

# Africa *woman*

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN IN AFRICA • MARCH 2004

## EDITORIAL

## It's time to unleash our power

It is that time of the year again when we celebrate International Women's Day. It is good that this should be so - not just as an opportunity for women to dance their hearts at national stadiums but also that we should be able to check on the nuts and bolts of women's progress.

We at *Africawoman* have, of course, given women a voice throughout the year. It is a task that is empowering in many ways. It is also a task that can be most frustrating, especially when faced with the similarities that cut across the continent in terms of issues such as HIV/Aids and the perennial reports of violence on women.

In this special edition, we present some of the strongest stories we have carried in the past year. It has been a period of growth for us in terms of the ability to articulate the joys and pains of being African women.

How can it be otherwise when we are faced with the story of young Tanzanian women selling sexual favours in exchange for maize as parts of the country suffers under the grip of famine? We have repeatedly faced reports of women who have been infected with HIV in their marital beds, yet the legal and social regime in most countries fails to recognise women's right to protect themselves from issues such as marital rape.

Yet women have refused to let their often disadvantaged positions

stop them from giving their best: Take the case of Ghana's Black Queens, who stormed their way into the women's soccer world cup despite being desperately neglected in favour of the men's team - which has recorded no victories worth speaking of in recent times.

This is the true spirit of African women. We are survivors and have been since time immemorial. We are strong. We often hear talk of women who have had 10 children and more, and still managed to feed, clothe and educate them somehow. This is not to suggest that women should go out of their way to have large families. It is just a pointer to the resilience of the African woman.

Amidst all the pain, we have carried stories of African women who have triumphed and made their mark on public life. They deserve a pat on the back for breaking through the barriers. It is only when there are enough

women at the table that we will be able to bring our agenda to the table and get noticed.

Yet we have also found that women have largely failed to capitalise on the opportunities presented to us to change their world and that of their sisters. Even when they have been appointed to Cabinet, few have been able to translate authority into power.

It is important that women are able to bring their "softer" perspectives into issues that we have often taken for granted. In Kenya, for instance, the caucus of women in parliament has made a point of visiting little girls who have been de-

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



## The First Lady Syndrome (and all that jazz)

By Ada Agina-Ude, Nigeria

First Lady Stella Obasanjo is on the warpath - not because of the price increases on petroleum products or even in response to the lawsuit asking her and the wives of other prominent leaders to account for money they have received for their charity projects. She wants the wives of governors to stop calling themselves first ladies. There is only one First Lady in Nigeria. Period. Her edict came on June 24, just six days before a national strike that paralysed business and government in Nigeria. She was addressing the wives of governors of the 28 states under the ruling Peoples Democratic Party, who gathered in Abuja for training on etiquette and protocol.

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

Churning with anger at the price increases, ordinary Nigerians have shown little restraint in expressing their pent-up feelings

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## Sex-for-maize scandal rocks village

By Sakina Zainul Dattoo, Tanzania

**EXTREME** hunger has forced Chilungulu village girls in Rural Dodoma to sell their bodies in exchange for maize. Girls as young as 14, some still in school, go without food sometimes for five days in a row.

In such circumstances, villagers told *Africawoman*, concerns about morality and even the threat of HIV/Aids take back seat.

It is common practice for girls from villages in the neighbourhood of Makutopora JKT Camp to sell charcoal to the soldiers; it is also just as common for the soldiers to offer free food to those who agree to have sex with them.

Says Ester Mchiwa, a mother of five, including teenaged girls: "What do you expect? A girl who has not eaten for days and knows of the extreme situation back home cannot refuse. She is only thinking of her survival."

Selina Mlewa, mother of two girls and three boys, told *Africawoman*: "We try to tell our daughters not to succumb to such invitations, but the situation is very tough. Many girls are thinking of their own benefits, so they don't listen. We are forced to send our girls there to sell charcoal so that we get money to buy food. We know of Aids and other diseases, but what to do?"

Ester Makasi, aged 18, says many of her friends are involved in the trade but she has not succumbed yet: she is being obedient to her mother. "Even very young girls, as young as 14, run away from school and go to Makutopora because they know there is food there," she says. "They don't tell their parents."

Famine stalks the land, mostly the rural areas, due to drought that has affected the harvest since August last year. The situation worsened last November, when

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# Memories of pain, death and despair

By Betty Muriuki, Kenya

**THE** elderly women walked slowly down the dingy corridor, afraid to look into the dark rooms on either side, yet drawn to them by a force more powerful than fear. They peered into the dark cells, their misty eyes running over the walls that had held their sons and daughters for weeks on end – long, dark days that they would probably like to forget, but never will.

The cells held memories and secrets of a dark time in Kenya's history, memories of pain and death and despair. Tears flowed down the cheeks of the 20 women as their offspring recounted their experiences in the cells, where anyone suspected of political dissidence was held and tortured by officers of the now disbanded Special Branch of the police in former president Daniel arap Moi's regime.

The underground cells of the 24-storey Nyayo House had been opened for public viewing three weeks earlier, following demands by former inmates of the cells to be allowed to visit them.

Stories of the physical and mental suffering inflicted on those who had been detained in the cells had been told from the 1980s to the early 1990s. While the accounts aroused feelings of horror, dread

and sympathy for the victims, they were often so terrifying that they seemed incredulous. Many Kenyans could not or did not want to believe that there were people capable of committing such cruelties against fellow human beings.

But the ordeal was real enough for Sylvanus Oduor, who was arrested from his office and driven blindfold to the torture chambers. He was stripped and forced to do countless press-ups, and then to lie on his back and maintain his legs at a 45-degree angle to the floor. When he failed to keep them up, his tormentors set on him with pieces of wood.

"I screamed and a huge officer stepped on my face," Oduor said on the day the chambers were opened. "They beat me until I was bleeding everywhere." Lawyer Gitobu Imanara says how ventilators blew dust into the tiny cell until it filled his eyes, ears and mouth. Then the cell was flooded with cold water, which he was forced to stand or sit in for days.

Hunger was also a favourite weapon. "For six straight days I didn't eat and had to drink the water that was flooding the cell. I was beaten and asked to confess to things I didn't know," said Joe Njoroge, who was held in the cells for five weeks. "Some of the starving detainees

drank their own urine and ate their own faeces after they were denied food for several days," said journalist Wahome Mutahi who, together with his brother, Njuguna Mutahi, were confined for 30 days in two of the 12 small cells. They were splashed with ice-cold water from powerful hosepipes and kept in pitch darkness, only realising it was daytime when they heard workers in the floor above dragging chairs and tables.

From time to time, the inmates were taken out of the cells to an interrogation room, where they were stripped naked and subjected to psychological and physical torture. Their tormentors were armed with all manner of weapon – rubber whips, wooden clubs burning cigarette ends and iron rods and pins – which they used to try to extract confessions from their prey.

During the opening of the chambers, Constitutional Minister Kiraitu Murungi apologised to the victims of the police brutality, believed to have been about 2,000, for their ordeal.

The chambers would be turned into a national monument of shame, he said, to remind Kenyans of what had happened there and hopefully prevent it from happening again. The government also degazetted police cells at the Nyayo



**SILENT PROTEST:** Mothers of political detainees wept as they recalled the torture their sons went through.

House basement and Nyati House, where political prisoners were also held and tortured, ensuring that no one would ever be held there again for interrogation.

But that is not enough, says the co-ordinator of Amnesty International-Kenya, Miriam Kahiga. While the opening of the chambers and reliving the ordeal were cathartic both for the victims and the nation, Kenyans need guarantees from the government that such brutality will never be seen again. "We also need guarantees from Kenyans that they will not let it happen again," says Kahiga. "Some of those who are now condemning the brutality were part and parcel of it or knew it was happening yet they never lifted a finger or said a word."

Many people were cowed into silence by fear that they would lose

their privileged positions. She gives the example of a prominent psychiatrist who refused to give therapy to the torture victims but is now happy to appear on television giving free advice to them.

While Kenya is moving, albeit slowly, towards healing the wounds inflicted by a reign of political terror and intimidation, Zimbabwe seems to be sinking deeper into that hole. President Robert Mugabe's government has resorted to physical intimidation of its subjects to still internal voices of opposition.

Fear rules the lives of many ordinary Zimbabweans, many of whom have resorted to fleeing the country to avoid being killed. But many continue to pay their price for their political opinion. Thousands were arrested late last month after taking part in a nationwide anti-government strike.

## Sex-for-maize scandal rocks village

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reserves depleted. Since late January, the situation in many villages has become critical, with some villages declaring deaths due to starvation.

Dodoma is particularly prone to famine. The land is not ideal for food crops. The main cash crop in the area is grapes, whose market is presently diminished due to closure of the local parastatal winery a few years ago. Kenya is the main, but limited market for Dodoma grapes now. Other cash crops cultivated in small quantities include pyrethrum, sim sim, peanuts and groundnuts while millet, cassava and maize are grown as food crops.

Says Dodoma-based journalist Susuma Susuma: "The problem with people in Dodoma is that they don't use their land for their own use. The majority will work for a tycoon, cultivating crops for small pay. That is why if a natural disaster strikes, they are hit the most as they don't have any reserves or their own farms to sustain them."

People have already started eating wild insects harvested from bark trees in Farkwa division. The

executive director of Kondoa District Council, Fred Masele, confirmed that he had witnessed people eating the insects.

In Singida Rural, meanwhile, three children have been reported to have died after their mother fed the family poisonous wild plants. The family with five children had not eaten for five days and, following what has become common practice, the mother boiled the only leaves she could find and fed her children. The two survivors have been admitted at the hospital in Mbulu district in Arusha.

According to Dodoma Regional Commissioner Alhaji Mussa Nkhangaa, any plan to avoid famine will involve building irrigation systems throughout the region. But this requires major investment, something the government cannot manage on its own. "Assistance is needed," he said.

Meanwhile, food is being sent to villages based on the needs data compiled by village leaders. However, Chilungulu village Executive Officer Sebastian Mwiliko said no food had arrived here.

He had received information on-

ly that morning that two bags of maize had arrived for the first time for his village and were being held by the Mundemu Division secretary awaiting collection.

He told *AfricaWoman*: "How can I take two bags of maize when more than 100 people are critical in the village? How will I distribute such food? I cannot take it since I fear for my security. Villagers can attack me and I have no security."

Mwiliko said they had compiled all data as requested by the government and forwarded it. There are 2,485 people in the village, but only 752 are able to work and another 206 are disabled and feeble.

"Most of the youths have started running away from the village, leaving the old in even worse conditions. Look around the village, there is absolutely no food, the little cassava that was holding us together is finished now. People have developed swollen legs and are extremely weak. They can't work anymore, children can't get to schools and women and babies are suffering the most," he said.

Village women confirmed that breast-feeding mothers were suf-

fering the most since they were trying to feed their babies without themselves having eaten for days. Many of them are no longer able to nourish their children. According to Mwiliko, the situation has fuelled underage sex, with parents being paid in food or cattle for their daughters. "An 80-year-old man can get a girl of 15 or 18 in exchange for a cow or some food," he adds.

Older girls are running away to towns and cities and getting involved in prostitution. "Aids is the main threat, but you can't choose when you are selling your body for food," says Mwiliko.

But Regional Commissioner Alhaji Nkhangaa says he was not aware of the practice at the village. He was not even aware of its location. "I am hearing this first time. I can't say this is not true but I can't say it is true either ... we will have to investigate...."

There have been reports of similar desperation in the North Eastern Province of Kenya, which is dominated by drought too, with children as young as 13 going into prostitution in order to get a loaf of bread.

## Time to unleash our power

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filed and suffered horrendous injuries. They have been widely covered shedding tears of pain at what they have witnessed.

But, far from seeing concrete action, we have instead seen an upsurge in crimes such as these. The challenge, then, is to move beyond tears and set up such high impact campaigns that we can begin to find lasting solutions to the problem.

It is not that there are no laws on most of the issues that affect women. A great deal of the discrimination that women face is easily taken care of in written laws. The problem is that the discrimination is often grounded in every day practices and customs that are deeply embedded in our psyches - ensuring that even women themselves perpetuate their own suppression.

The time for complaints is over. We women need to unleash the power in us to change our lives - wherever we are, whenever we can.



# Ghana's Black Queens march against all the odds

By Audrey Dekalu, Ghana

**THEIR** hearts in the right place and little else to go by, Ghana's Black Queens kicked their way to the fourth Fifa Women's World Cup held from September to October in the United States. It was a heart-warming experience for a nation numbed by the trail of dismal performances by the men's national team, the Black Stars.

But, just as in their maiden attempt, the Black Queens did not make it past the preliminary stages. They did register their first World Cup victory, though, when they beat Australia 2-1 in their final Group D match, courtesy of skipper Alberta Sackey's two goals. The team lost 0-1 to favourites China in the opening match and went down 0-2 to less fancied Russia.

It was a vast improvement on their showing four years ago. Then they were hammered 7-0 by China, drew 1-1 with Australia and lost 0-2 to Sweden.

What ails the Queens? Despite the fact that they are very promising, the Queens have never re-

ceived enough funding to ensure adequate training. A few days to the world tournament, the managers were compelled to launch an appeal for funds. The response was remarkably low. But even the very fact that they had to do so was an insult in itself. Before then, they had organised road shows and some friendly matches to boost their meagre kitty, but there was little to show for their efforts.

In contrast, the government doled out more than US\$26,000 to be paid to the Black Stars as bonuses in their "must-win" African Cup of Nations qualifier against the Cranes of Uganda in Kumasi in June. The Stars could manage only a 1-1 draw. They were promised close to 40 million cedis each should they win the return leg with Rwanda in July in Kigali. Alas, the money remained safely in the government's coffers.

Fuming after Ghana was kicked out of the World Cup, "grandma" Sackey (34) lashed out at officials of the Ghana Football Association, describing them as ineffective and inefficient and lacking what it takes



**AIMING HIGH:** The Black Queens were a vastly improved side in the women's soccer world cup.

to transform the game. "All they are interested in is interfering in issues which fall outside their do-

main," she told *Africawoman*, apparently referring to alleged interference with Coach Oko Aryee's

training programme in the US.

Sackey — who has been in volleyball, basketball and handball and only turned to football when she broke her arm — has decided not to retire and has offered to help the team qualify for the Olympic Games in Athens next year.

Despite the lack of support from the government, the women footballers have been rewarded amply by football: Sackey, Adjoa Bayor, Kulu Yahaya, Baselia Amoah-Tetteh and defender Elizabeth Baido are all on scholarships at the Robert Morris University in Chicago and Belinda Kanda is at the University of Ghana. The six-foot tall Mimi Osei-Agyemang, daughter of an old footballer and now a business tycoon in the US, is a graduate of the Columbia Medical School.

The rest of the 18 members of the squad barely have junior secondary education and look up to soccer as their sole vehicle to financial success. Women's soccer is still in its infancy in Ghana, however, and it is only at international competitions like the World Cup that they can hope to get any cash.

Deputy Minister for Education, Youth and Sports Joe Aggrey, a veteran sports journalist and avid critic of former sports authorities, now reckons that more money needs to be pumped into revitalising the sport. "After what I saw in America, I am more than convinced that women's football has a future in Ghana and we need to pay more attention to it," he says.

To be fair to the Black Stars, they won the African Cup of Nations four times. But it is a feat that has been equalled by Egypt and Cameroon. Their attempts to book a place in the World Cup have borne no fruit, making it even harder to explain why the football association will not put its money where its mouth is — with the Queens.

By Sandra Nyaira, Zimbabwe

**THE** message was loud and clear: invest in education, not war. Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon was dumbfounded. He never thought African media women would go to such lengths to make their feelings known, especially in the heart of Scotland — in Edinburgh, a city far removed from rural Africa.

"I will carry your concerns to Abuja," he said at the October 2003 Commonwealth Education Ministers' meeting with the theme Closing the Gap in Access, Inclusion and Achievement. "All the issues that came out of this meeting, the resolutions and things that need adoption will be discussed in Abuja and I hope the leaders will respond favourably."

*Africawoman* is asking the same question of the leaders at CHOGM: will you invest in education and not war? We certainly hope so. Indeed, questions are being raised on why Australia and Britain, which invested so much in the war in Iraq, were allowed at this year's CHOGM when some would put it in the same category of Zimbabwe — countries that have errant group of leaders who have violated the human rights of their people and others across the world.

Civil society groups at the Commonwealth Peoples Forum took McKinnon to task on the

## Send our children to school – now!

promise he made in Edinburgh — that education would be used as end poverty. "Will the Commonwealth, in the same spirit that some member countries threw resources into ousting Saddam Hussein, commit itself to ending poverty through education?"

*Africawoman* has solicited the support of cross-party Members of the Scottish Parliament calling on the developed countries, especially Britain and the United States, not to re-direct funds initially meant for African development to the rebuilding of war-torn Iraq. Donning *Africawoman* T-shirts, the MSPs handed delegates at the conference copies of the publication calling on the developed world to stop selling weapons that compromise basic civil rights and subsequently stop children from getting an education.

Over 50 million children in the poor Commonwealth countries are out of school. Organisations such as Oxfam also made huge contributions in trying to lure the education

ministers and the Commonwealth into fulfilling their millennium goals for education by 2015. "Warm words will not put one extra child into school," said Malcolm Flemming of Oxfam. "The Commonwealth has an education crisis and rich countries must provide the funding they promised. All developing countries also need to prioritise getting children into school."

In the keynote address, Commonwealth educationist Amartya Sen said: "If we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure."

These sentiments were shared by many who attended the conference, who hoped that the heads of government meeting in Abuja would adopt strong measures to deal with the education crisis in the Commonwealth. Running concurrently with the conference was the first ever Youth Summit of Com-

monwealth students who came up with their own thoughts on how access to education could be improved in general.

These include the need to improve the quality of education, the need for young people to be directly involved in developing education systems, the selection of teachers, design and evaluation of resource materials and curriculum. Their views have been incorporated in a report being tabled before the Heads of State and Government.

The ministers identified six key areas they want their leaders to talk about. These are: dealing with gender disparities in education, mitigating the impact of HIV/Aids, supporting education in difficult circumstances, universal primary education, improving the quality of education and using distance learning to overcome barriers.

Of great concern is the brain drain of teachers from the developing nations as countries such as Britain continue to dangle hefty pay cheques in front of poorly remunerated teachers and other professionals. McKinnon said the ministers' conference had agreed to set up a working group of senior Commonwealth officials to seriously look into this matter and look at ways through which countries like Kenya that have announced free primary education for all will not be set back by a shortage of teachers.



## Language dilemma as Tanzania opens up to the world



By Jamillah Mwanjisi,  
Tanzania

University of Dar es Salaam law student Sylvia Bahame is Tanzania's new beauty queen. Though some had reservations about her taking the title, there is consensus that she was the best of the 26 contestants — if not necessarily the most beautiful. That accolade rightly belonged to Nargis Mohamed, whom virtually everyone had put their money on. The trouble with Mohamed was simple: she may have been taller and slimmer, but she could not speak English well and failed to answer the critical question that would separate the commoners from the queen.

"Yes, she was beautiful and had a good figure but she could not speak one proper sentence in English," says Rose Lungu, a beauty contest fan. "How could she represent Tanzania in the Miss World pageant? Bahame is smart. She is educated. She speaks perfect English."

Even though Tanzania is the home of Kiswahili, which has just been declared one of the African Union's official languages, it is English that is increasingly considered the measure of one's education. Children in Tanzania's public schools start learning English as a subject in standard three, at the age of 10. Kiswahili is the medium of instruction in public primary schools. The situation is reversed in secondary schools, with Kiswahili becoming the medium of communication in official matters only. By this time, however, most children have difficulty with speaking English fluently.

The need for fluency has been brought home graphically to Tanzanians, however. Be it in the media, marketing, banking or hotel industries, people who can speak English fluently stand a better chance of landing a good job. This has set off a chain reaction, with parents paying through the nose for their children to attend private schools that teach in English. Some send their children to boarding schools in neighbouring Uganda and Kenya and as far away as Zimbabwe, believing that this will give their children an advantage when it comes to job hunting.

"My entire salary is going into paying my son's school fees," says Abel Ngapemba. "But I don't regret it

THE CRITICAL TEST: Nargis Mohamed had trouble answering questions in English.

# One question only and the beauty queen lost her crown

because I know he is getting a good education that will help him in future." Ngapemba has to take on extra work to supplement his income. Private primary schools here charge between Sh200,000 and Sh600,000 (US\$200 to 600) per term. This can only widen the gap between the rich and the poor, creating a vicious cycle of poverty for the majority of Tanzanians who live on less than a dollar a day.

A study done by Kuleana, a non-governmental organisation that advocates children's rights, shows that many of the gains of the 1970s and 1980s — driven by policies and campaigns for better education — have been eroded by growing demands. Children fortunate enough to go to school face low quality education, overcrowded classrooms, poor teaching, lack of books and

deteriorating structures.

Researchers and academics argue that Tanzania's poor education system and the place of English in it have had a bigger impact on society than has been acknowledged. Says John Kiango, acting director of the Institute of Kiswahili Research, which promotes the use of the language: "We don't have inventors in Tanzania, but this does not mean we don't have educated people. We do, but we can't apply the theory to help us create new things. We learn theories in English but we don't understand them enough. It is impossible to apply and use the knowledge."

It is estimated that between 50 million and 80 million Africans speak Kiswahili. Most of them live in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some southern African refugees who lived in eastern Africa in the 1970s and 1980s took the language back home to Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia. In Oman, Kiswahili is the second most common language after Arabic, from which it draws significantly.

Kiango and his institution see no reason why Kiswahili should be dropped as a medium of instruction in schools. Using the more familiar language will help children learn and understand the subjects better so they can apply that knowledge effectively, he says. "English and French should be taught, but properly, with qualified teachers and teaching aids," he adds. "We can't have it any other way."

He points to countries such as Japan and Finland, where tuition is conducted in local languages — and which have benefited tremendously from local inventions that have gone global. Why can't we be proud of our language, which is spoken by more than 90 percent of the population? Why should we continue embarrassing ourselves like the beauty queen, who crammed the answer to the question but, even then, failed to say it the right way?

Minister for Education Joseph Mungai is adamant that English is here to stay as the language of instruction in secondary schools.

If that is so, why not apply the policy across the board then, from kindergarten to the highest possible level?

## POINT OF VIEW

# Girls pay the price of negligence

By Yinka Shokumbi, Nigeria

**N**igerian girls start having sex at the age of 15, according to reports on sexual activity among youth. A significant number will have experienced at least one reproductive health problem by the time they are 18.

Some experts have blamed this on a national social health infrastructure that does not accord sexual health, especially family life education, any importance in the school curriculum. "About five years after it received public acclaim, the approved family life education curriculum has yet to be implemented in schools across the country," says Nike Esiet, executive director of Action Health Incorporated.

It is estimated that there are 150 births per 1,000 Nigerian women aged between 15 and 49. As many as half of these could be teenagers. Among the sexually active young population aged 10 to 24, 72 percent of boys and 81 percent of girls say they have practised contraception. Nevertheless, condoms and the rhythm method are the most common and many do not practice contraception always and correctly. Result?

Teenagers having children and abortions – and sometimes dying or becoming chronically ill in the process.

According to a survey of Cross River and Plateau states by the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria, 65 percent of respondents consider teenage pregnancy a persistent problem. "Our recent survey among adolescents in the two states indicates that there is a problem on hand, not only in promoting responsible reproductive health but also in the fight against HIV/Aids," says O. Odusami, senior programme officer with the agency. "If the results from the two states are replicated in others, we are in trouble."

The rise in teenage pregnancies can be attributed to poverty and unemployment, the search for material wealth and ignorance of matters sexual. Esiet believes, however, that sexual violence against girls by people supposed to be their guardians contributes significantly to the problem. "Sexual abuse takes many forms – including sexual harassment, unwanted sexual contacts, coercion, rape, incest, prostitution and child trafficking," notes Esiet. "Often, the perpetrators are not strangers but relatives,

neighbours and acquaintances. The younger a girl is when she first experiences sexual intercourse, the higher the chances that the sex is coercive."

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development defined reproductive health as "complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions". It implies that people are able to have a "satisfying and safe sex life, and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so".

Broadly speaking, this could be interpreted to mean that everyone, including young people, are entitled to accurate and unbiased sex education, reproductive health services, facilities and personnel in a friendly environment and a government back-up policy safeguarding their reproductive health interests at all times.

Although there are regulations supporting safe abortion and management of complications arising from abortions, there are no laws regulating the provision of abortion in Nigeria. Neither is there any law backing

the provision of such services. Although the government is agreeable to abortion in order to save a woman's life or to preserve her physical and mental health, this policy does not cover rape and incest.

More than 600,000 unsafe abortions are carried out in Nigeria annually and it is responsible for more than half of all pregnancy-related deaths and illness.

Although there are many youth-friendly centres and clinics set up by non-governmental organisations, there seems to be little political will to deal with youth sexuality decisively. And most of these facilities are in urban centres and environments that only those with formal education can go to.

Those with little or no education consider them too "high-brow" for their comfort.

Girls who work in homes or as apprentices do not often get to attend such clinics for counselling or assistance. For such centres to be relevant and accessible, government intervention will be necessary.

As things stand, the girls are driven out of school while their partners – who could well be teachers or senior students – continue with their lives as if nothing happened.

## How George W. Bush killed Africa's dream

By Sandra Nyaira, Zimbabwe

**I**t took just two hours for representatives of 144 countries meeting in Geneva to abandon the latest attempt to reach a consensus on whether the world's poorest people should get access to affordable medicine. The decision during a World Trade Organisation meeting dealt a major blow to the campaign against HIV/Aids in Africa.

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

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

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

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

It is immoral that the United States should use its veto power to protect the lucrative patent rights enjoyed by its powerful pharmaceutical industry rather the rights of the sick and desperate to affordable drugs. The question that comes to mind when leaders like Bush attack tin-pot dictators like Robert Mugabe over governance issues is: "Do they really care about us or their own interests in Africa?"

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

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

WTO members had agreed more than a year ago that countries could override patent rules in the interests of public health and license local producers to copy es-

sential drugs, but they failed to spell out how countries with no manufacturing capacity would gain access to the life-saving medicines.

A draft accord on imports was rejected by the US last December after immense lobbying from drug firms, which fear that relaxing the rules to allow poor countries to import generic drugs will help manufacturers in India and Brazil "steal" their markets. Developing countries rejected as too restrictive America's counter-proposal – limiting imports to drugs for a short-list of diseases including HIV/Aids malaria and tuberculosis.

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

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

people are dying of Aids back home in Africa."

The Geneva meeting ended without any hope for Africa. The time has come for African leaders to follow the example of Nelson Mandela, Kenneth Kaunda and Joshua Nkomo and talk openly about the pandemic. These politicians have openly said their children and relatives have succumbed to the disease.

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

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

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

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**HAPPILY EVER AFTER ...But only as long as the woman understands she is her husband's property, according to many African communities.**

# Marriage should not be a death sentence

By Nabusayi L. Wamboka, Uganda

**T**here is a popular saying in Uganda that you cannot refuse a man, meaning a woman can never say "no" to a man's sexual advances. Local legislators have extended this argument to the legal realm: they say that when women say "I do" they consent to sex any time, any place and any how. Consequently, there is no such thing as marital rape.

Yet a report released in Kampala in August 2003 indicates that Uganda's fight against HIV/Aids is greatly undermined by its failure to protect women from domestic violence and discrimination. Revelations that marital rape has greatly contributed to HIV/Aids in women have led to renewed calls for urgent legislation to protect married women.

The 77-page report, *Just Die Quietly: Domestic Violence and Women's Vulnerability to HIV in Uganda*, documents widespread rape and brutal attacks on women by their husbands. It is the first study to establish a direct relationship between HIV/Aids and domestic violence and is based on interviews with 56 women and 120 local, religious and government leaders and non-governmental organisations.

The survey, conducted by Kenyan researcher and fellow at the Women's Rights Division of the Washington-based Human Rights Watch Lisa Karanja, took place from December 2002 to January 2003 in the districts of Kampala, Entebbe, Iganga, Luwero, Pallisa and Tororo.

Karanja also interviewed individual men and women from over 10 ethnic groups.

Harriet Abwoli, who is HIV-positive and has been treated at Mulago Hospital, told Human Rights Watch how her husband used to force her into sex. "He would beat and slap me when I refused. I never used a condom with him.... When I got pregnant, I went for a medical check-up. When I gave birth, the child passed away, they told me I was HIV-positive. I cried. The doctor told me: 'wipe your tears, the world is sick'."

According to Karanja, many women became vulnerable to infection as a result of domestic violence in complex ways: "Most women saw domestic violence as innate to marriage and viewed sex with their husbands as a marital obligation. Traditional attitudes that designate

women as the physical property of their husbands deprived them of any authority over marital sexual relations."

Cultural practices such as bride-price underscored men's entitlement to dictate the terms for sex and to use force. Violence or the threat of it thus deprived women of their bodily integrity and compromised their ability to negotiate safe sex or even to determine the number and spacing of their own children.

Says the report: "In many cases, abandonment or eviction from home held even greater terror for those economically dependent women who, confronted by a hostile social environment, ignored their husbands' adultery and acquiesced to their husbands' demands for unprotected sex."

Hadija Namaganda's HIV-positive husband raped and beat her viciously, at one point biting off her ear. As he lay dying, too weak to beat her, he ordered his younger brother to continue doing so.

"He used to force me to have sex even after he became sick. He would accuse me of having other men. He said he would cut me and throw me out. I didn't know about condoms," Namaganda reported.

"Being married should not be a death sentence for Ugandan women. Women should not give up their rights to physical security and sexual autonomy just because they get married," says LaShawn Jefferson, the executive director of the Women's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch. "Any success Uganda has experienced in its fight against HIV/Aids will be shortlived if it does not address this urgent problem."

Interventions focusing on fidelity, abstinence and con-

**"My husband would beat and slap me when I refused. I never used a condom with him .... When I got pregnant, I went for a medical check-up. When I gave birth, the child passed away, they told me I was HIV-positive. I cried. The doctor told me: 'wipe your tears, the world is sick!'"**

dom use tend to minimise the complex causes of violence and incorrectly assume that women have equal decision-making power and status in the family. "Now we have a report in place with women's voices talking about their experiences," says Karanja. "It is incorrect to assume that women have access to decision-making in a home. Women are raped in their marriages and can't protect themselves or even access information about protection."

The coordinator of the Uganda Women's Network, Jackline Asimwe-Mwesige, says the report confirms the need to hasten reforms to discriminatory laws. Women find it difficult to adopt the safe sex strategy since very few of them can actually negotiate it in relationships. "The pace of reform is so slow and does not take into account the number of women dying daily from domestic violence," she adds.

Human Rights Watch has urged the Ugandan government to enact domestic violence laws and make women's health, physical integrity and equal rights in marriage a central focus of Aids programming. Local women's rights activists have had little luck asking the government to pass laws addressing domestic relations, rape and battery of women by their intimate partners.

According to Asimwe-Mwesigye, the problem with marital rape is that even women view it as the ordinary wear and tear of marriage.

This view is supported by the evidence of Masturah Tibegywa, a 46-year-old living with HIV/Aids: "He never forced me into sex. He would beat me for other things but not sex. There were times I had sex with him when I didn't want to. I would just do it. What could I do? In our tradition, the men don't physically force you - but then they don't need to."

HIV/Aids donor assistance to Uganda continues to be considerable. Uganda is one of 14 African countries slated to receive five years of Aids programme support from the United States. In February, the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria signed a grant worth over US\$36 million to support Uganda's ongoing fight against HIV/Aids.

Human Rights Watch has urged the donors to ensure that Aids prevention programmes specifically target domestic violence, including sexual violence in marriage, as core components of their strategies.



## POINTS OF VIEW

# World opinion is the first casualty of the war on Iraq

By Susan Naa Sekyere, Ghana

US President George Bush went to war on the understanding that his forces would disarm Saddam Hussein and free the Iraqi people, not destroy them. Was that why cruise missiles and sophisticated bombs never seen before rained on Baghdad?

Take note of this too: Civilians were not to be targeted. But they were still injured, inadvertently or not, in their thousands. And by the minute. Pregnant women miscarried and vulnerable people died of heart attacks.

The Americans told a world wary of this invasion that the whole exercise would take three days. It took them three bloody and messy weeks to take Baghdad. But these are the gruesome realities of war, brought to the world live by the international media.

It is these disturbing images, perhaps, that have led some to call for the resignation of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

His critics say he shouldn't have withdrawn his weapons inspectors, that he should have left them there to be bombed out of existence alongside the ordinary Iraqis. After all, even journalists died there too.

Would the coalition forces have targeted their bombs more accurately had the weapons inspectors stayed? We will never know. What clearly emerged from the war was a world of divided opinions.

Some would say that this opinion business was the first casualty of the war. Did America not defy the United Nations and some of its European allies with its decision to start the war?

Throughout the world, ordinary women and men protested loudly, with some even taking to the streets on every continent. Indeed, it was



Cartoon by Michel Cambon, produced by the World Association of Newspapers, for World Press Freedom Day, May 3, 2003

the first time in the history of mankind that so many voices rose against war. But the warmongers paid no heed.

That loud "No" was ignored.

Before the start of the war, the African Union, Ecowas and other regional bodies added their voice to those cautioning against war and its likely effect on Iraqi civilians. Perhaps the boldest of the African leaders was Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and his predecessor, Nelson Mandela.

Seeing as South Africa is one of the select few countries that are on the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) programme of the US, you might think they would not want to

risk sticking their necks out and choose to simply hide behind regional groupings. The only other protests came from Kenya, where there were demonstrations against the war.

And what of the leaders in the Middle East, many of whom did not so much as lift a finger, some preferring to ask Saddam to go into exile, ostensibly to save his country from destruction?

What did their silence mean? Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi condemned the American military operation but quickly added that Iran would not take sides in the conflict. Vocal opposition was left to ordinary people in the Arab world.

Thirteen clear days after the start of the war, Jordan's King Abdullah finally spoke out against it on April 2. Better late than never. Unlike his peers in Africa, he at least made his opinion known.

King Abdullah deplored the civilian casualties, saying: "As a father, I feel the pain of every Iraqi family and child."

Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the war on Iraq was a "black mark

in history, with the new world now realising that might is right". That country's conservative Islamic opposition party went so far as to predict the eventual downfall of the United States. Other Muslim groups described it not as an attack on Islam but on humanity.

It is all over for Saddam Hussein and his cohorts. But as the world waits to learn the fate of the former Iraqi leaders, one question remains unanswered: Did Saddam really have chemical weapons of mass destruction? And if he did, why were they not unleashed on the American forces? Not that anyone's opinion matters, of course, except that of President George Bush.

## Perhaps President Bush should have played football with Saddam

By Margaret Ziribaggwa, Uganda

Sport is all about the spirit of friendship and togetherness. Rarely does any match end in acrimony and some players form lasting relations on and off the pitch. When it comes to national teams, the fans routinely forget their political differences, cheering and demonstrating their loyalty as one nation.

Sport can also override military and political tensions between countries. Uganda and Rwanda have had difficult relations for a long time, each country accusing the other of training its rebels. The Ugandan government believes that top soldiers Samson Mande and Anthony Kyakabale, who deserted the national army, have used a base in Rwanda to train their rebel

troops. Rwanda argues that the murderous Interahamwe have been trained and sheltered by the Ugandans. In March, Rwanda went to the extent of deploying armed forces on its border with Uganda.

Despite these tensions, Uganda Cranes and Rwanda's Amavubi honoured an Africa Cup of Nations qualifying match at Amahoro stadium in Rwanda.

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame watched the March 29 game. The Rwandese were overwhelmed by 6,000 Ugandan fans who turned up to cheer their national team, most of them dressed in distinct national colours and singing patriotic songs in favour of their country and president.

Looking upon the hospitality the Rwandese laid out for their guests, it was difficult to be-

lieve that the two countries had ever had political differences. The match ended in a goalless draw and the return leg is due in June, this time in Kampala.

The unity that sport can create is a vital part of any reconciliation process. If England had accepted to travel to Zimbabwe for their cricket world cup game, there might well have been an opportunity to resolve the political standoff between the two countries. The players would have shaken hands and upheld the principle of fair play, setting an example for the political players. Who knows, the Americans would have thought the better of invading Iraq – and avoided the senseless killing – had the two countries worked out their differences on the pitch! We need a new motto for the 21st Century: Make sport, not war.

### {Abuja Diary}

## Press freedom under threat!

They came, 700 of them, from the local and foreign media. Accreditation was chaotic but they managed to get their passes. The passes only allowed them access to go to the media centre and at least the People's Forum. Unfortunately they had no access to the conference centre where the Heads of Governments were to meet, it was by invitation only. Once the invitations were given, the journalists were not allowed to ask questions or conduct interviews...

So what is the point of accrediting journalists to get to a conference and not give them access to the hub of information? If this is not press freedom under threat in the Commonwealth, what else is?

### Where are the beggars in Abuja?

AS the dignitaries began to arrive, the beggars started to disappear from the streets of Abuja, and the men in black replaced them. They have been kept away for the duration of the visit. Our camera crew bumped into two police vehicles and a lorry. The boys and girls in black would stop, pick up a beggar and hoist him or her into the lorry... Well this is what happens when your country hosts a major conference. Obasanjo probably wanted to impress his colleagues in the Commonwealth, hoping to portray a clean house and probably reduced poverty levels.

When President Bush visited Kampala Uganda early this year, all the people living within the radius of 20km from Entebbe Airport were paid to stay away from their homes for the duration of Bush's stay.

When former US president Bill Clinton visited Tanzania, and met with the heads of states from Kenya, Uganda and the host country, the leaders' sitting positions were all changed at one point, so that no-one was sitting in the same place as before. The streets were cleaned with soap and water, yet the people who pay the taxes do not enjoy such clean streets. Talk of irony...

### The sirenal music

EVERY other hour, there was music in the air as sirens blared to announce that a VIP was passing by. One wonders whether there are such goings-on when African presidents go to Europe or other developed countries. You can have all the convoys you want, but stop the noise pollution...



# Democracy, censorship a tough mix

By Caroline Somanje, Malawi

**AS** it moves to repeal oppressive censorship laws dating back to 1968, Malawi finds itself between the devil and the deep blue sea.

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

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

But if Bakili Muluzi's government thought it would be doing Malawians a favour by changing the law, it has learnt that there is

no easy road to democracy. The problem? While the proposed new law will do away with limits on the creative arts, it will permit distribution of materials containing explicit and violent sex, child pornography, sex with animals, degrading sexual practices and extreme violence. The Malawian government argues that banning entertainment materials unnecessarily contravenes freedom of expression and people's right to information — especially adults.

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

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

The bill provides for stiffer penalties for offenders. Theatre managers or owners who fail to comply with the law are now jailed for six months and fined 200 kwacha (about US\$2.17); in the new scheme of things, they will be locked up for

three years and be fined 250,000 kwacha (about \$2,717). "The emphasis is on regulation and not control (banning), which is now the internationally preferred method of regulating entertainment, publications and films," says the commission.

But Emmie Chanika, executive director of the Civil Liberties Committee, describes the proposed law as unfortunate. Democracy has a price, she says, and the new law is just one example. Chanika brings a new twist to the debate when she says that the whole question of pornography should be looked at from a wider perspective since politicians constantly degrade women at public rallies.

She cites Muluzi's reference to human rights activist Robson Chitengo as having been caught red-handed "climbing" another man's wife. Chitengo had been campaigning against Muluzi's proposed amendment to the constitution to allow him to run for a third term in office.

Says Chanika: "Are we hills that should be climbed? The law should cover such issues as these, including explicit and intimate dances like the popular but suggestive *kwasa kwasa* originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Our local *Chisamba* dance, done by elderly women at initiation cere-

monies to groom young women in readiness for marital obligations, is another example. These are not for younger eyes but, surprisingly, our local Television Malawi beams them without any age restrictions."

Chanika has a soulmate in Catherine Munthali, who heads the Society for the Advancement of Women: "Pornography is not part of our society," Munthali argues, "and there are certain things that need not be entertained, even when dealing with the changing times. Pornography is demeaning to women. We feel betrayed."

Ngeyi Kanyongolo, president of the Women Lawyers Association, says pornographic materials are not a problem as long as they are viewed in the privacy of people's homes. Banning pornography is not a viable solution, she says, because people can still see it on the Internet and in small video showrooms. The key word is control, in her view — and this is where the problem lies. The lawyer is wary about linking pornography to sexual abuse of women. "It is like saying wearing mini-skirts is a call for trouble, hence anyone raped or assaulted in a mini-skirt deserves it," says Kanyongolo.

According to the United States National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families, research has proved that pornogra-

phy and its messages can shape attitudes and encourage behaviour that can harm individual users and their families.

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

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

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

## FROM FRONT PAGE

against the Obasanjos. They compare the First Lady's attitude with that of past military wives, who were accused of being co-dictators with their husbands.

Mrs Obasanjo's rebuke was ill-timed for another reason: It is not tactful of her to place herself in the centre of controversy when there is a lawsuit against her, the wife of the vice-president and the wives of 22 governors in the immediate past government over funds for their charity projects. The suit, filed in Lagos in April by human rights lawyer Chinonye Obiagwu, is asking them to "render public account of all the funds raised in their respective foundations and projects and to refund funds and properties not accounted for".

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

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

Although Mrs Babangida made

## The First Lady Syndrome

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

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

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

When Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired army general, assumed office in 1999 as an elected president, he said his wife would remain just that and not be known as first lady. It became clear that she had her own plans when, about a year into her husband's administration, she

registered her own non-governmental organisation, the Child Care Trust Foundation, with the declared objective of supporting deprived children.

The Office of the First Lady has clearly come to stay, even though it is not provided for in the constitution. Wives of governors have also joined the bandwagon and are hard at work on their own projects aimed at solving one social problem or another — projects that have received sympathetic media coverage despite the lawsuit.

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

Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka describes the First Lady as arrogant and sarcastically refers to her as "Imperial Majesty". Writing in the *News*, a weekly magazine, on

July 3, a columnist had this to say: "Mrs Obasanjo clearly has an ego bigger than those of the two Maryams. She is probably in the same league with Imelda Marcos ... and Marie Antoinette, wife of the last French Monarch."

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

The real problem with Mrs Obasanjo is that, despite huge donations from private and public sources, not much is seen or heard of the work that her charity is supposed to be doing. In contrast,

Rwandan First Lady Jeanette Kagame has led a high profile campaign Aids, drawing not only on local charity but also roping in other first ladies from other regions of Africa.

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

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



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