BRAIN DRAIN HURTS AFRICA

Local hospitals are left high and dry as poorly-paid nurses move north to shore up Britain’s National Health Service

By Sandra Nyaira, Zimbabwe

THEY come from different parts of Africa, but have just one goal when they arrive in Britain — to make a better life for themselves and their families back home.

They are the thousands of women, most of them professional, who leave their poorly paid jobs and make tracks for the United Kingdom in search of greener pastures.

For many immigrants from Africa and most of the developing world, Britain is the land of great opportunity — a country overflowing with milk and honey. But things soon fall apart as they experience the trauma and the stress of surviving in a foreign land.

The women, who now form a very powerful economic group in their adopted land, leave their husbands, extended families, children and friends to work in the UK. The skilled women do all the menial jobs that the British and European Union nationals do not want, mainly because of their irregular immigration status.

Occupied mostly in cleaning and care giving in hospitals and old people’s homes, they work for 18 to 22 hours every day. They rarely have the time to rest and eat well, their ultimate goal being to amass as much money as possible and fulfill their dreams of owning houses and cars and having a comfortable life back home.

These foreign women, recruited from their nursing jobs by UK agencies, now hold Britain’s health delivery system in their hands.

British recruiting drive

British health service trusts are recruiting growing numbers of nurses from overseas to ease staff shortages while homegrown hospital workers emigrate to the UK, where they enjoy better salaries and perks.

This prompted former South African President Nelson Mandela to tell the British government in 1999 to stop “systematically stripping” Southern Africa of its most vital resource — skilled medical staff.

Three years on, the stripping game has ignited debate in London over the government’s morality in recruiting the foreign medical staff.

Southern Africa takes pride in its array of institutions of higher learning that annually churn out qualified personnel — which continues to trek to the UK in search of greener pastures soon after training. Zimbabwe has responded by bonding nurses and doctors for the number of years they were trained with public funds.

African leaders argue Britain continues to strip them of their nurses and doctors to shore up its National Health Service (NHS) by dangling attractive perks they can never afford.

In the years since Mandela appealed to Britain to stop poaching nurses from southern Commonwealth countries:...
Good friends look out for each other, says Commonwealth boss

From Page 1

We are not investing in the vital sectors that would greatly benefit the economies of the beneficiary countries. According to Uganda Investment Authority records, 26 foreign nations had invested in the country as at 2002. Of these, nine are Commonwealth countries that contribute investments worth US$670,868,585. Britain heads the list at US$60,257,760 followed by Mauritius at US$44,845,000, Kenya at US$32,120,935 and Australia at US$23 million.

Uganda would be better off if the investments went to sectors that would directly benefit grassroots communities. But, as things stand, the bulk of the investment is being poured into mining and quarrying, which takes 60.9 percent at US$545.8 million put into six projects that employ 763 people. In a country with no mineral-based manufacturing industries, the gain from this big investment is minimal in terms of employment and real national income.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing - considered the backbone of Uganda’s economy and the sector that directly employs women - takes only 9.1 percent of the total investments, with US$41.9 million and directly employing 4,714 in 25 projects.

Manufacturing is third with 5.7 percent of the investment and 45 projects employing 2,973 people at $31 million worth.

Uganda and many African countries have an edge in sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishing and tourism, says Uganda Investment Authority Director Maggie Kigozi. Yet there is very little investment in agriculture.

If Commonwealth countries are to become real partners in development with Uganda, more aid, trade and investment should be geared to the sectors that directly contribute to economic development and growth, Kigozi says.

Rise to challenge

To boost fair trade, developing countries also need to rise to the challenge of competitive trade. Fair trade should be a two-way traffic. It is for this reason that Commonwealth Business Council Mohan Kaul recently called on African nations to improve their business environment.

Among the areas that require improvement are: Joint action by governments, improving competitiveness, greater involvement of the private sector and development of infrastructure. African countries will only be able to compete effectively in sectors where they have an economic advantage.

If they keep on protecting industries that produce commodities that cost three times the world price and persist in neglecting the sectors where they have an advantage, fair trade will remain a myth, says McKinnon.

Ugandan firms that are producing for export, such as the Mairuye flower and vegetable project, are enjoying maximum returns, according to Kigozi. This is because the country is endowed with rich soils, conducive environment and cheap labour.

Developing nations can only improve competitiveness by networking with each other and the developed nations. But many women have little or no information on trade and market opportunities. Although the Commonwealth businesswomen’s organisation has done a lot to improve on this through workshops and information exchange, it is like a drop in the ocean, says Kigozi.

If they are to make any breakthroughs, local investors will need to improve on quality, be more organised and create more awareness of international labour, human rights and environment laws.

Kigozi has words of advice: Developed countries will buy your goods only if you have up-to-date book keeping, high quality goods and if you do not engage in child labour and protect the environment.

It is also necessary for the developed nations to make it easier for developing countries to access their markets. Why spend five times more on the beef industry when they can get all the beef they want from any East African country - and cholesterol-free at that!

It is certainly uneconomical for industrialised countries to subsidise their farmers to produce food that could be grown cheaper and more efficiently by developing countries.

Opening up their markets would benefit rich countries too, since allowing the economies of poor nations to grow would create new markets for the developed world, says McKinnon. All this talk of partnerships between Commonwealth countries will be meaningful only if there is mutual benefit. As McKinnon puts it: “In our interdependent world, we cannot hang on to the belief that we can live in isolation and ignore the suffering around us. We are all neighbours now and, as neighbours, we must realise we are all better off if we look after each other.”
Cricket wrangle splits Commonwealth

By Florence Machio

The theme of this year’s Commonwealth Day may be “partners in development”, but recent developments in the world of sports have forced many to reflect on just where the boundaries of partnerships lie.

New Zealand and England certainly demonstrated that there are limits when it comes to cricket.

When the International Cricket Council decided that some of the matches in the Cricket World Cup be co-hosted by Kenya and Zimbabwe alongside South Africa—the main host—complaints about insecurity soon became the order of the day. And this despite the fact that the council carried out its own independent investigations and established that the security arrangements in the two countries were just as good as those in South Africa.

This being the first time that the continent would host the event, many African cricket fans were excited. The temperature dropped enormously with the news that New Zealand would not play in Nairobi. While England and Australia were also threatening to boycott their scheduled matches in Zimbabwe. Both Kenya and Zimbabwe vowed not to play the matches elsewhere.

The key question was why, even after security arrangements were upgraded, the Kiwis and Aussies would still insist on not playing in the two countries.

After September 11, 2002, it is generally agreed that there is no safe haven in the world—not unless terrorism is completely wiped out. When the World Trade Centre and even the Pentagon were attacked, it became apparent that even those who claim the most sophisticated security systems could ever claim to be safe.

The Africans immediately cried foul. Kenyan police spokesman King’ori Mwangi dismissed New Zealand’s position as “outrageous and dishonest”. South Africans Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki were quick to join the fray, with President Mbeki saying: “Given what has happened with regard to Kenya and Zimbabwe, it may very well be that the false ‘travel alerts’ about South Africa were intended to convey a global message of general African insecurity to prepare for the campaign against Zimbabwe and Kenya and, therefore, the African-hosted Cricket World Cup.”

Kenya Cricket Association chairman and I&CC member Jimmy Rayani capped it all by saying of the Kiwis: “If people are going to be paranoid about security, then even the White House would be unsafe.”

Less than charitable

It was not the first time that Kenya had been at the receiving end of less than charitable remarks from fellow members of the Commonwealth. While pitching for the Toronto Olympics bid, Mayor Mel Lastman said to a freelance journalist before leaving for a trip to Kenya: “Why the hell would I want to go to a place like Mombasa? I just see myself in a pot of boiling water with all these natives dancing around me.”

Although he later apologised, there were no tears shed in Kenya when Toronto lost the bid to host the 2008 Olympics to Beijing. At the end of the day, he just might have realised he needed the “cannibals” to give weight to his bid.

Could it be that the Kiwis are suffering from the same wild imagination? If so, they stand accused of flouting the Commonwealth spirit of sports and Australia—which is the current head of the Commonwealth Committee on Cooperation through Sports—has proved itself unable to give any meaningful guidance.

When taking up the mantle at the sports committee, the Australian minister for arts and sports said: “One of its priorities will be to advocate to governments and international agencies, including the United Nations, the power of sport as a vehicle for community development within the Commonwealth.”

Mike Mills, a Nairobi rights activist, had this say: “I can’t understand why the New Zealand cricketers don’t want to play here. It seems to me that they are inadvertently supporting Osama bin Laden. What better way to support terrorism than to be scared of playing in a country as beautiful as Kenya?”

Pride and prejudice are unlikely bedmates for partnerships. New Zealand, Australia and England wasted an opportunity to join with the rest of the Commonwealth in telling the terrorists that they did not fear them and that the world would go about its business—terrorism or not.

Baroness Valerie Amos, the UK minister for African affairs said at a news conference in Nairobi ahead of the Cricket World Cup: “We cannot discriminate against a country on the basis of terrorism. No country is safe.”

Need we say more?
Let partnership flourish forever

In keeping with international trends, African countries are focusing on strengthening regional connections — hence the East African Community, the Southern Africa Development Corporation and the Commonwealth. Africa is now at the centre of the building blocks of the African Union, whose key initiative is the New Partnership for Africa’s Development.

African leaders have literally been railroaded into seeking regional integration by circumstances such as conflict, hunger, poverty and disease. The high profile of West African leaders in resolving the crises in Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia is testimony of the fact that Africans have been driven to look after their destiny in their own hands. So do the efforts to craft peace deals in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Does Africa still need the Commonwealth? The key elements to resolving the continent’s numerous problems are good governance, democracy and education. As areas that form the backbone of the Commonwealth. Through its secretariat, the Commonwealth works to strengthen and promote democracy in member countries by providing technical support and sending observers to monitor elections.

This has gone some way to shame rogue leaders into complying with the principles of democracy. Where there has been mutual suspicion, conflict and distorted expectations, the Commonwealth observers have stepped into the breach as neutral referees. An endorsement by the election observers has come to be mustered.

These teams played a key role in recent elections in Sierra Leone, Ghana and Kenya. Kenya’s recent peaceful transition was witnessed by a group of eminent persons, led by former UN undersecretary-general Adbayo Adesewo. It helped even the weight of the fact that the Commonwealth’s position as partner in Africa’s development remains crucial.

The foundation has over the years supported Africa’s fledgling democratic processes by sending experts to countries such as Sierra Leone, where they helped the country shattered by war to organise the landmark May 2002 elections.

In Malawi, the experts were on hand to assist with voter registration and an expert was in Tanzania in November last year working with the elections management body on computerisation of the voters’ roll.

Many Africans who have honed their skills through Commonwealth scholarships now occupy key positions in their countries, and civil society in general has benefited from training and education.

Nevertheless, the very basis of Commonwealth unity has recently come into question at the Cricket World Cup held in South Africa, with New Zealand, Australia and England refusing to play in Kenya and Zimbabwe in protest against human rights abuses in those countries. How about developing partnerships for irrigation dams? Poor education and lack of access to land and credit pose a formidable challenge to prospective partners with women farmers. Processing and storing perishable food crops is another challenge for African governments.

Most food is left to rot when in season for lack of the technical know-how to preserve it. Bad roads in rural areas compound matters. Yet the women may just need trucks to cart their produce from the farm to buying centres.

Enyonam Zoti is a 36-year-old farmer at Lati in the Ho logo district of Ghana’s Volta region. The mother of six says: “I wish someone would tell me what to do with my farm produce. I work very hard with my hoe and cutlass but at the end of the day a quarter of my produce goes to the landowner.”

Marketing her produce is another headache. She is at the mercy of middlemen from Togo who buy it for as little as $3 a tonne. Women tobacco farmers at Wute and Semanu in the Akat- si district work from sunrise to sunset, only to be forced by circumstances to sell at throwaway prices to middlemen in Ghana, Benin, Togo and Nigeria.

For Yawa Agboyiibor, the main problem is that half her tomatoes and other fruit/vegetables go to waste because of poor roads. The same tomatoes cost a small fortune when they reach the capital, Accra. “We toll for nothing, and we are still waiting for the day the government gives us the technology to preserve our tomatoes,” says the farmer.

They also live in hope that the government will fulfill its promise to give them seed money to buy fertilisers and other agricultural inputs.

High levels of political will and resources will be required to put an end to gender inequalities. The theme of this year’s Commonwealth Day offers a good opportunity for heads of state and governments to pay some attention to rural women and their contribution to development.
KENYA

The scholarship that changed Njoki’s life ...

By Lilian Juma

WHEN Njoki Ndung’u won the presti-
igious Chevening Scholarship to study for a masters degree in hu-
man rights law, she had no idea it would see her rise to become a member of parliament in Kenya.

The big dream started in 1992, when she was a state counsel in Nakuru, the main town in the vast Rift Valley Province. Her key tasks were criminal prosecution and civ-
il litigation. Flipping through her newspaper one day, an advertise-
ment for three scholarships caught her eye. Her only concern was that they were for another country.

Being a civil servant meant she did not qualify for such a chance. All the same, she put in her bid, dri-
ven by the fact that she was eyeing a high-ranking job in the Attorney-
General’s Office which would re-
quire high qualifications.

“I met a friend who explained to me that if I wanted to win the heart of the sponsors, I had to show ex-
ceptional leadership qualities and demonstrate how such studies would help in the development of my country,” she recalls.

Ndung’u fell into the spirit of things, not expecting much. To her surprise, however, she received a reply almost immediately telling her she had been awarded a full-
time scholarship.

She says: “The fact that I was in-
terested in human rights law, con-
stitutional law and abuse of human rights under the practice of crimi-
nal law made it favourable for me as the British Council immediately agreed to increase the number of scholarships to four.”

Ndung’u, one of five women nom-
inated to parliament by the ruling National Rainbow Coalition follow-
ing Kenya’s recent poll, adds: “I was shocked that things worked out for me. Above all, the advantage was that I was a woman. The scholar-
ship came at a time when many or-
ganisations were investing much of their resources in uplifting the sta-
tus of women.”

Different experience

But learning in the UK was a total-
ly different experience from study-
ning at local universities. “The stand-
ards of education at the Univer-
sity of Nairobi, where I studied in the 1980s were very high and everyone worked hard. The pressure of work was very intense and there were continuous assessment tests every week.”

She arrived at Leicester Univer-
sity expecting much more pres-
sure, only to find that things were done differently in the UK. “The pressure and competition in class in the UK is not necessarily very high and one can decide what one wants to write, including the sub-
jects to take.”

Her stay in the UK was made easy by British Council staff, who were readily available and even or-
ganised trips to do with other areas of study. The best thing about studying in Britain is that everyone has access to research information as the process does not require vet-
ing as in Kenya,” she adds.

On returning home after the one year, opportunities came knocking on her door. She immediately quit her government job to join the In-
stitute of Education in Democracy, a non-governmental organisation. In her consultancy firm specialising as a community officer for civic education for two-
and-a-half years.

Ndung’u’s next step was the United Na-
tions High Commissioner for Refuges, where she worked as a pro-
tection officer for two years. Her time at Leicester proved par-
ticularly useful when she started her consultancy firm specialising in human rights. But she was soon off again, this time to the Organisa-
tion of African Unity (now the African Union) as an adviser on hu-
man rights for two years.

On her return home, she planned to start on her doctorate and was also interested in teaching at the University of Nairobi’s Institute of Diplomatic Studies. “But things moved so fast that I had to post-
pone my PhD plans,” she says.

She joined opposition politics at a time of major changes in Kenya, working at the coalition’s secre-
tariat, where she actively participa-
pated in strengthening the opposi-
tion’s move to present a united front against the 40-year rule of the Kenya African National Union.

Very uplifting

“The scholarship was very uplift-
ing and also boosted my chances of getting jobs as my qualification put me way ahead of others,” she says. “The experience helped me to be more analytical and strengthened my ability to look at a problem and think it through.”

In parliament, Ndung’u aims to contribute towards developing poli-
cies to improve the status of mar-
ginalised people and to address human rights issues.

Being in parliament places her in prime position to lobby other MPs to work on bills affecting women. She was on the drafting teams that put together the Family Protec-
tion/Domestic Violence Bill and the Equality Bill.

Ndung’u does not believe she has arrived yet. “I am still young and have great potential to serve the nation in other capacities, even in diplomatic relations. The sky is the limit.”

Every year, about 2,500 scholar-
ships are given to deserving stu-
dents in over 150 countries to study in the UK. The Chevening scholar-
ships and funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and ad-
ministered by the British Council.

UGANDA

MP ‘shadowing’ project off to good start

By Anne Mugisa

TWO Ugandan MPs – one representing the eastern district of Tororo and the other com-
ing from Kasese to the west of the country – have just returned home from the UK, where they “shadowed” fellow female MPs.

Loyce Bwambale of Kasese and Hyuha of Tororo came out of the experience with one major insight. Though the issues affecting women politicians are the same, UK MPs are more in touch with their constituents. This is probably explained by the small number of constituencies per MP and the enormous re-
sources for research and opportunities to lis-
ten to their people’s grievances.

MPs in the UK have constituency clinics, or “surgery”. This is time set aside to meet the people and get feedback. The MPs also hold door-to-door meetings occasionally.

The first shadowing programme for the two MPs took place from November 3 to 10, 2002. The countries benefitting from the Ef-
fective Leadership programme of the British Council are Eritrea, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya and Uganda.

Most women MPs

Of the six countries, Uganda has the highest number of women MPs at 70 out of 304. The country had no women MPs before 1986, when the dominance of political parties and negative attitudes towards women en-
sured that they stayed out of politics. “I am not aware of any political party in Uganda that allowed women to run for parliament,” Bwambale told Africawoman.

The Yoweri Museveni government intro-
duced affirmative action, ensuring that all 36 districts had a woman MP.

The “shadowing” project — known for-
medly as Effective Constituency Service — is an extension of the Effective Leadership pro-
ject that sought to gauge voters’ perceptions of their parliamentarians. The voters felt their leaders were motivated by self-interest rather than a national vision and service to their constituents.

Both voters and their leaders appeared to have difficulty understanding the role of MPs, who accused the electorate of harass-
ing them with requests for financial assist-
tance. The study also showed that women were generally considered to be more in touch with their people’s needs, more serious about their work and less corrupt than men.

According to Bwambale and Hyuha, there are few women in the British parliament be-
cause they can only get there on party tick-
els. The women MPs have a caucus through which they identify, research and articulate development issues.

Uganda does not have a national resource centre for women, and MPs have to rely on the modest libraries set up by non-govern-
mental organisations. The verdict, according to Bwambale and Hyuha, is simple and straightforward.

If used effectively, the “shadowing” project will give women the extra edge to boost their careers – to the benefit of those who vote for them.
Zimbabwe / Priscilla Mhlolo lost her husband and daughter to Aids. Her son killed himself when he thought he might have caught the disease. Now this brave and anguished woman breaks her silence and tells her tragic story to Reyhana Masters-Smith

“I was sitting at the funeral like any other mourner,” Prisca Mhlolo recalls. “No one could believe that my son had just died. I just couldn't cry. I had shed so many tears over so many years and now I was empty. “It's also the day that I decided to tell the truth.”

Prisca is short, stout and the picture of health. Yet in the past seven years, she has lost her 7-year-old daughter, husband and 17-year-old son. All the deaths are inextricably tied to HIV/Aids.

Mhlolo was first told she was HIV-positive in 1988. She spent the next 10 years in denial. She broke her unofficial vow of silence at her son's funeral. Mhlolo's brother called her at work to tell her that her son had committed suicide after being sexually abused by one of the teachers at his school. He left her a note: “I can't stand to see you hurt. I don't want to die of Aids. I saw you suffer with my sister. I saw you suffer with my father. I can't bear to see you suffer anymore...”

“That was when I thought enough is enough. We thought that we had kept a secret. But Aids was not a secret and now my son was dead. He hadn't even gone for a test. He just assumed that because he had been abused he was now HIV-positive.

After we buried him, I stood up in front of everyone. My family tried to stop me. Maybe they knew what I was going to do. But I couldn't keep quiet. I talked and I talked. I told everyone the truth. I told them about the last 15 years.”

This is Mhlolo's story of courage and determination. She speaks slowly, calmly and with authority. She tells her story in a confident and dignified manner:

My eldest sister was angry. She kicked me and hit me. My other sister packed her bags and left for Harare. Everyone in my family was ashamed. It was difficult. I know that what I did was right. I was allowed to live so that I could talk. The hardest thing to fight is not the disease. It is the stigma and the fear that people have. They don't want to be near you. They don't want to touch you.

I now accept the stigma. I don't care what people think or say or do. Instead, I talk. It is my strength. And people always come to me for help. That is why God let me live. So I could talk to people. In 1988, I gave birth to my daughter Agnes. She was always sick from the time she was born. By the time she was three-months-old, she had been in and out hospitals many times and it was always with a different illness.

Then one day one of the doctors told me about a disease called Aids and asked if he could take blood tests. Of course, I had heard about the disease, but I associated Aids with sex workers and not a married woman like me. I had not slept with any man other than my husband.

I went back to Parirenyatwa Hospital for the results. The doctor was not there but his nurse was there. Her attitude towards me told me that something was wrong. She didn't want me close to her.

“He told me that if our daughter had Aids and I had Aids then, of course, he had Aids”

She just pushed an envelope towards me and said: “Your daughter has Aids and you have Aids.”

I don't know what was going through my mind then, but I just threw my daughter across the room and she hit her head on a bench. She had a scar across her forehead until the day she died. I screamed and ran out of the room, out of the hospital and just kept on running. I felt just outside the entrance and woke up later in a hospital bed.

I asked to see my husband when I woke up. Then I asked the doctor how long I had to live. He told me I had three months. In those days even the medical staff were negative about HIV/Aids. So when I saw my husband, I told him that I was going to die. I knew that it was a killer disease. My husband was cool, calm and collected.

He told me that he still loved me and that I was still his wife. Those words were so soothing. I didn't want to think about anything else. I did, however, ask him to take a test. He just dismissed it. He told me that if our daughter had Aids and I had Aids then, of course, he had Aids. After that, he didn't want to talk about it any more. In our culture, we don't ask too many questions. So I didn't ask any more questions.

Martha Mukaratirwa from Headlands in Zimbabwe cares for her daughter Eva at home. Eva was abandoned by her husband and her mother literally does all the housework including looking after Martha's baby. Photo: Gideon Mendel.
speak out

Malaria: the case for getting our priorities right

By Charity Binka

Through it can be prevented and cured, malaria continues to kill millions of Africans and costs the continent $12 billion a year. Most of those dying are pregnant women and children under five.

In Ghana, 40 percent of outpatient visits are attributed to malaria; 10 percent of the cases end up in admission to hospital. According to Constance Marfo, the national malaria programme manager, the disease makes major demands on the health care system and the national budget, which is already tight as it is. "Malaria is more deadly than HIV/AIDS because it kills faster," she says. "But people have downplayed it because of ignorance."

Indeed, malaria has slowed down economic growth in African countries by 1.3 percent per year. Due to the compounded effect over 35 years, the Gross Domestic Product for African countries is estimated to be 32 percent lower than it would have been in the absence of malaria.

It is for this reason that 17 heads of state met in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2000 to consult on how to tackle the disease. They argued that malaria was more than a health issue and pledged to intensify efforts to halve deaths caused by the disease by 2010.

Taxes on nets

But almost three years on, few countries have reduced or waived taxes on nets. Ghana is among those that still tax nets. The insecticide treated nets that are considered the most effective way of keeping malaria at bay, given the growing resistance to drugs. With the taxes added on, however, the nets are out of the reach of many Africans.

According to the Abuja Declaration, it was expected that by 2005 at least 60 percent of those suffering from malaria would get "correct, affordable and appropriate" treatment within 24 hours of the onset of symptoms. At least 60 percent of those affected, particularly children under five and pregnant women, were expected to sleep under the treated nets and pregnant women would have preventive treatment.

Despite these lofty ambitions, the use of treated nets is below five percent in the 24 countries where they are in use.

Some $750 million was to be spent on the fight against malaria, with the World Bank promising $500 million. The Bank is nowhere near meeting this pledge, having released only $100 million.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan says in a 2002 report: "The two-year effort by African leaders to combat malaria – a disease that claims as many lives as AIDS – has failed. We are still far from the Abuja goal of reducing the malaria burden by half by the year 2010 represents an enormous challenge."

More than promises

Discussions at Abuja did indicate, however, that it would take more than promises to bring malaria under control. More than anything else, it would require political will to make any progress against this daunting disease.

Chloroquine, for many years the best and cheapest drug for treating malaria, is in danger of failing in effectiveness. The good news is that scientists are working to find a vaccine; the bad news is that many Africans will not live to make use of it.

It is not enough to focus on the old preventive measures. African governments must develop policies and strategies that take forward the fight against the disease. But Ghana's ministry of health continued to champion chloroquine as the treatment of malaria until recently, when Minister for Health Kwaku Afriyie said malaria parasites had developed resistance to it.

Research indicates that only in 75 percent of the cases does chloroquine succeed in treatment in Ghana and only one-third of the parasites respond to the drug when isolated. By World Health Organisation standards, such a drug needs to be replaced. But it costs a dollar to get the full dose of chloroquine while the new malaria drugs could cost as much as three dollars a day, a price many Africans cannot afford.

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UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan says in a 2002 report: “The two-year effort by African leaders to combat malaria – a disease that claims as many lives as AIDS – has failed. We are still far from the Abuja goal of reducing the malaria burden by half by the year 2010 represents an enormous challenge.”

More than promises

Discussions at Abuja did indicate, however, that it would take more than promises to bring malaria under control. More than anything else, it would require political will to make any progress against this daunting disease.

Chloroquine, for many years the best and cheapest drug for treating malaria, is in danger of failing in effectiveness. The good news is that scientists are working to find a vaccine; the bad news is that many Africans will not live to make use of it.

It is not enough to focus on the old preventive measures. African governments must develop policies and strategies that take forward the fight against the disease. But Ghana’s ministry of health continued to champion chloroquine as the treatment of malaria until recently, when Minister for Health Kwaku Afriyie said malaria parasites had developed resistance to it.

Research indicates that only in 75 percent of the cases does chloroquine succeed in treatment in Ghana and only one-third of the parasites respond to the drug when isolated. By World Health Organisation standards, such a drug needs to be replaced. But it costs a dollar to get the full dose of chloroquine while the new malaria drugs could cost as much as three dollars a day, a price many Africans cannot afford.

"It is for this reason that 17 heads of state met in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2000 to consult on how to tackle the disease. They argued that malaria was more than a health issue and pledged to intensify efforts to halve deaths caused by the disease by 2010."

Taxes on nets

But almost three years on, few countries have reduced or waived taxes on nets. Ghana is among those that still tax nets. The insecticide treated nets that are considered the most effective way of keeping malaria at bay, given the growing resistance to drugs. With the taxes added on, however, the nets are out of the reach of many Africans.

According to the Abuja Declaration, it was expected that by 2005 at least 60 percent of those suffering from malaria would get "correct, affordable and appropriate" treatment within 24 hours of the onset of symptoms. At least 60 percent of those affected, particularly children under five and pregnant women, were expected to sleep under the treated nets and pregnant women would have preventive treatment.

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There’s every reason why our women should be leaders

By Mildred Barasa

After nearly three decades of women’s rights activism, the question still lingers: Do women in leadership make a difference? African women have climbed the campaign trail and came back with a big “Yes” and a few “buts.” Here’s a sample:

Karen Magara, a young politician who tried to vie for election in Kenya’s December poll but was eliminated at the nominations stage in dubious circumstances, says: “Women represent the true needs of society; they make sure their children and families are comfortable. Besides, they uphold morals. This country is known for crimes such as corruption because of the long period that men have always been in power.”

Magara, 30, cites as evidence the fact that few women have been implicated in corruption and abuse of office. Some might argue, however, that this is a question of lack of opportunity since there are few women in leadership positions that allow access to massive resources and power.

In parliament, she says, women tend to lobby for motions to improve social services and those that affect their lives. Of immediate concern are laws that deal with ownership of property. Leadership is generally associated with higher pay, which will boost women’s economic standing. Kenya has 17 women MPs, three of them in the Cabinet and three assistant ministers.

Kenyan MPs earn close to Sh500,000 (about $8,000 per month). The women in the Cabinet head the ministries of health, water development and part of the vice-president’s office.

According to research carried out in the United States of America, women are 50 percent more likely to take up issues of concern to women than their male colleagues—regardless of the political parties they belong to.

Says Laura Liswood, secretary-general of the Council for Women World Leaders, which is based at Harvard University: “The problem is that the number of women in political life ebbs and flows. You need a critical mass of women holding political posts before you see leaders coming through regularly.” This has been achieved only in a few countries, and even then countries that have marginal influence on the international scene. Sweden, Finland and Norway boast between 30 and 44 percent female representation in parliament while Britain is far behind with 12.5 percent.

“Women do 70 percent of the farming in this country and, agriculture being the backbone of the economy, their involvement in leadership will mean they get a chance to make decisions on how best the sector can be improved.”

Liswood is among the many who believe that stereotyping is largely to blame for the absence of women in leadership positions. “Women are seen as good when it comes to relationships or social issues, but there is a feeling that they can’t handle an international crisis as well as men.”

Since women have exceptional experiences from those of men, she argues, they should be represented adequately in leadership so that their different skills can be highlighted. “Women have unique experiences. When you block out a whole category of people, the political world is poorer for it. We are cutting out a whole area of experience.”

She continues: “One female prime minister said to me that women look at political issues in terms of how they affect families rather than the more macro-economic outlook of men. So, if they are discussing an economic situation they will ask, ‘but how does that affect the price of milk?’ The things that affect real people.”

Even though women generally tend to avoid bloody conflict, Liswood notes, “It’s probably dangerous to believe there would be instant world peace if all the world’s leaders were women. Indeed, Indira Gandhi was infamous for declaring martial law in India while Margaret Thatcher made the Falklands war a personal campaign. This just shows that women leaders too have to live in the real world and do what’s best for their country.”

Esther Keino, now a nominated MP in Kenya, gained stature from her work as director of Egerton University’s Centre for Gender and Women’s Studies. She says: “Women do 70 percent of the farming in this country and, agriculture being the backbone of the economy, their involvement in leadership will mean they get a chance to make decisions on how best the sector can be improved.”

Vigdis Finnbogadottir, former president of Iceland, believes it is not too much to ask that women be allowed the opportunity to rise to the next category of leadership. “I don’t want women to run the world alone. But if women and men could run the world together, things would be very different.”

Most poverty alleviation strategies in Uganda remain a pain in the neck. They charge exorbitant interest on loans and have ended up doing more harm than good to women, who are the major “beneficiaries.” The loans are so small that they can hardly set up an economically viable project, yet the interest rates are very high. Because most of the women are just starting out in business, they end up failing. Some have had to sell their household property to pay off the loans. If they are to help women, poverty reduction strategies must be carefully analysed and the views and concerns of the beneficiaries taken into consideration.” —Rose Bukirwa.

Quote, unquote

S he swapped medicine for business when her husband died and used the experience not only to provide for her three children but also to help other women gain a foothold in trade.

Now the director of the Uganda Investment Authority and the focal point for Commonwealth business leaders, Maggie Kigozi joined the business world in 1994 and systematically put into practice the tricks she had learned from her. Her journey to success began when she was appointed marketing manager of Century Bottling Company, which produces such popular soft drinks as Pepsi Cola and Mirinda. “My decision was sudden, but I have no regrets,” she says, and quickly adds that women should be ready to take on challenges and adventures.

After working day and night to prove her worth at Century, Kigozi was ready to take on the greater challenge of becoming the director of the investment authority. In the early days, even progressive women had difficulty speaking about money and business, she recalls, perhaps for fear of ridicule or simply because they considered them a private matter. Kigozi considers it a personal achievement that more women are able to discuss investment freely these days.

Although the playing field is far from level in trade, she has set up a network of women and helped them establish international contacts alongside encouraging Ugandans to open their doors to investors.

Kigozi takes particular pride in prominent businesswomen such as Miria Kivumbi, who owns Radio One and Maria Luyombo, the director of Tibah School.

Though local women have been encouraged to start district investor groups, they still have infrastructure problems such as transport and power supply.

Their business skills have improved, however, and many can now keep proper records of their accounts.

“Proper book keeping is vital, but many business people ignore it,” says Kigozi. It is no way to attract foreign investors, who demand high standards of accounting. It is just another challenge for madam director, one she is not afraid to tackle.

—Margaret Ziribaggwa

Maggie Kigozi: “Proper book keeping is vital, but many business people ignore it.”

UGANDA

Maggie Kigozi makes her mark in business
Women in leadership:
A dream too far for some

By Sifanelile Nlilo

IN 1996, ministers of women's affairs from the Commonwealth set themselves a task: To increase women's representation in decision-making positions in the political, public and private sectors to 30 percent by the year 2006. With only two years to go, very few countries have achieved this target; in fact, some have taken a few steps backward. According to to promoting principles of democracy, good – in which members committed themselves

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and sits in Cabinet, one is the deputy speak-

fully fledged Cabinet minister, two are Min-

the number of women in the Cabinet. Only

hind at a meagre 14 percent following a drop

Seychelles – had 30 percent or more women's

Commonwealth seeks to accelerate the imple-

licial organisation without a constitution, it is

women's machineries ability to mainstream

lobbied for the law to include women's co-

Uganda is the first African country to have appointed a woman as vice-president. The government has also introduced the Universal Primary Education policy to provide free education for four children per family, two of whom must be girls. At the tertiary education level, extra points are added for girls to allow more women to study at university.

But some are still not satisfied. “The numbers have grown of women in leadership positions, but their voices are not heard,” says Jacqueline Asimwe-Mwesiga, co-ordinator of the Uganda Women's Network.

Since coming to power in 1986, President Yoweri Museveni's government has made significant strides towards including women as partners in the country's development and decision-making process. But tradition dies hard and Ugandan women are often omitted from key institutions like the legislature.

Their efforts to re-introduce the issue have been unsuccessful so far. Without land, women have no authority in family matters. They also do not have a quota system to increase women's representation in parliament following the loss of some women MPs in elections. “If we can have seats reserved for some sections of Zimbabwean society, why can’t we do the same to accommodate women,” says Khumalo. “There is scope here for women to lobby for a quota system.”

Although the Commonwealth is a voluntary organisation without a constitution, it is well placed to influence member countries to comply with an agreed agenda. Despite its dispute with some members of the Commonwealth, the Zimbabwean government has not said it will pull out of the voluntary club. This, hopefully, means that the country still wants to be a respected member of the international community and is prepared to abide by the principles mutually agreed at these international forums.

Women drop out

Says Nomalanga Khumalo, MP for Umz-

women's representation in parliament

Says Asimwe-Mwesiga: “Economically, things are still bad for women. While women work hard to grow crops, especially the rural ones, but at the end of it all it is the men who benefit since it is they that make decisions on where to sell the produce and how to use the proceeds from the sales.”

Khumalo believes the two dominant par-

There are few women in the top structures of the par-

Women’s machineries ability to mainstream gender issues and develop policies.
Prize for top writers of fiction

The outstanding literary talent that exists in many parts of the Commonwealth is making a significant contribution to contemporary writing in English. To encourage and reward new Commonwealth fiction and ensure that works of merit reach a wider audience outside their country of origin, the Commonwealth Foundation established the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1987.

This major prize for Commonwealth fiction is solely international in its character and administration. Entries are first assessed by four regional panels of judges and the selection of the overall winner is made by a distinguished panel—Commonwealth panel. Each year the award ceremony is held in a different Commonwealth country.

Novels and collections of short stories are eligible. Drama and poetry are ineligible.

The work must have been written by a citizen of the Commonwealth of reasonable length and be in English.

The eight regional winners will be invited to Calgary, Canada, in May 2003, when the final judging will take place and the prizes presented at a gala awards dinner.

In addition, the best book winner will be invited to London for an audience with the Queen.

— Florence Machio

Addressing the challenge of learning

The Commonwealth of Learning was created by Commonwealth heads of government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education, knowledge, resources and technology. International head-quarters were established in Vancouver in 1989, hosted by Canada, and the Province of British Columbia, whose combined support has been critical to the viability and growth of the organisation over the years.

Within its mandate, COL has emphasised the relationship between girls and women and new communication technologies. A number of regional workshops on gender and technology have been held. It has also initiated other projects related to gender.

Challenges continue to face girls and women in many parts of the Commonwealth, whether in the lack of educational and economic opportunities or in the contrast of hope and despair. Open and distance learning offer opportunities to address these challenges.

— Florence Machio

Monkey business as women pay price of war

By Nabagayi L. Wamboka

FROM the thick forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the semi-arid sands of Karamoja in Eastern Uganda, guns are smoking and women are on the run.

Native pygmies living in the tropical forests of Congo are being hunted down as a delicacy in the war torn country and the armed cattle raiders of Karamoja are raping and killing their neighbours with impunity.

The UN observer mission in Congo early this year issued a report quoting testimonies from 350 witness that rebels in one of Africa’s major wars force pygmies to hunt and prospect for minerals. If they return empty handed, they are killed and eaten instead.

The search for food amidst war has had major consequences that have not only destroyed tourism in the region but also turned the locals into the hunted as rebels seek to survive.

As the Congolese flee what must be one of the most of the horrible deaths, they come with traditions that threaten to wipe out Uganda’s fragile ape numbers.

According to Animal People an internet newsletter, war threatens mountain gorillas, barely 400 in number, and may be an even more urgent threat to chimpanzees.

Ugandan Wildlife Education Centre consultant Wilhelm Moeller warned recently: “Refugees don’t leave their traditions and habits behind. Eating bush meat is one of them. It has never happened before that chimpanzees and gorillas are consumed in Uganda, but a lot of Congolese are in western Uganda and many are not in refugee camps but in areas that are chimpanzee habitat.”

“Terrorism has led the Karimojong to attack and loot. They are too many and soon they will be more than the islanders,” says, nurse Sempero Bridget Nansubuga.

In Karamoja, the women are fleeing hunger and torture from marauding Karimojong warriors who have sent thousands feeling to the safety of the cities, the villages and refugee camps but even these are randomly attacked by the raiders. The national army is either too weak or not prepared for the swift attacks.

As the women flee further inland to the safety of the cities, they fall into the trap of prostitution, unemployment and environmental degradation.

But, as the saying goes, better a slow death that you cannot see than a quick death that you look straight in the eye.

Gearing up for the first Games of the century

EVERY four years, the 72 nations of the Commonwealth gather to enjoy the games, entertainment and sporting performances that make the Commonwealth Games the most tangible mortar that binds together this unique family of nations.

The first Commonwealth Games took place in Hamilton in Ontario, Canada, in 1930. Eleven countries boasting 400 athletes participated in these first games. Except for 1942 and 1946, during World War II, the games have been held every four years. Sixteen games have been held in total, with three of these hosted by Australian cities – Sydney in 1938, Perth in 1962 and Brisbane in 1982.

While other games around the globe have been founded on geo-political or climatic factors – such as the Asian and African games and the Winter Olympics, the Commonwealth Games have been based on a common history and language, English. All athletes and officials can converse in the language, creating an atmosphere that has led to the Commonwealth Games being known as the “Friendly Games.”

The next Commonwealth Games will be held in Melbourne in 2006.

The games are designed to help encourage and support the pursuit of health and fitness in members countries and provide inspiration for youth to strive for excellence.

Uganda has performed remarkably well in boxing, with James Nyakana and Justin Juuko winning gold medals. Kenya and Nigeria have also won medals in athletics and other sports.

Lately, there have been proposals that women be allowed to contest directly against men in games such as chess that require more of brains than physical exertion. It has been done in lawn and table tennis, where mixed doubles are arranged.

Let women rise and use the Commonwealth Games as an avenue for emancipation.

— Margaret Ziribaggwa

Eating bush meat is one of the traditions and habits of refugees from the Congo.
**Tired of a senseless war**

**Organisation fights to end suffering and misery caused by endless fighting in southern Sudan**

By Grace Githaiga

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**Let us benefit from democracy, too**

By Eunice Menka, Ghana

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By Rebecca Okwaci

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Kenya

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**SPECIAL COMMONWEALTH DAY ISSUE – WOMEN AS PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT**
Africa, the numbers of recruited health personnel entering the UK has risen more than five-fold – from 393 in 1997–98 to more than 2,114 in 2001.

The global shortage of nurses raises an ethical issue with British legislators asking whether they should be poisoning nurses from countries that can ill afford to lose them.

Ministers have urged the NHS to stop actively recruiting in southern African in response to Mandela’s appeal but did not formally declare a ban until 1999. The ban included Caribbean countries.

Last year, the British government published a code of practice extending the ban to all developing countries except where the host government had invited them to recruit. This included countries such as the Philippines, where there is a surplus of nurses.

The ban did not extend to commercial agencies, which critics say are now doing the “dirty work” for the NHS. A spokeswoman for the government had invited them to recruit. This included countries such as the Philippines, where there is a surplus of nurses.

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“Don’t prevent cultural diversity from flourishing!”

The Royal College of Nursing “supports overseas recruitment but says it must be done ethically and that proper support must be given to nurses and their families on arrival.”

Some nurses have alleged exploitation by recruitment agencies, which charged fees of more than $2,000 to bring them to Britain. In response, the Tony Blair administration has set up an international hotline for overseas nurses where they can report problems or seek assistance to prevent exploitation.

But even as the NHS pulls in nurses from overseas, British-trained ones leaving. For every two nurses recruited overseas, a home-grown one moves abroad.

Last year, 6,265 British-trained nurses emigrated, the highest number for 10 years. There was a strong recruitment of staff from the Philippines, which last year exported 7,235 nurses to the UK, bringing its total to 11,000 in three years.

The UK government target of an extra 20,000 nurses by 2005, set in the NHS Plan, has already been achieved two years ahead of schedule due to the overseas recruitment. Now it has set a new target of recruiting 35,000 more nurses by 2008. Tough competition awaits, with countries like the USA fishing in the same pond.

The global market is getting tougher as countries vie for position in the increasingly desperate struggle for extra pairs of skilled hands.

But the global market is getting tougher as countries vie for position in the increasingly desperate struggle for extra pairs of skilled hands.

Caring professionals: Low pay has driven many nurses to England

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