if we are to enhance the quality of life of our people,” says Isaac Musam- ba the Minister of State in charge of Planning.

Whether that’s possible with women in “hiding wars” to prove their place as number one wife is open to question.

by Susan Naa Sekyere

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) is meant to be about good governance, security and economic enhancement for Africa. It was born out of an OAU meeting of African leaders in July 2001.

But will it encourage integrated development on the continent in this era of globalisation or fail to deliver as so many other African structures appear to have done in the past? The Organisation of African Unity, ECOWAS, and the South African Development Corporation have brought very little change to their people.

Indeed trade between Ecowas countries is still plagued with bottlenecks and barriers.

U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair is clearly keen to see NEPAD work – while touring Lagos, Nigeria, he said, “This is the best chance in a generation for us to make our partnership work.”

But on the same day, U.S. President Bush made clear he wouldn’t honour the pledge of “increased aid” to developing countries, because “the world has spent an enormous amount in the name of development without success.”

Prime Minister Tony Blair thinks, “There is a new generation of African leaders who are prepared to say it is our responsibility, with their express determination to end famine and bloodshed on the continent.”

Clinging to Democracy and taking the war-path against corruption must be the focus to get more agreements like the one at the 2000 OAU summit which excludes African governments who came to power through unconstitutional means.

There should also be a louder call to clambering African heads and their governments who want to hang onto power forever to wake up.

African leaders must pull along all AFRICA, male or female, young or old, rich or poor in order to guar- antee success.
Demolition of kiosks: a political game to silence outspoken women?

By Lilian Juma

Anna, a 43-year-old single mother of five thought she had just began to enjoy the fruits of six years toil at her market stall after losing her civil service job during IMF induced cuts in 1996. To her dismay, she awoke to the biggest shock of her life as her premises, including all her property was flattened by a city council bulldozer.

She had been operating a foodstuff kiosk along Jogoo Road, near Nairobi’s heavily populated residential area of Eastlands.

Like her fellow traders — most of them female — she was never warned of the impending destruction. She just woke up on the morning of February 7 to find her six year investment gone.

Why? Since the year began, councils in major Kenyan towns like Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru and Eldoret have been aggressively demolishing kiosks to rid the urban centres of “unhygienic and illegal structures.”

Nairobi politician Cyrus Maina warned kiosk leaders against politicising the clearances. Maina said the structures were not owned by the poor as people thought adding that many belonged to very rich people. He said the kiosks had been built without planning and turned into dwelling places without sanitary facilities.

“We are not out to be inhuman. We are only out to enforce the law,” he said.

He said kiosks near primary and secondary schools would not be spared as most sold drugs to school children.

“We will continue to demolish and I don’t want anybody to try to come over the issue. There is no debate.”

But there is. The Archbishop of Kisumu and vice-chairman of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Zacheaus Okoth has said the government should stop the demolition of kiosks.

“This will not only perpetuate poverty but is a potentially volatile issue that can cause unrest, if not bloodshed,” he said.

He accused the Government of “creating space for gangs to butcher innocent Kenyans and destroy their properties” and asked why such attacks only occurred when national elections were nearing.

“Does a government that fails to guarantee the basic human right of life to citizens have a moral duty to exist?” he asked in the wake of a massacre at Kariobangi where 20 market traders and several senior police officers were killed.

Politicians who have been vocal about the rights of the poor suddenly seem preoccupied with finding ways to move them in order to win the forthcoming elections.

Is it merely a campaign to improve the cleanliness status? It has come to be known that every time the country nears elections, many incidents of the kind, including tribal clashes are common. Some established politicians have been known to incite chaos and violence in different areas in the country in a bid to drive out people of different ethnic backgrounds whom they suspect are sympathetic to their rivals.

Maybe market traders and kiosk owners are also seen as radicals. Many Kenyans have lost their jobs due to massive retrenchment by companies no longer able to sustain a huge workforce. Having been propelled into poverty, these Kenyans have had no alternative but to resort to other means of feeding their children through small scale business activities like hawking and kiosk ownership. They may be in a lowly position but their minds are sharp, they are often well educated and their influence over passing trade is seen as considerable.

Ironically that’s why the Kenyan Ministry of Health has been using kiosks in a pioneering British backed pilot scheme to improve women’s health.

The Market Day Midwives project supplies contraceptives and vaccines through wooden market kiosks. Funding from the British Department for International Development ended in 2000 but by then the service was self financing and the 38 qualified midwives had given AIDS information, family planning devices and child immunisation to 16,520 people and distributed 440,000 condoms – three times the target. Whether these kiosks have been included in the demolition is unclear.

It’s the same story in Uganda where the government has agreed with Kampala City Council to remove all kiosks and newspaper vendors from Kampala streets, particularly around banks as a measure to increase security in the city. “There is an uncontrolable mushrooming of kiosks on our streets, particularly around banks and we think this has been one of the main reasons for the increased robberies in town.” Minister of Internal Affairs Eria Catgeya said.

Meanwhile Anna must start again – and another kiosk is probably her only option.
Milosevic’s trial: Lessons Africa should learn?

As the world waits with abated breath over what is going to happen to former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, little has been said about current presidents or leaders who may be running roughshod over their people in the same way. Will lessons to be learned from a president elected twice by his people and once termed as savour?

Kenya, Uganda, Madagascar and other African nations will soon be going to the polls - Zimbabwe has just emerged from another unsatisfactory election. The people need leaders who will avert chaos, by steering their countries to economic strength and avoiding corruption. Perhaps what most of the citizens of these countries are hoping for is peace and less violence meted to them by the police. Corruption has been the basis of collapse or the lack of growth in African government similar to the violence in Yugoslavia during Milosevic’s reign.

Asked if Kenya and Zimbabwe had lessons to learn from Milosevic, Lawyer Patrick Lumumba in Nairobi said “reforming the constitution is one way, many of the current laws in Kenya especially on the powers of the executive should be streamlined to avoid such a scenario”

But it is true to say that some of the African dictators have been elected and re-elected to power by the same people who complain of bad governance.

Women are the majority of voters all over the world, Africa is not an exception. Could it be that women have elected the very old men they accuse of corruption, intimidation and bad violence? Are women making informed choices? In a recent radio talk show in Nairobi a woman said “ We should have a press conference where all the presidential aspirants are quizzed so that the citizens are aware of what kind of a person they are choosing”

The ball was thrown in the court of journalists to dig up information on the aspirants as “they are responsible” for informing the public. Does that mean that if journalists had done their job better Yugoslavia would be a different country today?

It has always been history in Kenya that people are misplaced through violence from their homes just before the general elections. In 1997 the ethnic clashes in the rift valley and coast provinces were shifted to urban areas. Should these clashes that cause loss of life be the responsibility of the current government? Or will the world wait until we have another Yugoslavia before anyone pays attention to these warning signs?

Maybe we should take a keen look at what Milosevic said in his defence.

“Everybody who lent support...The government, the parliament, various political organizations, the media…they all stand accused here. The citizens stand accused, citizens who lent their massive support and elected their representatives at free party elections”

Mugabe and Zimbabwe’s future

It remains to be seen whether Robert Mugabe, 78, will yield to international pressure and call for fresh elections or whether he will be able to hold on for the next six years as his country faces massive starvation and total economic decline. The “smart sanctions” and Commonwealth suspension imposed by the West have failed to alarm him - and the old men of the Africa have decided to deal with the devil they know. Why? How would intervention against Mugabe harm them? How can the flagrant abuse of human rights to anything other than damage the continent, its will to change and its desire to be free of corruption in the eyes of the world and its own people. The only “hope” for women may be that mass starvation topples him from power in total disgrace and that Tsvangirai is then voted into power in a free and fair election. Is this the best the international community can do?

US AIDS girl cheered by Ghana conference

By Theresa Owusu-Ako, Ghana

Do Ghanaians need a 17-year-old American girl to come all the way from the US to tell them there is light at the end of the tunnel for children living with HIV?

Hydeia Broadbent, 17, who is HIV positive visited Ghana as an ambassador for children with HIV. Born with the disease and with both parents dead, Hydeia has been supported by a foster father and the Broadden Foundation.

She was cheered when she told children at Ghana’s National Theatre in Accra, “A little love will make all the difference. Having HIV is not the end of the world. It is the love that matters. You can make a choice, you abstain from sex, which is the best protection against contracting the disease.”

In Ghana, where the world’s highest number of people in the world living with HIV and AIDS had appealed against a ruling ordered to provide Nevirapine to all pregnant women - the court ruling, he said: “Thank goodness for the decision. It’s unnecessary for anything to have gone that way at all. We have been like a laughing stock in the world.”

The Anti-AIDS group, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), which launched a Constitution court action over the drug, says 10 lives could be saved each day if the government implemented the ruling immediately.

The government was not immediately available for comment.

Experts say Nevirapine has limited side effects but is a life-saver, able to cut mother-to-child infection rates by half. Boehringer Ingehelm, which makes the drug, has offered to provide it free to South Africa for five years.

South African President Thabo Mbeki has taken a controversial stance by questioning the link between AIDS and HIV, the virus that causes it.

AIDS victory for South African mums

A HIGH court judge has ruled the South Africa government must provide women with an anti-AIDS drug that cuts the risk of passing the virus to their babies.

Thabo Mbeki’s government - widely condemned for refusing to expand the Nevirapine pilot programme to all pregnant women - had appealed against a high court order to provide the drug.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has entered the fray by saying South Africa should emulate poorer countries like Uganda which was reversing the AIDS pandemic, and “get it right.”

The government was so worried about its uncertain image over the Nevirapine court battle it took out adverts in the South Africa press quoting the President’s state of the Nation address.

No wonder. The country has the highest number of people in the world living with HIV and AIDS with an estimated one in nine South Africans infected – around five million people – and 70,000 to 100,000 babies born HIV-positive each year.

At the court case, Judge Chris Botha said Nevirapine must be given to HIV-positive pregnant women at all state hospitals and clinics with the capacity to do so.

South Africa’s Nobel peace laureate Archbishop Tutu has likened the fight against AIDS to the fight against apartheid white rule.

“We must fight these diseases with the same passion, the same commitment, the same determination,” he said. Referring to the country’s ruling party and the Finance Minister, “The thank goodness for the decision. It’s unnecessary for anything to have gone that way at all. We have been like a laughing stock in the world.”

The Anti-AIDS group, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), which launched an Constitutional court action over the drug, says 10 lives could be saved each day if the government implemented the ruling immediately.

The government was not immediately available for comment.

Experts say Nevirapine has limited side effects but is a life-saver, able to cut mother-to-child infection rates by half. Boehringer Ingehelm, which makes the drug, has offered to provide it free to South Africa for five years.

South African President Thabo Mbeki has taken a controversial stance by questioning the link between AIDS and HIV, the virus that causes it.
Women say they were teargassed and clubbed as they tried to vote in the March election that saw Robert Mugabe returned to power in Zimbabwe amidst allegations of violence and intimidation. Now Canada and the UK are set to withhold $4 billion in development aid this year, but the Women’s Coalition in Zimbabwe say the international community must give food not a cold shoulder to avert starvation.

Zimbabwe women want food, not isolation

By Sandra Nyaira, Zimb.

SUSAN CUTO and hundreds of thousands others persevered the long snaking queues that characterized most polling stations as Zimbabweans showed their determination to cast their ballots in the recent presidential elections.

Susan, 36, like many others, was a disappointed woman because after standing in the winding queues, going back for more than five kilometres, she was not able to cast her vote in the election that saw President Robert Mugabe re-elected to serve another six-year term.

Mugabe and his ruling Zanu PF party employed dirty tricks to disfranchise thousands of voters in the urban areas, largely supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change whose leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, is his strongest challenger since Zimbabwe got independence from Britain in 1980.

Mugabe drastically reduced the number of polling stations in towns to make sure a small number of people voted there and increased the number of polling stations in the rural areas, largely perceived to be Zanu PF strongholds.

Mugabe won the vote by 56 percent over Tsvangirai who got 42 percent in an election with five presidential candidates.

There was no woman candidate in the race for State House but the Women’s Coalition (WC), an umbrella body of Zimbabwean women and women’s non-governmental organizations, has rejected the outcome saying the poll was rigged in Mugabe’s favor.

Isabella Matambanadzo, a WC spokesperson said women’s participation in the election was severely limited by the political climate of intolerance, intimidation and violence – most of perpetrated by members and supporters of the ruling Zanu PF party.

“My payment is teargas and I’m thrown behind bars for refusing to leave the polling station”

Women like Susan were tear-gassed and clobbered as they remained determined to cast their ballots by Mugabe’s riot police who tried to dispel them before they had voted.

“Can you imagine, we are facing massive starvation in this country because of archaic laws and bad policies and I resolve to change the government through non-violent means and my payment is teargas and I’m thrown behind bars for refusing to leave the polling station,” an angry Susan told Africa woman.

Politically-motivated violence since February 2000 has left more than 200 people dead in the country, most of them opposition supporters.

Thousands of women in the rural areas had their homes razed to the ground and left without food or clothes - but most African governments rushed to endorse the election as free and fair.

Stella Tsoodlo, 70, of Chipinge South in Zimbabwe’s Eastern Highlands, now lives under a bridge with her six orphaned grandchildren due to the massive retribution that started just after the announcement of the results.

Her home was burnt down and she has nowhere to go. No-one wants to take her in because they also fear the politically-motivated violence. Her crime? Her grandson, Peter, supported the opposition and she had to pay the big price.

“I have lost everything that I ever worked for in my life, I do not want to do. How could they possibly do something cruel like this to an old poor woman like me?”

The Women’s Coalition say women are the silent victims of well orchestrated political violence that has been planned months before the recent poll.

Says Matambanadzo: “The youth militia and the war veterans forced women and young girls into sexual slavery. Cultural taboos around the issue of rape have silenced the women, many of whom will never tell their stories. The impact of this sexual violence will live with these women forever, especially given the HIV/AIDS virus.”

“The youth militia and the war veterans forced women and young girls into sexual slavery”

She said most women’s choice was restricted by new laws rushed through Parliament just before the poll. Women were required to produce proof of residence when most women lacked proof of residence. Millions of women were therefore forced to renounce other citizenships to be able to register and vote.

“An other restrictive law asked people to renounce other citizenships. Women were required to produce proof of residence when most women lacked proof of residence. Millions of women were therefore forced to renounce other citizenships to be able to register and vote.”

The Women’s Coalition: “This paranoid government banned NGOs, thought to be sympathetic to opposition, from voter and civic education campaigns fearing they would campaign for the MDC.”

Beta also deplored the decision to reduce access to polling stations in urban areas.

“Women shoulder the burden of domestic family and other responsibilities. Many were therefore forced to leave the queues.”

Many Zimbabwean women are now facing the prospect of starvation as the international comminity clings onto its purse strings refusing to hear pleas for food aid because of Mugabe’s flawed re-election.

A rigged election – half-hearted international intervention and now political isolation with Zimbabwe outside the Commonwealth. Can Zimbabwe’s women expect any help now or will the violence go on for another six years while Europe and America dither?

Annan’s message

KOFI ANNAN, the UN Secretary General has asked rich nations to double their annual aid to halve the number of people suffering from hunger or a lack of drinking water – the majority women and children. Speaking at a conference in Mexico he also laid responsibility on political leaders in the developing world to live up to their obligations to bring their people out of poverty.

“T hey have much to do to mobilize domestic resources in their own countries, as well as to attract and benefit from international private capital,” he said.

The controversial Economics Minister of Taiwan Christine Tsung resigned after weeks of “torment” at the hands of opposition politicians and academics.

Tsung, 53, the first woman to head the economics ministry, had been under fire from opposition members who said she lacked a firm understanding of the economy. “She was the wrong person for the job. It’s better for the government to offload the burden sooner rather than later,” said political scientist Emile Sheng. Strangely, though Tsung had proved her personal capacity to create wealth - she was widely thought to be the richest cabinet member with personal assets of T$1.2 billion (US$44 million).

In her resignation letter, Tsung likened herself to a rabbit which wrongly entered a political jungle, while her critics said she was promoted beyond her abilities in line with a government campaign promoting equal rights for women.

“I have the passion and ability to get things done,” Tsung said in the statement. But the unique political language and culture will forever be my obstacles. Like a rabbit which wrongly entered into a jungle, I am totally unaware of the political traps everywhere.”

Even her dress style fell under the spotlight, with one opposition lawmaker attacking her for wearing exorbitant jewellery.

Tsung said “I hope my superiors will not lose confidence in promoting the best and brightest women.”
A great tree has fallen
A tribute to Esther Ocloo: 1919-2002

By Charygii Binaka, Florence Dolphine & Susan Naa Sikegore, Ghana

Certainly 83 years is a long time to be around in a part of the world with so much poverty and disease. It should call for celebration. But at 83, we are mourning the death of Esther Ocloo, the renowned industrialist, advocate for gender equality and a great African human being. Auntie Esther died of pneumonia at the Military Hospital on March 8.

Esther Ocloo was born in 1919 at Pokidza, a small town in the Volta Region of Ghana into a poor illiterate family. Her father was a blacksmith who died at the age of 35 leaving her mother to look after her and her mentally retarded sister as well as the farming. This was Esther’s role model.

When Esther Ocloo finished Achimota school in Ghana back in the 1940s, her aunt gave her 10 shillings. With the money she produced 12 jars of marmalade and sold them, and continued the pattern until she had her own business going. In 1941 she started work at the Department of Horticulture, of the Long Ashton Research Station, Bristol University, England where she obtained a Diploma in Food Preservation.

She came back home to start the first food processing and preservation factory in Ghana called Nkulumu Industries Limited in 1942. It still produces jam and fruit juice for both local and foreign markets. Though she was successful, she had trouble getting business loans. “Everybody thought I was crazy,” she always said.

So you think you’re smart, girl. Try driving on Kenyan roads

Once in the city the journalists were in for ear-splitting noise from all angles - shocked by the noise from hooting vehicles, each driver determined to get the right of way, especially at intersections without traffic lights. It was quite shocking to see some vehicles mount pavements to avoid wasting time in the jam.

There are also no zebra crossings and no sign of traffic policemen. By the time they returned to their hotel, the women were scrambling for painkillers to stave off their throbbing headaches.

Another problem for women behind the wheel are the “matatus” minibuses. Most matatu drivers muzzle their way in with total disregard to other road users. Woe betide you if you dare raise a voice questioning their behaviour. Your comments will be met by a torrent of insults from driver and assistant.

Driving behind a matatu? Keep your distance because without any warning a matatu driver will pull up to pick up or let out a passenger. “It is only in Kenya where one can drive a vehicle without a side mirror,” True.

Although the former Assistant Commissioner of Police, Bakari Omarro says they have increased the number of officers on the streets to curb the mess due to the failure of the traffic lights, this has only lead to corruption as money changes hands when traffic offenders buy their way back to more careless driving.

Finally it is not unusual to find vehicles and trailers broken down and abandoned on the roadside with no warning at all.

The police move to check if a driver has taken proper driving lessons is a very welcome one. But unless the current climate of careless danger and corruption is changed, it will only mean more sizeable backhanders to keep the buses on the road.

So ladies, whatever driving skills you have at home, you will unfortunately need them all in Nairobi to avoid being driven around the bend - for some time to come.

African Woman Authority are to clamp down on unlicensed drivers of “matatus” minibuses packed with commuters.

Will this be enough to make Africawoman journalists return to Kenya after some hair-raising experiences on Nairobi roads?

Local writer Ruth Omukhango saw Nairobi through the eyes of her visitors - and it wasn’t a pretty sight!
South Africans want a national funeral for the remains of Saartjie Baartman, whose remains are due to be returned by the French government later this year after almost two centuries on display in French museums as a “sexual freak”.

Descendants of southern Africa’s oldest known race say it will give new status to the Khoisan people and show respect to a woman degraded by racists in 18th century Europe.

**Baartman remains to rest in peace in South Africa**

In 1815 the surgeon general to Napoleon Bonaparte was given the body of a Quena woman called Saartjie Baartman, who had died after living as a circus freak in England and France. The doctor made a plaster cast of the woman’s corpse before he cut out her brains and genitals and preserved them in laboratory bottles.

Ten years ago these commodities were still on display at the Musee de l’Homme in Paris - now the National Assembly of France has ordered they be returned to South Africa where can be given the dignity in death she was denied in her lifetime.

Saartjie Baartman was probably born in the 1790s and lived in the Cape Platte where records show she was living in a small shack in 1810 when she met a ship’s doctor, William Dunlop. He persuaded her to travel to England with promises she would make a fortune exhibiting her body to Europeans. Baartman was put on display in a building in Piccadilly, exciting crowds of working-class Londoners who viewed her with a mixture of morbid curiosity and malice. Like all Quena women, she had a protruding backside and large genital orifices - billed by the show’s promoters as resembling the skin that hangs from a tarkey’s throat.

Contemporary descriptions of her shows say Baartman was made to parade naked along a “stage two feet high, along which she was led by her keeper and exhibited like a wild beast, being obliged to walk, stand or sit as he ordered”.

In 1814, after spending four years being paraded around the streets of London, Baartman was taken to Paris and handed to a “showman of wild animals” in a travelling circus. Her body was analysed by scientists, including Cuvier, while she was alive and a number of pseudoscientific articles were written about the superiority of European races.

According to South African Jermey Nathan, one of the producers making a feature film on her life, Baartman was put on display as a naked and exotic savage dressed only in feathers at a ball organised by the Countess Du Barrie.

“This was the time of pre-Darwinist social anthropology and Cuvier believed she was the missing link, the highest form of animal life and the lowest form of human life,” says Nathan.

Her anatomy even inspired a comic opera called ‘The Hottentot Venus’ or ‘Hatred to French Venus’. It appears Baartman worked as a prostitute in Paris and drank heavily to cope with the humiliation she was subjected to. She died in 1815 of an “inflammatory and eruptive sickness,” possibly syphilis. Cuvier made a plaster cast of her corpse before dissecting it. He removed her skeleton and cut out her brain and genitals. He pickled them in bottles that were put on display at the Musee de l’Homme for more than 150 years. Her remains were removed from public exhibition 10 years ago but remained the property of the museum.

When the bill passed through the French Senate last month, Khoisan rights activist Willa Boezak said: “We are feeling very pleased, and the highest form of animal life, and the lowest form of human life,” says Nathan.

No cash for women filmmakers

By Ruth Gabi, Zimbabwe

The winner of a prestigious Pan African Broadcasting Heritage Award says women filmmakers are not being encouraged to develop.

Tistis Dangarembga, a Zimbabwean writer and filmmaker made the award winning film ‘Everyone’s Child’ in 1995. Now she has five films to develop but no cash to proceed.

"Films are expensive to make and it becomes an economic issue as to whose story is important enough to distribute. Telling an African woman’s story touches on political power and women do not have the domain as decision-makers in this area. A full-length feature film requires a lot of money for development, equipment and production. Many trained African women filmmakers have no access to the resources for making a film."

‘Everyone’s Child’ is a docu-drama film that makes a compassionately appeal for communities to come together to care for AIDS orphans and fight the scourge. Although the film deals with very serious issues, there are some light moments with the ‘street kids’ in Harare and their quest for survival in the city.

Women in the Southern African Region have not succeeded in making more than ten full-length feature films. There are misconceptions that women’s stories are ‘unpleasant’, ‘not cutting edge material’ and therefore ‘not entertaining’ and that, according to ‘the critics’ is not what audiences want to see.

"Women have to fight to be in the industry," said Bridget Pickerling a producer from South Africa. “The film industry is dominated by the white minority race and they are the ones who usually get funding for their films.”

For empancipating rural women or just ourselves?" – Zoe Bakoku-Bakoru, Minister for Gender Uganda.