

Africa *woman*

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN IN AFRICA ● JULY 2002

GHANA

NEPAD: But what about the women?

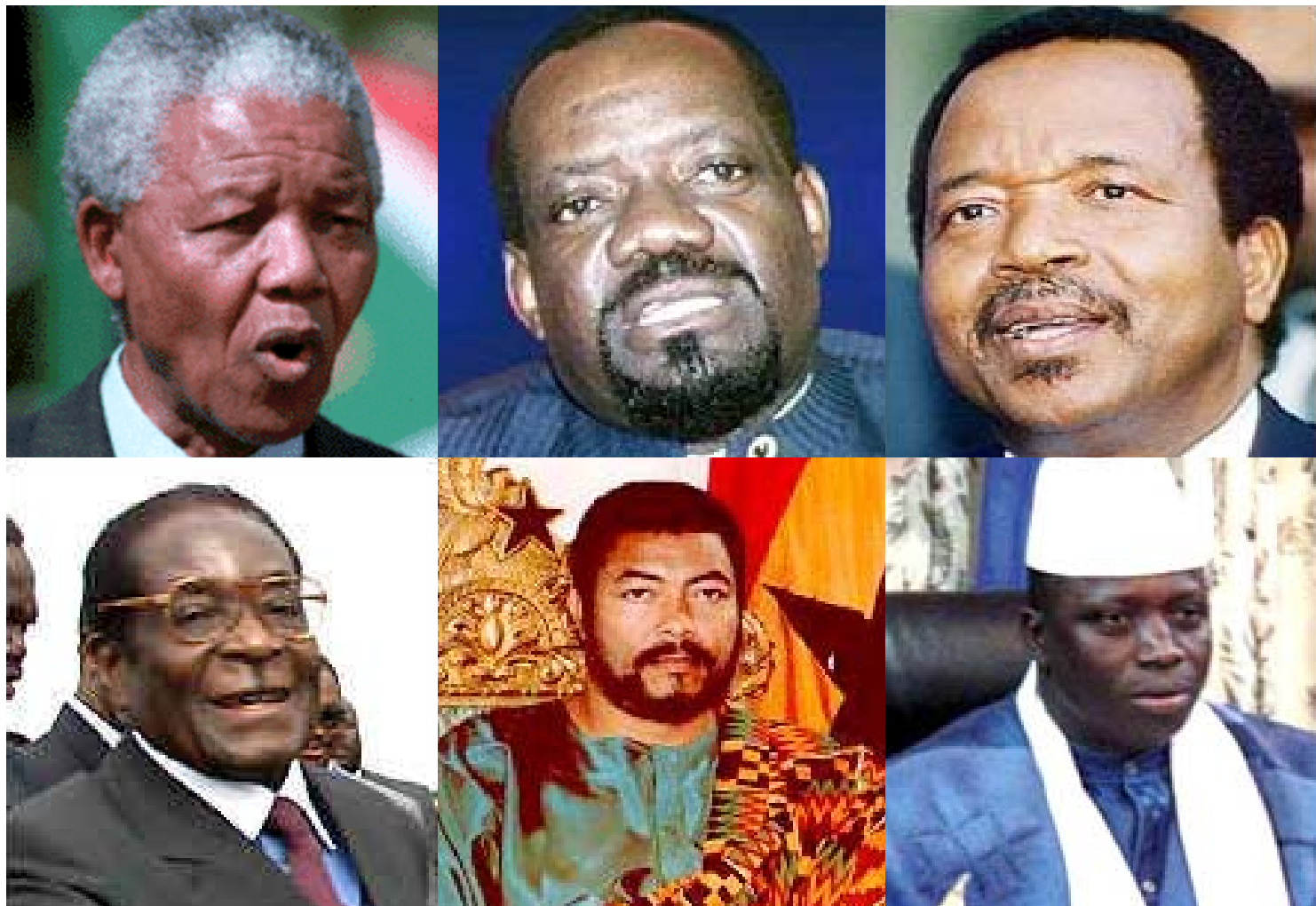
By Susan Naa Sekyere

Women have been referred to only eight times and even then in general terms, in the latest edition of the New Partnerships for Africa's Development (NEPAD) document. These references are a clear indication of NEPAD's inability to adequately solve the problems of African women and other vulnerable groups.

In her paper "Popularising NEPAD among Women in Africa," Unifem's Anglophone West Africa Regional Director Florence Butegwa says: "Although women are mentioned here and there, NEPAD does not appear to deal with gender perspectives of development. It does not address how narrowing the gender gap in all sectors – not just by promoting girl education – is key to progress."

NEPAD does not bring out the element of partnership between the sexes, she adds. Besides being the majority and the prime movers in African society, women face discrimination and do not have equal access to resources.

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Top to bottom, left to right: Nelson Mandela, Alhaji Umar Konare, Jerry John Rawlings, Robert Mugabe, Abigail Acquaye and Yahya Jammeh

KNOWING WHEN IT'S TIME TO QUIT

Nelson Mandela knew when it was time to give up the reins of power. So did Mali's Alhaji Umar Konare and Ghana's Jerry John Rawlings. But others, notably Robert Mugabe, of Zimbabwe, seem determined to do anything they can to cling to power. Abigail Acquaye looks at the record of Africa's leaders, some of whom seem determined to die inside their presidential palaces no matter what their people think. See Page 7.

ZIMBABWE

Girls pay high price as drought takes toll

By Sibongile Ncube

Young girls drop out of school to scavenge for food for their families

Once a jovial and vibrant eight-year-old, Thandiwe Ndlovu is wasting away gradually. The grade three pupil at a primary school in Kezi, one of Zimbabwe's most impoverished districts, appears dull and withdrawn — all because of hunger and starvation back home.

The Ndlovu family has not had anything to eat in five days, surviving on wild fruit known as Umviyo in the local Ndebele language. It is abundant in the dry areas to the south east of the country.

Rainfall patterns here are erratic

and cannot sustain viable agricultural production. The area, which receives between 400 and 600 millimetres every year, is good for ranching. Still, local people must farm for their subsistence needs.

Thandiwe is one of the more than 114,000 children in dire need of food aid. Statistics indicate that more girls – some barely in their puberty – than boys are dropping out of school to scavenge for food

for their families. Most parents in these parts go to great lengths to educate their sons, believing that girls are not worth investing in since they will eventually leave home to get married.

The drought and subsequent famine, affecting more than 500,000 people, has exacerbated the burden of rural women, who must make sure their families have something to eat regardless of the conditions.

Sarah Ndlela, a mother of six from Nana village in Gwanda South, says life is extremely hard. She has to walk long distances in search of edible fruits to feed her hungry children. "We have not had a decent meal in weeks now and three of my children have since stopped going to school," she says. "I have sold everything I could lay my hands on just to get food on the table."

At one homestead, mourners at a funeral went through the burial rituals without eating anything – something taboo in local culture.

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Droughts: Children end up on city streets

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Matabeleland South governor Stephen Nkomo says the government has put in place measures to stop the situation, which also threatens livestock. The drought has been declared a national disaster to enable donor organisations assist in feeding the starving people.

The government has also announced that it would provide \$20.7 billion for food relief to 7.8 million people affected by the drought. Already, a total of \$1.5 billion for food relief has been released under the public works programme to be shared by the country's eight administrative provinces.

More than 5.9 million people in the rural areas and 1.9 million in urban areas need food assistance after the poor harvest. Matabeleland South, the driest region in the country, has some of Zimbabwe's biggest rivers – such as Tuli and Shashane – but they lose water due to siltation caused by gold panning.

Painful as it is, Thandiwe's story depicts how natural disasters, coupled with poor economic reforms and gender discrimination, have conspired to make many Zimbabwean destitute. Forced to scavenge for food, children like Thandiwe end up on the streets of cities, where they are exposed to abuse, particularly from men taking advantage of their vulnerability.

This rural-urban migration is a long-term effect of drought, with more people opting to try a new life in the cities. Zimbabwe has seen an increase in the number of children living in the streets. While there are no precise figures, the number of street children is said to have increased in the 1990s, when the country experienced some of its worst droughts in living memory.

Our next case study takes us to the streets of Bulawayo: Xolani Sibanda, only 13, has never experienced the warmth and the hospitality of a home, let alone slept on a bed. The first time she was taken in by a welfare organisation, Thuthuka Children's Home, she would not get into bed but ducked underneath it instead.

While a few girls find their way to community centres for rehabilitation, scores end up being forcibly married to much older men with money. Due to a rise in the number of such marriages, Minister for Justice Patrick Chinamasa recently introduced stiffer penalties for those

The high price of motherhood

Why do so many mothers have to die in childbirth?

By Elizabeth Akonnor, Ghana

At 39, Ofosua had already given birth to eight children. Five were alive and, as the wife of a poor farmer, she knew they could not afford another baby. But she fell pregnant again and her husband, Kwame Poku, said it was a gift from God.

She visited the antenatal clinic during her sixth month of pregnancy. The midwife at the antenatal clinic chastised her for having so many children and also for making her first visit so late in the pregnancy.

It turned out that Ofosua was anaemic, and she was given a lot of medicine to take. She went for her second clinic visit a month later and was given more of the same medicine, which she stopped taking after some time. When she died, she still had some of the drugs in her bag.

During the eighth month of her pregnancy, Ofosua occasionally noticed some bleeding but could not go to hospital because she did not have the fare. Besides, she could feel the baby move and the bleeding always stopped on its own – except for the day she died.

This time, the bleeding started at night and would not stop. Four hours later, her husband decided she should go to hospital but it took another three hours to get the transport. When she finally arrived, the midwife set up an infusion and sent her colleague to get the doctor from his home with the ambulance. The hospital phone was not working. The doctor arrived 30 minutes later.

Ofosua was getting weaker and needed an emergency operation, he said. With three units of blood in hand, surgery started 20 minutes later. A healthy boy was quickly delivered. But the placenta was difficult to remove and she started bleeding profusely when it finally came out. The blood bank could only supply one more unit of blood even though she needed at least three units. The doctor wished he had an obstetrician around to help him out, but there was none. He eventually was able to stem the bleeding. But it was too late. She died five minutes later.

POINT OF VIEW

Yet another woman in the prime of her life had died needlessly in childbirth. Some 851 women have died so far in labour, according to Ghana's Ministry of Health. This could be just the tip of the iceberg, as many cases remain unreported.

Statistics indicate that 230 out of every 100,000 Ghanaian women die giving birth; in the developed world, this figure drops to about two to five women out of 100,000. Many other women who survive difficult labour have to live with disability or chronic illness.

The World Health Organisation estimates that about 600,000 women worldwide lose their lives through preventable complications dur-



ing pregnancy and childbirth. About 99 percent of these deaths occur in developing countries. The average woman in Africa or Asia attends one or two antenatal visits while women in the developed world attend at least 10 times before birth.

As many as 300 million women, more than one-quarter of all adult women living in the developing world, suffer from either short or long term illness and injuries related to pregnancy and childbirth.

A combination of socio-cultural factors contribute to these deaths: Harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, poor nutrition, low social status, frequent pregnancies with short birth intervals, early marriage, adolescent pregnancies, reliance on traditional medicines and healers, emotional abuse and vio-

lence.

Ironically, death in childbirth is often accepted as one of those tragedies of life. But Fred Sai, a professor at the University of Ghana Medical School, disagrees. He described it on World Health Day in 1998 as a "social injustice that reflects society's failure to value and protect women."

He added: "Women should not die because they are women. Investing in their survival and wellbeing makes economic sense as well as being a moral imperative."

During a symposium on the theme "Safe motherhood: The delays in seeking and receiving lifesaving care" held in Accra by the White Ribbon Alliance – set up by 21 non-governmental organizations as a follow-up to the Global Safe Motherhood Initiative launched in Kenya in 1987 – Patrick Kuma-Aboagye of the Ministry of Health painted a grim picture of the situation in Ghana.

Maternal deaths in Ghana ran up to 1,805 in 2000 and 2001. Most of the women were in the prime of their lives and died as a result of abortion complications or haemorrhage.

Kodjo Sena, who teaches medical sociology at the University of Ghana, Legon, identified the four delays that cost so many women their lives: Lack of recognition of the risk factors associated with pregnancy; delay in taking action when the risk has been identified; delay in arriving at a health facility and further delay in services in the health facility.

What is to be done to put an end to all these unnecessary deaths? The White Ribbon Alliance adopted a two-pronged approach – targeting communities for public education and lobbying for safe motherhood.

The International Federation of Women Lawyers, in collaboration with the Centre for Reproductive Law and Policy, have done a study of national laws and policies in reproductive health and women's empowerment in Anglophone African countries. One of the proposals is that abortion be legalised to save the lives of mothers – a highly controversial issue in African society. Whichever way the debate goes, it will take full commitment to end maternal deaths.

Nepad marginalises women

From Page 1

NEPAD has been touted as a holistic and comprehensive strategic framework for the socio-economic development of Africa. It sets out a vision for Africa stating the problems to be addressed and also includes a plan of action.

Despite the much-vaunted all-inclusiveness, NEPAD goes on to marginalise women as it is a reflection of the patriarchal nature of African societies. According to the African co-ordinator of OHCHR in Geneva, Tokumbo Ige, the structure and language of NEPAD reflects a culture that encourages little or no female participation in its evolution.

In many African societies, women are family unit heads, decision-makers and leaders in devel-

opment and peace building. They take part in conflict prevention and resolution. But women's roles in initiatives like NEPAD are vague. They have neither been consulted nor involved in the numerous meetings and processes nor invited to make their inputs.

Ige says Paragraph 49 of the NEPAD document merely states that African leaders will take responsibility for "promoting the role of women in social and economic development by, first, reinforcing their capacity in the domains of education and training and, second, by developing revenue-generating activities through facilitating access to credit and thirdly, by assuring their participation in the political and economic life of African countries."

There is no doubt about it: This is simply a token offer to African women by the owners of NEPAD. How about allowing the women themselves to make their own initiatives instead of thinking for them all the time? Rather than accepting this as their lot, African women must discuss possible mechanisms of engagement, input and an eventual part ownership of NEPAD.

Building popular support for NEPAD will require concerted efforts to invite national dialogue aimed at all levels of African society – especially the lower levels, where civil society, the majority of women and all other vulnerable groups belong. This calls for an analysis of NEPAD as a framework for development.

If African women are to be architects of their own sustained upliftment, they will need to move a step further. Despite the fact that women have not been consulted seriously or invited to the table, we must get engaged in the NEPAD process.

Ige suggests stocktaking of the operating mechanisms put in place post-Beijing at national and regional levels. This, she says, could play an important role in bringing women on board NEPAD, albeit at the eleventh hour. Women NGOs will also need to build bridges with key institutions that have direct input into the NEPAD process. As the adage goes, If the mountain will not go to Mohammed, Mohammed will have to go to the mountain.

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NETWORKED: The Africawoman team during Information Technology training in Ghana. The three-day course, on a wide range of computer skills, was designed to enable the team to manage our virtual newsroom. It was sponsored by the British Council and conducted by Dita Dang, an international IT training institute.

UGANDA

There's one law for men, and another for women

By Anne Mugisa

For 10 years or so, Annette Kokunda suffered physical and psychological torment at the hands of her tycoon husband. He beat her severely every other day, sometimes leaving her unconscious.

But the police would not arrest him, saying it was a domestic affair. Kokunda's family urged her to stay, content with the presents and cash that the man gave them. In the meantime, he was threatening to kill her if she ever left him.

Kokunda finally left after another beating. She is now studying for a diploma in law and has sued him.

Karugaba* was not so lucky. She is serving an eight-year jail sentence for killing her husband. She was initially charged with murder but she was eventually convicted of manslaughter.

Her story was that her husband returned home around 2 a.m. and started beating her for supposedly taking too long to open the door. She says she did not hear him knock. He followed her to the bedroom and accused her of not being courteous to his guests earlier in the day and also of being a bad cook. He assaulted her again. She escaped to the kitchen, but he followed and slapped her about. She escaped to the dining room and to the kitchen again and he gave chase, saying he could kill her and buy his way out of prison. She got hold of a cutlass and swung it at him and, as he turned to escape, he

They tolerate abuse and then fight back – with devastating results

was cut on the neck. He fell on a chair in the sitting room. The man died that very night.

Although there are no effective reporting systems on crime in Uganda, it is widely believed that violent crime among women is on the rise. Many of these crimes take place in abusive relationships. Women on murder charges are also often accused of killing their co-wives, the women their husbands cheat with or their stepchildren.

They all give horror accounts of abuse tolerated for so long that they finally snapped and fought back – with devastating consequences.

When they come up for trial, however, the courts are rarely interested in their claims of provocation or self-defence. Causes of crime among women are hardly analysed in a legal system that is dominated by male standards.

This has led to double standards within the judicial system when it comes to handling of violent female offenders. Even where the courts acknowledge that the offender was provoked, they often go ahead and convict them – not of murder, which carries a death sentence, but of manslaughter whose maximum penalty is life imprisonment. Most of the women find it difficult to reconcile this with the fact that they have often been pushed to the very

edge by the time they commit the crimes.

Interviews with women who have killed their husbands reveal that they consider themselves caged in by social norms that frown upon divorce and accept wife battering as a way of life. They end up believing they have no other means of escape but to kill.

There have been claims that violence by women is on the increase because of feminism. However facts on the ground contradict this, because the majority of the violent women offenders have little or no education and have very low status in society. Many of them have no idea of their rights and would not even dream of demanding equality.

In Ugandan society, the violence of husbands against their wives is socially permitted. A wife who does not submit to the wishes of her husband, however outlandish, can expect to be beaten.

In a survey carried out by Lillian Tibatemwa Ekirikubinza of the local chapter of the International Federation of Women Lawyers, only seven out of 21 men considered violence a justification for a woman leaving her marriage.

Of the 14 men who were against divorce, one argued that a woman's foremost duty was to her children and she must tolerate abuse for the

sake of her children. The rest of the men said that a man had a right to chastise his wife, arguing that women are beaten only when they do wrong. Some women have also been conditioned to accept this kind of reasoning – that women must sacrifice their self-interest for the sake of others.

While the judicial handling of the female violent offenders overlooks or refuses to take into account provocation, their male counterparts often seem to get away with it. Should a man kill his wife's lover, for example, the courts will accept this as provocation or fighting to preserve the chastity of the woman. Yet a woman who kills a man for sexually abusing her will more often than not be convicted.

This discriminatory nature of the criminal justice reflects the social relations of men and women. The courts merely follow the social patterns that dictate that men and women behave differently in similar conditions.

The failure of the law to reflect women's worldview is an indication of the powerlessness of the women in society. Many aspects of Uganda's legislation sanction female subordination. A marriage law, for example, place stringent conditions for the wife seeking divorce and dispossesses and punishes the adulterous wife but not the adulterous husband. Is it not time for the law to be overhauled to reflect present-day realities?

* Name changed to protect her privacy

International newsbriefs

UNITED STATES

Better life, but jobs a problem

NEW YORK: Life is getting better for black, Asian and Hispanic women in management positions at US corporations. But they face a "concrete ceiling" to top jobs, a study issued recently by a women's advocacy group shows. Catalyst, a non-profit group advocating the advancement of women in business, surveyed 350 women in the three minority groups in US organisations in 2001 and compared their progress and perceptions to answers given by the same women in 1998. 57 percent, had been promoted once in the three-year period and their average salaries rose from \$81,300 in 1998 to \$111,700 in 2001. While most of the report was encouraging, it said the women perceive the doors to top management as sealed to them. This leads them to use the term concrete ceiling rather than glass ceiling, said Sheila Wellington, president of Catalyst. (Reuters)

PAKISTAN

Arrests after council ordered gang rape

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani police have arrested the alleged rapists and several members of a village council that ordered the gang rape last month of an 18-year-old girl in Meerwala village, Punjab Province, as a tribal punishment. Four men raped the teenager when the council ordered her family be punished after her 11-year-old brother was seen walking unchaperoned with a girl belonging to a different tribe. The attack led to calls for greater central government control in Pakistan's tribal regions, where federal laws are often ignored. (AP)

AUSTRALIA

Women's tennis doping claim denied

WOLLONGONG: There is no evidence that women's tennis is under the influence of doping, two-time Wimbledon champion Evonne Goolagong-Cawley said. Responding to claims by Australian Sports Drug Agency Chief Executive John Mendoza that the physiques of some women players were "bizarre" – he compared them to Chinese female swimmers of the early 1990s who later tested positive to drugs – Goolagong-Cawley, winner of seven grand slam titles, said all women players were being unfairly tarnished by the drug claims. "They have no evidence," she said. "In every generation you're going to have some players that seem stronger." (AP)

EDITORIAL

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Kenya's first woman presidential candidate Charity Ngilu works up the crowd at a campaign rally. African women may be powerful privately, but they are poorly represented in elective politics.

The power of an angry African woman

You would not know it from the representation of women in Africa's leadership, but they have always been a social and political force to reckon with. From Cape Town to Cairo, politicians have won elections on the strength of support from women. In East Africa, for example, the figure 65 per cent is often cited as the number of women turning out to vote. But when it comes to political positions, the sub-Saharan average for women is only 11.8 per cent.

The case of the Nigerian women who occupied the main oil terminal at ChevronTexaco's Escravos site should put to rest any doubts that African women are strong and powerful. By the time they were ending their 10-day sit-in, which paralysed the oil giant's Nigerian operations, they had managed to win concessions that our governments never would have been able to pull off.

The women demanded, and got, commitments from the company that it would provide jobs for 25 villagers over five years and help build schools, clinics and chicken and fish farms. And how did they do it?

Not by engaging in never-ending discussions of the kind that take place between representatives of the Bretton Woods institutions and other bilateral and multilateral funders, which still end up withholding aid for dog years anyway.

Not at the point of a gun, a strategy apparently common with Nigerian men—who reportedly use kidnapping and sabotage to pressure oil giants into jobs, protection money and compensation for so-called environmental damage.

The women aged 30 to 90 simply threatened to bare all if their demands were not met. In many parts of Africa, this is the ultimate curse. The majority of women did not even speak English, yet they got a breakthrough that even the renowned author Ken Saro-Wiwa was unable to get. The Nigerian Government hanged him for his Ogoni crusade against the oil-producing giant Shell.

The women's protest marks a new era of negotiations between multi-nationals, governments and the ordinary people of Africa. It is a wonderful departure from the social conditioning that often works to suppress women's voices and turn them literally into second-class citizens.

Reading through the stories in *Africawoman*, you will no doubt have noticed the many hurdles that Africa's women must face in public and private if they are to make anything of their lives. A great deal of this discrimination is grounded in traditions and culture that accord leadership and power to men.

The Nigerian women have taught us a lesson we appear to have forgotten. Throughout history, African women have been movers and shakers. The history of the liberation struggles in Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, Angola and Mozambique is full of the names of women who sacrificed comfort and either went to the bush to fight or actively supported the freedom fighters. Yet independence has not given women their due recognition—except perhaps in South Africa.

With Escravos behind us, perhaps women will find the courage to venture more boldly into public with demands that they do not only gain access to the corridors of power but that they become the powerful economic force that they can be.

SCOTLAND

African aid workers tackle Scottish poverty

African aid workers are being posted to Greenock and Port Glasgow to help deprived Scots overcome social problems.

The unique project has been put together because of the appalling deprivation of an area that has become one of the worst in the country. It will "challenge stereotypes", according to the organisers, the Prince's Trust and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), the Third World development agency.

Nine Nigerians, aged 17 to 25, will be paired with nine UK volunteers and placed with community groups in Inverclyde.

The three-month project by VSO and the Prince's Trust, which chose Inverclyde because of its "deprivation levels", is being paid for with Millennium Fund money.

The volunteers begin work in August, assisting charities which address problems created by unemployment and drug abuse.

They will live with local families and work with the poor, children's groups and unemployed workers, helping them to acquire new skills ranging from the basics of numeracy and literacy to computer skills.

After the three months, the volunteers will move as a group to a project in Nigeria.

Jacinta Sweeney, a Scots-born VSO worker, returned from Cameroon in West Africa to supervise the project. She said: "Nigerians arriving in Greenock will raise eyebrows. It appears as role reversal – volunteers go to Africa, Africans don't come here. It's the first project in Scotland and it challenges stereotypes. They will have much to offer"

The prospect of African "missionaries" on the Clyde was welcomed yesterday, but Tommy Graham, a former Labour MP, believes they could engender resentment.

Mr Graham, who was associated with Inverclyde for 24 years, said:

"It wouldn't be racial, but there's little they can achieve.

"For years Inverclyde has had intense, social therapy. Volunteers won't dent the problems."

He added: "Knowing the nature of locals, the newcomers will be welcomed, but I can't see them making a difference unless it's going for the messages or painting someone's house."

This article, written by Jim McBeth, was first published in The Scotsman newspaper.

LAGOS v GREENOCK

Lagos, Nigeria

Established: about 1500
Population: 1,274,000
Industry: Commercial port, heavy industry
Unemployment: Officially 13.6 per cent — World Bank says 50 per cent in poverty
Infant mortality: 74 deaths per 1,000 births
Life expectancy: 51 years
Literacy: 57 per cent
HIV/AIDS prevalence: 5 per cent
Football: National team made World Cup

Greenock, Scotland

Established: 1592
Population: 50,013 - down from 81,123 in 1921
Industry: Call centres, Clydeport
Unemployment: In men of working age, about 15 per cent, with 10.8 per cent permanently sick - 31 per cent poverty
Infant mortality: 94 deaths per 10,000 births
Death rate: Twice as high as East Dorset
Drug misuse: 5 in 1,000 pop. injecting users
Football: Greenock Morton FC, 3rd Division



Role reversal: Ms Sweeney with some of the African volunteers coming to the aid of Greenock.

REPORT ON LEADERS

Women are brilliant – and then maybe not

By Sandra Nyaira, Zimbabwe

It is one of the most contentious issues of our time: Can women be as good, or better, leaders than men? Well, the answer remains as vexed as ever, going by a British Council study in East and Central Africa.

The research on leadership took place in eight countries – Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe – in late 2001 when 800 people were interviewed in the seminal research on people's perceptions of women political leaders in particular.

Effective Leaders? Views from East and Central Africa captures their sentiments succinctly: Most of the people interviewed saw no major difference between male and female leaders, saying women were just as apt as men to forget the ordinary person once elected.

"I don't see any difference – women have done nothing special," said the Rev. Violet Sampa-Bredit, general secretary of the Christian Council of Zambia. "They've been co-opted into the male structure." Her compatriot, village headman James Mukupa, holds a different view: "Women are more effective because they go to the field more ... because they are mothers, they know what the communities need. Men only like to drink beer."

Despite the advantage of numbers – women are the majority of voters in most African countries –

there are few countries in the region that have a critical mass of female MPs, with Uganda's Vice-President Specioza Kazibwe being the highest-ranking woman politician. This was attributed to the "pull her down" syndrome among women, who hold each other back by refusing to support and nurture each other's careers out of jealousy.

Uganda's MPs

In November 2001, Uganda had the highest percentage of women MPs – standing at 24.4 percent. Tanzania and Eritrea came close at 22.3 percent and 22 percent respectively. Zambia and Zimbabwe ranked fourth and fifth at 10.1 percent and 10 percent. Malawi and Ethiopia came next, at 9.3 percent and 7.7 percent respectively, and Kenya came last at 3.8 percent.

Speaking during the launch of the report in Harare, Hope Sadza, the executive chair of the Women's University in Africa, women should not be seen as women leaders in Parliament or boardrooms but simply as leaders. It would be necessary to bridge the gap between the public and private roles of women politicians, she added. But others argued that it was not so much an issue of numbers as the quality of women who made it to the top.

The initiative was part of a British Council project to support an increased role for women in politics and leadership. The research



The cover of the British Council's report on leadership in Africa.

chers interviewed both rural and urban people on their perceptions of women leaders, especially about their effectiveness in improving the lives of the average person.

The responses were consistent across the eight countries. Some felt that leadership was rightly the preserve of men and that women should lead at certain levels only – such as in the Treasury, because they are considered to be more honest and less corrupt than men.

Despite a generally jaundiced view of politicians, the majority of the respondents felt that women were better able to represent the concerns of other women in the political arena and were more likely to follow up on their electioneering promises in their constituencies. "Women leaders are grassroots-based – they always come back to support their communities and in particular women," a Zimbabwean respondent said.

There were concerns that most women go into politics with less experience and less education than men – and this hampers their ability to get things done. But some respondents argued that "women leaders are brilliant and innovative

but they are not listened to."

Nevertheless, most of the respondents were against affirmative action programmes to ensure more women are in local governance structures and parliament. In Uganda, respondents argued that affirmative action MPs were less accountable and performed poorly because they had not earned their positions on merit and were "inadequately prepared for office."

"We want women at the top but they should not genetically engineer them ... we want women with footprints ... people who have a history," a Uganda woman MP said.

Recommendations

The respondents made a number of recommendations, which include providing opportunities for training, exchanges and interaction with other successful women role models, increased access to information, more access to funding and the need for the various governments to amend laws and policies that affect and hinder the growth of women in all sectors of life.

As a result of the research, The British Council plans to develop a

two-way exchange programme between women political leaders in East and Central Africa and the United Kingdom. The idea is to link the politicians with mentors or have them shadow one another to help identify how they can effectively represent the people they serve, particularly the poor, most of whom are women.

Helena Kennedy, the chair of the British Council, said: "For the British Council, the point is not just to increase numbers but also support the creation of a new agenda in politics and the media, taking action that changes the lives of the ordinary women for the better."

Of those interviewed, 47 percent of Zimbabweans felt that women politicians were less corrupt than men compared with 53 percent of the respondents from Kenya and 61 percent from Uganda.

What should be done to move forward? Retired politician Sara Ntiro of Uganda said: "Establish agencies that can develop or support women leaders. Women need to chat on their own, to meet. Women leaders feel lonely. Social, political and legal systems that support women's action are still very fragile."

Racism or brotherhood: Why Africans supported Senegal

By Margaret Ziribagwa, Uganda

It was cheers all over Africa when Henri Camara's golden goal took Senegal through to the World Cup quarter-finals at the expense of Sweden. Senegal became the second African nation ever to reach the last eight, Cameroon having been the first in 1990.

Senegal's hopes of advancing into the semi-finals – by this time transformed into an African dream – were, however, shattered when Turkey beat them 2-1. Across the continent, Senegal's departure from the premier football bonanza was met with a mix of disappointment and pride. "I am very proud of the Lions who bear the name of Senegal – they have honoured Africa," said President Abdoulaye Wade, calling on his people to

POINT OF VIEW

hold national celebrations upon the team's return from Japan.

Federation of Uganda Football Association Secretary-General Haruna Mawanda said: "It is tough, but not the end of the world. To support Senegal was to support Africa." A fan watching the match in a Johannesburg bar went further: "I feel so bad ... we fully supported Senegal, but their legs just got tired."

Was it racism or brotherhood? In the days after the end of the World Cup, many commentators pondered this question, with a consensus emerging: Senegal were Africa's favourites because they proved to the world that all continents can produce players good



Senegal fan celebrates.

enough to hold their own on an international pitch. Senegal became the symbol of the underdogs, not only in sport but also politically, and so Africans had good reason to re-

joice and associate with their success.

Was it a gender thing? Football may be largely a men's game, but women were out there cheering as loudly and passionately as any fans – some having traveled all the way from countries such as France to support the team. All the Senegalese players are professionals in France, prompting the French to refer to them as "France B Team" at the World Cup.

For one month, football united people across race and gender, raising hopes that they can work in harmony and on an equal footing in all leadership positions. In Japan and Korea, the roles were often reversed, with women the cheerleaders as men followed.

Is this an indication of what the future holds?

CULTURE

"I give this prize-winning book to all Zimbabweans who lost loved ones in the 1980 to 1986 disturbances"

Yvonne Vera

finally finds
a voice – and
how it booms...



Author Yvonne Vera is reflecting on her life, another successful book behind her: "When I was growing up, I often felt too short for any great tasks. Too female. Too kind. Too apologetic. My voice was not loud enough. One teacher said to me in Form Two, 'Speak loud enough. I am not your mother-in-law!' He was a great teacher but these words were shocking to me. But the mind has its own limitless horizons and I am glad."

The little girl who could not speak loud enough has found a way of speaking so loud and so effectively that her voice echoes and reverberates throughout the world. Now a multiple award-winning novelist of international stature, her books have been translated into Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, German, Norwegian, Catalan and Finnish.

Through her writing, Vera is speaking out on several pertinent issues and giving a voice to the downtrodden in her society, particularly women. All of her novels feature very strong female characters.

In the novel *Under the Tongue*, she gives a voice to the girl child through the heroine of her story, Zhizha, who is raped by her father. In her latest offering, *The Stone Virgins*, she lends her voice to the thousands of people who lost loved ones in the genocidal killings perpetrated by the

National Army's North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade against innocent civilians in Matabeleland in the 1980s. As usual, women characters are at the centre of her story telling.

It is estimated that about 20,000 unarmed villagers died between 1980 and 1986, when the army cracked down on Matabeleland, ostensibly in search of dissidents. When an amnesty was finally declared in 1987, barely 100 dissidents emerged from the bush, ending what has come to be known in the minds of the people of Matabeleland as the Gukurahundi massacres. President Robert Mugabe has since described that period as "an act of madness, never to be repeated."

The people who lived through that horror were scarred for life, however, and it is from these people's point of view that Vera has written her book. "I give this prize-winning book to all Zimbabweans, who lost loved ones in the 1980 to 1986 disturbances," says the author, who believes that the role of literature is to stand as a neutral wit-

ness to events.

The novel's plot follows the lives of two sisters – Thenjiwe and Nonceba – of Kezi, a district in Southern Matabeleland that was heavily affected by all the wars in the history of Zimbabwe. The two live through the violence of the war of liberation, welcome the dawning of independence in 1980 only to have their hopes of peace shattered when the "dissidents' war" breaks out. They once more find themselves caught up in a vicious cycle of violence.

Historian and author Phathisa Nyathi, who spoke at the official launch of the book on May 23, said: "This book is about a lot of issues. It is about tribulations – of women burdened by war, of a community caught between the hammer and the anvil ... About women's vulnerability and brutalisation in a war situation."

One of the two sisters has her mouth cut off by the soldiers and several people are tortured and executed on trumped up charges or allegations. Nyathi quoted an extract from the novel about a storekeeper named Mahlathini, who was tortured and killed: "Mahlathini had no time to protest, neither was he invited to. He did not challenge the accusations, which he knew to be false. Who was Mahlathini? He was only a storekeeper whom they could skin alive and discard."

in case anybody is in doubt as to whether the violence was planned or just a series of sporadic unconnected events, this what the author has to say in the book: "The team of soldiers who had congregated at Thandabantu Store had demonstrated that anything that had happened so far had not been random or unplanned. Atrocious yes, but purposeful. They committed evil as if it was a legitimate pursuit, a ritual for their convictions." It is no wonder therefore that Nyathi said: "This is a haunting tale of human cruelty at its most mad ... If you don't shed a tear or two after reading this book, you either have no heart or you have one of stone."

Vera herself says it was her love for Matabeleland region and its people that spurred her to write about that period in its history (1980 to 1986), which she describes as "most senseless, most difficult to understand".

She adds: "This is a book about love and war. I have written it with what I hope is an appropriate

elegance and beauty. There is no doubt that Matabeleland has the most stunning and ferocious landscape for a writer to engage. I will always write within this environment. This book has made me love this land more than I ever dreamed possible."

The Stone Virgins has won the inaugural US\$5,000 Macmillan Prize for Fiction for Africa, awarded to unpublished manuscripts from the African continent. "I am very glad that the judges of this prize were equally amazed by my words, and by the penetrating depth of our history," says the author. "What comes out in the novel really is the conflict of the beauty of this landscape and the horror and violence of the different wars that people went through."

She has more than seven awards to her name. She has won the Zimbabwe Book Publishers Award a record five times and, in 1999, snapped up the first Voice of Africa Award – the Commonwealth Prize for Africa – that carries a US\$12 600 prize.

Although she values these prizes, Vera says it is her love for her community whose story she strives to tell, that keeps her writing. "I feel very close to my community and I am humbled to realise that I have served it well. I am very glad that Zimbabwe has won such a prestigious prize in literature and that Bulawayo, in particular, has at this stage contributed significantly to world literature. I will continue to write."

Born in Bulawayo 37 years ago, Vera holds a doctorate in literature from Canada and rose to prominence in the early 1990s, when she published the collection of short stories *Why don't you carve other animals?* A novel, *Nehanda*, followed. It won the Zimbabwe Book Publishers Award. In 1996, she wrote *Under the Tongue*, which won the Voice of Africa Award. She followed it up three years later with *Butterfly Burning*, a novel set in her hometown's oldest high-density suburb, Makokoba.

The Stone Virgins is her first novel in a rural setting, inspired by the rolling landscape of Matopo and Kezi, an area that is as scenic as it is rich in history. The success of the book is a source of great pride for her – especially as it addresses a very sensitive, very emotional period in Zimbabwe's history.

Vera is director of the National Gallery in Bulawayo. She took three months' residency at a villa in the German City of Feldafing to write and finish *The Stone Virgins*. – Sifanele Ndlovu, Zimbabwe

"I feel very close to my community and I am humbled to realise that I have served it well"



"This book has made me love this land more than I ever dreamed possible"

African politicians have much to learn from the example of Nelson Mandela and Alpha Omar Konare



Top to bottom, left to right: Thabo Mbeki, Yoweri Museveni, Daniel arap Moi, Abdou Diouf, Sam Nujoma and Levy Mwanawasa

By Abigail Acquaye, Ghana

As Kenyans gear up for elections this year, President Daniel arap Moi has finally said he will step down – but not without a catch. “I will remain chairman of Kanu,” said Moi of his ruling party.

Clinging to power long after they have ceased to be popular is a major problem among African leaders. Indeed, this is the main reason Africa is beset with numerous conflicts that have led to gross violations of human rights. It is to reverse this trend that a few African leaders have accepted democracy, good governance and respect for human rights. This breed of leaders has carved a new image, not only for themselves but also for the entire continent.

The latest to join this exclusive group of ex-presidents – which includes Tanzania’s Julius Nyerere, South Africa’s Nelson Mandela, Ghana’s Jerry John Rawlings and Senegal’s Abdou Diouf – is Alpha Omar Konare, immediate past president of Mali, who bowed out when his term of office ended this year after two terms spanning two decades.

Although his party put up a candidate in the April 28 presidential elections, he made no attempt whatsoever to subvert the electoral process. Last year, he called off a constitutional referendum that would have granted him immunity from prosecution in response to widespread public criticism. Upcoming African leaders would do well to adopt such qualities of statesmanship.

By his gesture, Mr Konare has demonstrated a great sense of maturity in respect for rule of law. Any attempt to manipulate the constitution to his benefit would have had great consequences for the sub-region.

Mandela, one of the world’s most respected and admired statesmen, inspired the world with his determination to replace the apartheid regime of South Africa with a multi-racial democracy. Despite 27 long years in jail, he emerged to become the

INSIGHT

Africa’s leaders must know when to quit

country’s first black president and went on to play a leading role in the drive for peace in other flashpoints on the continent. He was actively involved in the search for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and other African countries and even ventured into the Middle East.

Mandela was not power-drunk. Elected President in 1994, he entrusted his deputy, Thabo Mbeki, with the day-to-day business of government while he concentrated on building a new international image for South Africa. And he succeeded in persuading multi-national corporations to remain and invest in the new South Africa. He gave up the presidency of the African National Congress in December 1997 in favour of Mbeki and stepped down as president after the ANC’s landslide election victory.

In 1961, Tanzania, then Tanganyika, gained independence under Julius Nyerere. Nyerere stepped down in 1985 aged 63 to be replaced by Ali Hassan Mwinyi followed by Benjamin Mkapa. After a two decade reign, Jerry Rawlings stepped down in 2000. Senegal’s Abdou Diouf quit in March 2000 after almost two decades in power.

In the category of Africa’s leaders determined to die with their boots on are Gam-

bia’s Yahya Jammeh, who came to power in 1994 after ousting Dawda Jawara, who had ruled for 29 years. Malawi’s Bakili Muluzi is currently embroiled in a confrontation with the opposition over his attempts to amend the constitution to enable him stay in power for a third term. His move has met with stiff opposition from church and civic groups. Under Malawian law, Muluzi must vacate office when his second term expires in 2004. The Malawian leader came to power in 1994 after ousting founding president Kamuzu Banda in landmark pluralist elections. Banda had ruled Malawi for 30 years and had styled himself life-president.

Sam Nujoma of Namibia has reigned since February 1990. Togo’s Gnassingbe Eyadema has been in power for over 30 years while Moi has reigned since 1978, when first president Jomo Kenyatta died.

Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe is serving yet another term. He has been in power since 1981. Zimbabwe’s Presidential elections held between March 9 and 11 this year were tainted with massive election fraud. Over 200,000 votes were improperly cast, the election was held in an atmosphere of fear, there were large discrepancies in figures recorded at polling stations and those

announced by government and the opposition had no access to state media, which operates the only TV and radio network.

Cameroon’s Paul Biya has ruled from 1982. His predecessor was in power for 22 years. A presidential election is due in 2004 and it is hoped that Biya will not manipulate the electoral system to his advantage.

After many years in power, Guinea’s Lansana Conte is faced with rebellion from the Reassemblment des Forces Democratique d’Guinee, which has launched a series of attacks aimed at overthrowing his government. This situation is frightening, considering that the fighting that erupted in Sierra Leone and Liberia began in a similar manner. Although very little is known about this group, its attacks on Guinea have caused alarm in the sub-region and beyond.

Last year, Zambia’s Frederick Chiluba contemplated a third term and tried to amend the constitution but recoiled following intense condemnation both at home and abroad. His handpicked successor, Levy Mwanawasa, appears to have turned against him, seeking to take him to court over corruption.

But for the death of Unita leader Jonas Savimbi in February this year, the Angolan civil war would have persisted. After being tracked down by government troops, Savimbi died in a hail of bullets aged 67. When he emerged from the bush to contest the 1992 elections and lost, Savimbi cried foul and unleashed mayhem until his death.

Yoweri Museveni of Uganda has ruled for 16 years. His political career took off in the 1970s after a rebel movement backed by Tanzania ousted Idi Amin. He served as a minister in the new government that took power but then claimed that elections held in 1980 were rigged. On February 6, 1981, he went to the bush and took power in 1986.

One thing that is certain: African leaders can no longer treat their countries as their bona fide property and thus hold their people to ransom. They must know when they have outlived their usefulness and quit.

U M B E Y A

{ NOT THE OFFICIAL NEWS }

After a beautiful Scottish wedding, it was time mid-July for our very own Lesley and new husband Chris Smith to go through an Africa mini-ceremony. Not one to miss a beat, Chris did exactly what is expected of an African groom – he paid the bride price to visiting in-laws from the *Africanwoman* team.

He got on the right side of his mother-in-law (Charity Binka, Ghana) and the elders (Florence Machio, Pamela Sulwey and Ruth Omukhango of Kenya, Margaret Ziribaggwa of Uganda and Ropa of Zimbabwe) by presenting them with blankets. He had obviously learnt early the value of blankets, which is often part of the attire of African elders. Who can doubt that Lesley is in good hands?

Welcome to the family, Chris!

Where there's a map . . .

All in all, *Africanwoman's* outing in the UK went pretty well. The team did not only spend quality time bonding and brainstorming on the future of the project, but the editors also learnt some useful life skills. Arriving in London for the first time, some team members expected to be met by a chaperone.

Instead, they found out that the map of London was going to be their companion for the duration of their stay. “

A guest is never given a map in Africa,” exclaimed Kenya Country Coordinator Ruth Omukhango, but she was quick to add that experience is the best teacher.

Expecting a running commentary on people, places and events from the taxi driver on her way to town from the airport, Administrator Pamela Sulwey was instead met with silence,

albeit a polite one.

But Florence certainly had the best of the British: Having forgotten her laptop computer in a taxi, she could have expected to spend her time fretting about her loss. But not in the capital of the world. The taxi driver tracked her down and delivered the computer right into her hands.

Double fun . . .

Following closely in Lesley's footsteps is Alice Emasu of Uganda, who recently tied the knot in a colourful Buganda wedding ceremony. It turned into double celebration when she had a baby girl, the first for *Africanwoman*. Umbeya takes this early opportunity to wish our firstborn the best that life has to offer.

Radiant and glowing . . .

There's another baby on the way. Remember Susan Janji-M of Zimbabwe? After meeting her during a recent fact-finding trip to Harare, Coordinator Florence could only say: “Susan looks radiant. Pregnancy clearly becomes her.” Despite the political crisis and the drought in southern Africa, our team in Zimbabwe is not doing too badly. Regina Nyirenda is glowing like a neon light – she is in love!

Making the news . . .

Florence, meanwhile, was feeling anything but bright and chirpy. She was detained for an hour for not adhering to a law that requires all journalists visiting Zimbabwe to put in a formal application to the Ministry of

Information. She was held at the airport for an hour and was only allowed in when she promised not to write a story against the president. It wasn't all bad. For the first time, she became a newsmaker rather than newswoman after the *Daily News* carried the report.

Looking for love . . .

What is it with the Zimbabweans? Ropa Mapimhidze tells us she is also looking for the man of her dreams. All that she asks is that he be young and “small.” She has that in common with Jean Rafferty. Alistair McNeill – the professor – was on hand to show Ropa all the websites where she could find love. Ropa and Jean, please report back on your adventures in the world of romance.

Lesson from history

In our last edition, we heard from our Ugandan sisters that their countrywomen are up in arms over Congolese women stealing their men.

The Congolese apparently have followed UPDF soldiers returning home from combat, claiming to have been legally married to them. Psshaw! Word from Kenya is that local women think it is just a case of the Ugandans getting their just desserts. During the Idi Amin crisis in the 1970s, they say, Ugandan women came to Kenya in droves.

Lacking any other opportunities, they often took up domestic work – whereupon they so impressed Kenyan men with their class and style that they soon had no time for their legit wives. History does repeat itself, eh!

UGANDA

Children having children

By Alice Emasu

It is the Day of the African Child and a group of 87 teenagers are sitting under a tree in Kaptanyain Tingey in eastern Uganda.

Some carry babies on their backs and others under their arms. But almost every one of the girls aged 14 to 17 years appears anxious. They would like to return to school but they have no fees and no place to leave their babies as they study. Only six of the girls have no babies. They died prematurely.

Irene Chebet, 14, sets the ball rolling. “I woke up one morning to find my stomach protruding. When I consulted my grandmother, she said I was pregnant. I did not take her words seriously because my periods had not started. I was not throwing up. I was not sickly and I had big appetite. I wondered how I could have conceived when I had sex with my boyfriend only twice.”

Two months later, she felt the baby kicking. “This was the end of my studies,” she says. Chebet's experience can be chalked down to the rites of passage among her Sabin people. After they have gone through female circumcision – or female genital mutilation, as human rights activists prefer to call it – girls as young as 11 are encouraged to marry. Circumcision signifies adulthood.

The Day of the African Child – June 16 – is an opportunity to focus on how to improve the lives of children. Here in eastern Uganda, girls as young as 11 are given away in marriage under the pretext of poverty. In exchange, their parents receive livestock, food and items such as bicycles.

China asks for abortions

Some Chinese women who are married to Taiwanese have been asked to have abortions when they visit home to comply with China's one-child policy, a Taiwanese official has said. At least six Chinese women with Taiwanese husbands said they were harassed by Chinese officials who wanted them to have abortions or undergo surgeries to prevent further pregnancies, Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation said in a statement.

Women with one child were asked to take a pregnancy test every three months to ensure they do not get pregnant again, according to the foundation. China uses its one-child policy to control growth of its population, which has climbed to 1.3 billion. (AP)

GHANA

Selling newspapers the Afisietu way

By Charity Binka

Selling newspapers is hardly a glamorous job, but Afisietu Issaka is not complaining. The 22-year-old completed senior secondary school in 1998 but did not make the grades to go to college. But the young woman, who makes a living as a newspaper vendor outside the University of Ghana campus in Accra, is determined to make up for lost time.

She is rewriting some of her papers and hopes to study for a higher diploma in accountancy. And that is where the problem lies: She has no money to pay the fees.

Afisietu is the fourth of five children born to a security officer, now retired. On leaving his job, he started selling newspapers to make ends meet. Afisietu works alongside him, helping to raise sales and ensuring that their earnings are kept within the family. Her only hope of returning to school lies in supporting her father, she says.

“I enjoy my job and don't feel intimidated in any way,” she adds.



Afisietu Issaka: Selling newspapers pays for education.

Occasionally, people stop by and ask why she should be selling newspapers. Her response is simple: Whatever a man can do, a woman can too.

Some customers buy from her

simply for the novelty of it. She considers herself lucky to be working in a friendly neighbourhood. The “learned friends” on the campus are full of praise for her “courage”.

Afisietu confides that one lecturer was so impressed that he has pledged to buy from her as long as she continues selling newspapers by this particular roadside. Unlike her male colleagues, who carry their stock under their arms and keep running back and forth on the streets, Afisietu has a specially designed stand for displaying her newspapers. Her customers like her for one thing: After buying from her once, they need not tell her what newspapers they read.

Afisietu sells about 150 newspapers a day. She earns about US\$135 a month – an amount much higher than a university graduate earns as a government worker. If she can maintain the pace until July next year, there will be enough money to see her through her training.

Her message to other young women still holding out for “decent” jobs: “They have to know that there is no discrimination in jobs. Every job is decent. If they say there are jobs for men and others for women, they will remain out there doing nothing.”