

Africa *woman*

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN IN AFRICA

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Hope Sadza: "WUA gives such women a second chance to complete their tertiary education. It provides a comfortable working environment so that the mature woman does not feel out of place as is usually the case when she joins universities with youths out of high school."

ZIMBABWE

Mature students get a second chance

By Ruth Gabi

BETTY MTERO looks up, over the top of her glasses. "Learning is from the cradle to the grave – that's my motto," says the 70-year-old. "I strongly believe I can achieve whatever I set my mind to. And what I want now is a degree from WUA."

WUA is an acronym for Women's University in Africa, the first in Southern Africa, which opens its doors to the first intake of 400 undergraduates in September. WUA will admit students from all over Africa. Since its launch in 2001, the university has been overwhelmed by applications from Zimbabwe

New university is tailored to suit women who raised families

and other countries in the Southern Africa Development Community.

Mtero is a teacher who has worked in many Zimbabwean schools since getting her diploma in the 1960s. She studied by correspondence for a diploma in adult education from a college in Zambia and graduated in 1971.

With the launch of WUA, Mtero is determined to put yet another feather in her cap. Sitting ramrod straight, she says: "The opening of WUA is a great incentive for wom-

en to advance themselves. My aim in this new millennium is to get a degree in Gender Studies and Sociology from WUA."

This ambitious project is the brainchild of two dynamic women educationists, Hope Sadza and Fay Chung. Sadza is a former public service commissioner and vice-chair of the Council of the University of Zimbabwe.

She is also the chairperson of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. Chung, a former minister of education and culture in Zimbabwe,

works for the United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organisation and is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Sadza and her friend of 20 years conceived the idea of WUA three years ago. Chung provided the seed money. "I contributed to the project by taking early retirement from my government job in order to give eight months of my time to setting up the institution," says Sadza, comfortable behind her big desk at the university's temporary offices in Harare. "WUA had no money and capacity in the beginning."

Seeking funds and support were

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KENYA

Day a widow's life changed forever

By Ruth Omukhango and Florence Machio

ZAINA Mukami has spent a good part of the past six years listening to lawyers fight in court. The bone of contention? Whether or not she should inherit a US\$6.25 million fortune from her husband, a prominent Kenyan administrator who died in 1996.

Her patience finally paid off when the high court, sitting in Nairobi, gave her control over the estate. Though she is to jointly administer the property with her brother-in-law, this ruling is considered a landmark in affirming the rights of widows – the court having thrown out a demand by her husband's family that they had first call on the extensive property of Ismael Chelang'a.

The former provincial commissioner, who died at 40, owned huge chunks of prime land throughout Kenya and had housing estates in four major towns – Eldoret, Kapenguria, Mombasa and Nakuru. His other properties included a three-star hotel in the coastal area popu-

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Widow wins fight over husband's fortune

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lar with tourists. He had shares in many companies and held several bank accounts.

As the wife of a senior administrator, Mukami enjoyed a privileged lifestyle. As a widow, she learned that social class is no barrier to the discrimination that women must contend with when they lose their husbands.

The Chelang'a kin went to court to challenge her right to the property on the grounds that Mukami was never legally married to their son. Not only did her mother-in-law disown her, but she also dismissed her children as illegitimate and not entitled to an iota of the property. Instead, she presented two other children as her son's true heirs.

The end of the nightmare came with the May 24 ruling by Justice Alex Etyang, that Mukami and her husband had been legally married in March 23, 1983, under Islamic law. The Chelang'a case is seen as a major breakthrough for Kenyan widows seeking recognition of their rights in the ongoing constitution review.

Because women do not traditionally own land, widows risk being disinherited or may even have to be "inherited" by brothers-in-law if they hope to retain rights to their land or remain part of the family.

Rights

Angela Gethi, chairperson of the Widow Support Network of Kenya, argues that widow rights to property and inheritance should not be interfered with by anyone – including the administration and the judiciary. She wants widows to have automatic rights to their husbands, property and to remarry of their own volition.

In current law, women have an implicit right to acquire and own land, housing and property. But there is no specific provision for co-ownership between husband and wife. Neither is the consent of one spouse (and/or of the land control board) required if the other wants to sell land the couple occupies. Spouses are also not required to inform one another of mortgage plans or similar transaction.

Uganda's Land Act includes a clause requiring consent from the spouse in case of any transfer. An explicit provision recognising women's equal rights to land and other property is not included.

Customary laws and traditions that are still widely applied usually exclude widows from inheritance and only rarely allow daughters to inherit.

Under Islamic law, widows and daughters can inherit, property – but their share is smaller than that of men.

A chimney at U.N. headquarters

Making a mockery of anti-secondhand smoking campaign

By Charity Binka and Eunice Menka, Ghana

Something strange is happening in the UN headquarters in New York. It is called hypocrisy. So much smoking everywhere. As soon as one comes out of the conference rooms of the world body's headquarters, one is engulfed in a cloud of smoke.

Last month a forum on forest management held at the headquarters saw many men in attendance. Was that why there was so much smoke around? So much so that delegates attending the forum had no "breathing space" in the smoke-filled environment.

Even the few computers that were lined up could not be used for work by non-smokers since it was a smoke-choked affair all around.

Yet the UN and its agencies such as the World Health Organisation spends thousands of dollars in the fight for a tobacco-free world.

POINT OF VIEW

Do these world bodies have any justification for the celebration of the yearly World No-Tobacco Day?

These agencies are making a lot of noise about secondhand smoke and the dangers associated with it. In fact the theme for last year's World No Tobacco Day was Secondhand Smoking. The occasion was used to highlight the fact that secondhand smoking kills and individuals have a right to protect themselves from it.

The W.H.O. says infants exposed to secondhand smoke could be at increased risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Children exposed to second hand smoke experience more frequent colds and ear infection; increased coughing and wheezing; higher risk of pneumonia and bronchitis; weaker lungs;

higher risk of developing asthma and worsened asthma, if they already have it.

In adults, secondhand smoke can cause cancer and make it easier to get lung diseases, heart attack or stroke.

The US Environmental Protection Agency ranks secondhand smoke as one of the most dangerous substances known to cause cancer and it is linked to 35,000 heart attacks each year in non-smokers

If medical evidence abounds that secondhand smoke has such a devastating effect on the health of individuals and the communities, why are health officials and these world bodies preaching a tobacco-free environment and practising a different thing?

The UN headquarters in New York is host to conferences all year round and must not be seen to condoning such criminal acts of exposing people including children to preventable death.

University will cater for women who raised families

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crucial and the two co-founders have worked tirelessly to lay the foundation for WUA.

Sadza says: "The Government of Zimbabwe has been very supportive. It donated a developed 385-acre farm with a breathtaking landscape and tree-lined avenues just four kilometres outside Marondera, a small town 70km from the capital Harare."

Start-up kitty

WUA's start-up kitty now has Zimbabwe \$100 million in capital, pledges and donated services. It has not all been plain sailing, though. "Most people in the business and the corporate world were not interested in a women's university," Sadza recalls. "I remember one banker saying to me, 'As long as it is for only women, I am not supporting it'. But I persisted. I told him I was not leaving his office until he had offered WUA some assistance. By the time I left he had agreed to fund one lecturer in finance and banking."

The first women's university in Africa is in Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, and was established to serve Muslims. Kenya's Kiriri Women's University of Science and Technology will also open its doors in September. WUA will admit both women and men, in recognition of the fact that some men have also been disadvantaged and have been unable to get university education. WUA will reserve 15 percent of its intake for men. Sadza explains: "We do not



Fay Chung: Took early retirement from her government job.

want to encourage reverse discrimination."

Why a women's university? WUA will not cater for girls straight out of school but for women who unable to get university education as they had to work and provide for their families.

Says Sadza: "WUA gives such women a second chance to complete their tertiary education. It provides a comfortable working environment so the mature woman does not feel out of place as is usually the case when she joins universities with youths out of high school."

Zimbabwean Minister for Water and Natural Resources Joyce Mujuru is one of those keen to join WUA in September. Now in her late forties, Mujuru was her country's first minister for women's affairs at in-

dependence in 1980.

The university also targets women in middle management whose promotion prospects might be handicapped by lack of a degree. "Paper qualifications from a university are a great confidence booster," says Sadza. "It gives women that extra impetus to excel in the academic field."

Women with grown-up children, who have always longed to pursue studies at the degree level for their personal fulfillment and who have the time and resources after the nest is empty, will also benefit from WUA programmes. And this is exactly what Mtero intends to do.

Four children

She says: "I have four children and they have all got degrees. My son has got a masters in psychology, my eldest daughter is a microbiologist and the other one is an optician. My late daughter Natsai was a journalist. Now it is my turn to get a degree because, as I said earlier, learning never ends. I am a people person and am involved with a number of voluntary organisations like the street kids association. I also sit on a number of boards, so education is very important for me. I hope to get a scholarship to study at WUA. The dissertation for my diploma was on The Training Needs Of African Women."

Initially, WUA will offer three-year degree programmes in agriculture, management and entrepreneurship, gender studies and sociology and reproductive health.

The entry qualifications are five ordinary level passes from high school and five years' work experience. The university's selection process will apply Accredited Prior Learning – which takes into consideration experience and earlier qualifications. WUA will also offer distance learning to accommodate rural women and others unable to be on campus on a regular basis.

Says Sadza: "It is vital for women to get a scientific knowledge of agriculture since women working on the land produce 90 per cent of the food in Africa. For women who are locked up in middle management jobs acquiring a degree is one definite way of moving upwards. It is also crucial for women to understand why they are separate and how scientific values and culture determine their destinies, hence gender studies and sociology."

She worries that young women in Africa are not in charge of their reproductive health.

"Women should focus on HIV/Aids prevention and participate in research instead of being the subjects of research. HIV-positive women must talk about HIV/Aids and how to prevent it and also how to protect girls and boys."

WUA is a private university and is self-funded. Working with a board of trustees of nine women and a planning committee of 15 women, Sadza is trying to persuade companies and institutions to invest in the graduates by funding their studies at WUA. Sadza chairs the board of trustees and Chung is the patron."



Rock singer Bono and U/S. Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill chat with pupils at a Kampala school during their debt-study tour of Africa.

Two men on a mercy mission

Irish rock star Bono and US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill may still have different worldviews after a 10-day tour of African countries, but they have reportedly 'bonded together' in believing that a better life is possible in Sub-Saharan countries wallowing in poverty and mortgaged to the hilt. "We are going to lose millions of lives unless there is a significant jump in aid from the United States and Europe," said Bono, of U2, who has been a dedicated advocate of more debt relief and aid for Africa. The tour took Bono and O'Neill to the 2,888-bed Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, the world's largest, and witnessed the devastation of HIV/Aids in South Africa. The two met government officials in Ghana, South Africa, Uganda and Ethiopia and also visited schools and orphanages in their African journey of discovery of the full impact of poverty and disease on the continent. Billed as the "odd couple", Bono and O'Neill presented not only a contrast in outlook but also appearance — the first in casual wear and ever-present sunglasses and the other in business-like suits.



Bono cuddles 11-month-old Thomas Gqubile, whose mother is HIV-positive, during his visit to an HIV-AIDS centre in Soweto, South Africa.

International newsbriefs

ZIMBABWE

Trouble with older men

YOUNG women in sub-Saharan Africa are more susceptible to HIV infection than men because their partners are often older than they are, says Simon Gregson of Imperial College of London. Gregson and researchers from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids conducted a study in Manicaland, a province in eastern Zimbabwe, to assess how the disease is spread. They found that young men under 25 usually had relationships with women their own age or a few years younger, but women tended to have partners five to 10 years older. "The age difference between female and male sexual partners in Manicaland is the major behavioural determinant of the more rapid rise in HIV prevalence in young women than in men," Gregson said in the study reported in *The Lancet* medical journal. (Reuters)

ENGLAND

Protecting mothers

A CHEAP drug that has been around for decades can halve the risk of women developing a complication during pregnancy and save thousands of lives in poor countries, doctors say.

Pre-eclampsia is marked by dangerously high blood pressure, fluid retention and protein in the urine and can lead to eclampsia, which endangers the lives of both mother and child. Eclampsia — convulsions or fits — is one of the most common causes of death for pregnant women in the developing world. Magnesium sulphate, which costs just US\$5, protects the mother and does not harm the infant. (Reuters)

RWANDA

The burden of beauty

GENOCIDE suspect Arsene Shalom Ntahobali abducted women to be raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, a witness testifying in the so-called "Butare Trial" claimed before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

Under cross-examination by Norman Marquis of Canada, co-counsel for Ntahobali, the witness — identified only as "TK" — said Ntahobali often visited the Butare governor's office, where ethnic Tutsi refugees were gathered, in search of "good-looking" women whom he abducted and who were later raped. Ntahobali was allegedly a militia leader in Butare. More than 800,000 Tutsi and politically moderate Hutu were killed during the genocide. An estimated 26,000 Tutsi were killed in Butare alone. (Internews).

UGANDA

The warrior wives

By Nabusayi L. Wamboka

THEY loved. They suffered. And some may finally die slowly and painfully. They are the Congolese wives who marched to Uganda in search of their soldier husbands returning home from the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

With the withdrawal of troops of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces from the DRC, many women — some accompanied by children fathered by the returning soldiers — followed their husbands to Uganda.

Little did they know that they would spark off a major social crisis, with Ugandan wives mounting a major offensive against surprise co-wives who posed a threat to meagre family resources.

Some of the Congolese women were arrested and held at Bombo Barracks for two weeks, allegedly for entering Uganda illegally and for being idle and disorderly. Others were denied immigration papers at the border posts.

The regional newspaper, *The East African*, quoted army spokesman Phineas Katirima as saying the women and their husbands would have to be screened before being allowed to reunite because they outnumbered the returning soldiers. There were fears that some of the women might be spies.

Other senior army officers said the soldiers would be screened to establish when they graduated from the Cadet Training School.

Congolese women find love, hate — and even death — in a new country

"The marriages of those who had not completed the compulsory four years of staying single after graduating will not be recognised," said Katirima.

For the Congolese women, the agony is compounded by fears of HIV infection through the reckless sexual behaviour of the soldiers.

At least six countries are involved directly in battles to decide the fate of the country formerly known as Zaire, which has valuable stocks of oil and precious minerals.

Alliances

Guerrillas representing various ethnic groups and government forces have forged alliances with countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, Angola, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe in a battle that has not only seen a military fall-out but also a reproductive health crisis.

Laurie Garret, a correspondent with *Newsday* in the US, quotes Bette Korber of Los Alamos Laboratory in New Mexico saying that they have noticed "something strange" going on in the Congo. "It's as if all the African HIV clades [subtypes] are mixing there, forming strange recombinants. We're seeing variants never seen before. Recombination is happening so fast that we see the clade distinctions

beginning to blur," she writes. Viruses are emerging that have genetic traits of the Ugandan, Zambian and Congolese sub-types.

"This is war," says a top military man, pounding his fist on the table. "If there is any strategy to fight AIDS, it should be used. And if someone prevents that, that person is an enemy of humanity ... the spread of HIV is the fault of the leaders."

Aids is not the only problem afflicting Congolese wives. Fearing that the entry of these women into Uganda would destabilise marriages and deny many single Ugandan women a chance to get husbands, leaders have turned to Parliament and the immigration department to block the immigrants.

According to East African Legislator Naomi Kabasharira, some of the returning soldiers were already married and had left behind starving wives. Five of her constituents have reportedly accused their UPDF husbands of abandoning them for Congolese women. "We must protect our women who have been waiting for their husbands for years and suffering without money," she says.

But the Congolese women have also found sympathisers in Uganda. Judy Kamanyi, executive director of

the women's pressure group Action for Development, says: "There is no law disallowing polygamy in Uganda. The women are free to join their husbands, as long as they fulfill immigration requirements."

The Congolese women say their Ugandan partners paid the traditional bride price to their parents. Some are as young as 19, they walked more than 340km to the remote border town of Buta, where they found transport to Uganda.

"It is a complex issue and we need everyone's co-operation," says Katirima. "This is the first time we are experiencing this."

Concerns

One of the key concerns is to establish the socio-economic impact on families and the country of allowing the Congolese women in. Uganda's 1995 Constitution grants citizenship to women who have stayed with their husbands for three years. But most of the returning soldiers had been in the DRC for no more than two years.

Women leaders opposed to the Congolese women have gained critical support from their male colleagues, who say Uganda should emulate Tanzania, which turned back women pursuing returning troops who had deposed Uganda's dictator Idi Amin in 1979. "We already have a problem with Rwandese (women) in every bedroom," says legislator John Kazoora, a retired senior UPDF officer.

EDITORIAL

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Marching against violence in Nairobi.

It's time to end this violence against women

Let's all agree on one thing: That domestic violence is a throwback to the dark ages and has no place in modern society. Yet, as is clearly demonstrated in our special report, it continues to thrive — with even top-flight women leaders reporting being battered.

Ugandan Vice-President Specioza Kazibwe may have been criticised in some circles for going public that she had been the victim of abuse, but *Africawoman* has only words of encouragement for the women — and men, though only occasionally — who choose to break the silence on domestic violence.

A very personal crime, wife battering remains the bane of most women's lives only because they refuse to speak openly about it. This has given most of our justice-dispensing authorities the opportunity to refuse to intervene, arguing that they cannot get involved in domestic matters. They complain, of course, that women often back down from prosecutions — mainly due to family and social pressure — making it a futile exercise.

At the psychological level, women have remained in abusive relationships by the notion that they have "nowhere to go". It is not a cop out in societies where women have been programmed to believe that they are nothing without a man — any man — in their lives. Indeed, women fleeing violence may find themselves rejected by kin who consider them and their children a burden.

Besides, the lowly economic status of the majority of African women places them in the awkward position of being unable to provide for themselves and their children should they decide to walk out.

Sorry does not quite capture our sentiments on this matter. Fury is closer to it. From Ghana, we bring you a report on a demonstration by Sisters' Keepers, a coalition that has taken the campaign against violence right into the streets of Accra. Let's all speak with one voice and take the protests spread to all African capitals.

We might just be able to convince our governments to put in place mechanisms to ensure shelter and protection for women desperate to get out of abusive relationships and also make specific laws to ensure women, children and men are free of this scourge.

Tell us what you think

We'd like to know what you think of the stories in this issue of *Africawoman* and what you'd like to see in future issues. Send your comments to The Editor at awcin@kenyaonline.com, or to lesley.riddoch@bbc.co.uk Your contributions will help *Worldwoman* serve you better.

GHANA

A letter to my brother on the Road to Hell

By Golda Armah
and Elizabeth Akonnor

It's me Kwame, writing this letter to you. How is everybody, especially my mother, my child and you as well. Kwame, I will be very grateful if you could find a loan for the final payment of the refrigerator that I bought. Boahene, if you like the store do the renovation on it and use it or you can rent it out for the upkeep of my child ... Please sell the engagement ring and Bible, give the suitcase with the clothing materials to my child ... For now I am going to Assin Foso, but if you find me again that is fine, but if you don't, search for my body for burial. I really love my child, Rachel, but I am compelled to take this action because of the disgrace her mother had caused me."

This is the final statement of Kwame Afoakoa, before he shot his wife and shot himself following a quarrel between them. Until then Afoakwa, a farm-labourer, aged about 28, had been preparing to wed Amorkor Tagoe, 27 year-old hairdresser.

A dangerous trend is emerging in Ghana—the culture of murder in the name of jealousy. Six women have been murdered within two months; February and March 2002, usually over alleged infidelity and other unsubstantiated complaints.

On April 17, Adwoa Mansah, 35, a trader was found dead in her room. Her husband, Nana Egyir, is said to have strangled her. Adwoa had rented a house about eight months ago after she had separated with her husband. Egyir had been issuing death threats to Adwoa and refused to cater for their two children. The children returned home from school only to find their mother dead on her bed.

But not all the murderers resort to the use of gun. On February 26, a 35-year-old mason Kwasi Nyarko killed his wife by hitting her with a hammer on the head. His sister-in-law is still on admission at the hospital, having suffered a similar fate.

Nyarko told investigators that he said he did not understand why after giving money to his wife to trade; she would refuse to give him money when he was in need. He said at the time, he had been indisposed for sometime and so his late wife was always provid-

ing him pocket money. Nyarko said he asked his wife to increase the amount because it was inadequate but his wife refused. According to him, he asked his wife to give him back the money she had given him to trade but she would not budge.

Obviously, the sudden spousal murders have sparked off fear in and has left many women in a state of panic as to their husband's reaction if an argument should erupt.

Obviously these murders have nothing to do with education poverty on the part of the murdered women. One picture that runs through these murders is the prominence of chauvinism, which is leading men to regard the wives as inferior or second-rate citizens.

Certainly the breakdown in the family unit and the extended family have a hand in the turbulent nature of society today.

Today, urbanization does not make it auspicious for families to resolve marital problems through the extended family system; hence people take the law into their own hands.

Also, the electronic media is a contribution factor to such murders because violence portrayed on the screens affect lives of some viewers. Counselling stands out as the number one solution for couples. They should talk to any qualified psychologists when the need arises to prevent further occurrences.

Above all, experts believe that when partners close the communication gap between them and learn to talk, to dialogue, the tension, the frustrations and the anger that all lead to such barbaric acts, would be reduced.

But some women are have found innovative ways to handle the problem — fight back.

A woman was recently reported to have squeezed the testicles of her farmer husband until they popped out of the scrotum. It was an act of self-defense which she resorted to after she had been beaten by her husband in a quarrel.

Hmm, what a way to defend yourself!

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FAMILY VIOLENCE

SPECIAL REPORT

Domestic violence is a pervasive problem world-wide and a great deal of effort has expended on finding lasting solutions to one of the greatest threats to women's well-being. But because of the very personal nature of these attacks, domestic violence remains a grey area — with women and girls, the majority of the victims, being left to their own devices. Many of them live in a cultural regime that conditions them to believe that this is their lot in life and they must put up with it. But, as our special report demonstrates, the winds of change are sweeping all over Africa and women are gradually finding the courage to break the silence and blow the whistle on abuse.

UGANDA

“How can you beat a whole vice-president?”

Specioza Kazibwe's admission that she lived in an abusive relationship sparks a great debate

By Sarah Namulondo

Women warm to Ugandan Vice-President Specioza Wandira Kazibwe. Over the past decade, she has earned a reputation for advancing women's rights and defending the marriage institution.

Kazibwe has always been a strong woman, good mother and wife. She has spoken candidly of marriage, telling journalists that it is not always a bed of roses. Of her own relationship, she once had this to say: “A rose flower rests among thorns but doesn't lose its beauty or scent. We have had our struggles but I always tell him I'm your wife and he knows he is my husband.”

In her traditional outspoken manner, Kazibwe also said that she had often weighed the negatives and the positives in her marriage and decided the positives outweighed the negatives. “Marriage is a good institution,” she declared. “It is the basic unit of society.”

All this changed on International Women's Day, when she announced to the world that she had been living in an abusive relationship, sparking off an emotive debate on domestic violence that had echoes all over East Africa.

Interviewed two years earlier, she describing the man she now accuses of being a wife batterer, as a “real ladies' man, good listener and political aide.” He had pushed her to the centre of politics, she said, in a glowing interview.

Sample this: When Engineer Kazibwe wooed her 28 years ago, in her own words, “It was a musical encounter.” She loved church music. He loved her voice. They met during music practice at Lumumba Hall in Makerere, Uganda's main university. Several days later, he gatecrashed a musical party she was attending. When she asked him if he



Ugandan Vice-President Specioza Wandira Kazibwe

could also sing, he stammered, stammered and stammered.

Two years later, the tune is decidedly different. “They say Mukyala Kazibwe keeps telling us about our husbands who beat us when for them they are lucky they are not beaten. No, they beat us. Even me – I used to be beaten until I decided enough was enough,” she told a women's meeting on March 15. “I said, Mr Kazibwe, you have been beating me, walk out. How can you beat a whole vice-president? I'm very sorry.”

He admitted beating her – but only twice. He slapped her on each occasion for ‘insubordination’ and returning home in the wee hours. Engineer Kazibwe capped it all by saying he loved his wife and hoped they would reconcile.

Why the vice-president swallowed her words and came out to talk of the abuse several years after she separated

by poverty. Should the man become frustrated, goes this school of thought, he can be expected to turn his wife into his punching bag.

And it is not only in Uganda that this philosophy holds. According to the United Nations Population Fund's Personalising Population, 32 percent of Nicaraguan women say that it is okay for a husband to beat his wife if he even suspects that she has been cheating on him. “Violence can be considered a normal part of life,” says Alba Alvaro, an obstetrician who also helps educate low-income women about domestic abuse. “Some even think that it's an expression of love and caring.”

The U.N. estimates that 75 percent of married Nicaraguan women have been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in some way, including psychologically.

As in Uganda, debilitating poverty is cited as the major cause of domestic violence. The UNFPA reports that more people and no new jobs means increased tension and lots of poor young women who are forced to rely on men.

The good news is that women are not taking this nonsense any more and the number of non-governmental organisations addressing the situation is on the rise. Uganda's Domestic Relations Bill is coming up in Parliament and, if passed, will give women a “bargaining” chip. In the meantime, battered women who do not have the kind of resources at the disposal of the vice-president can take refuge at the Women and Children Crisis Centre in Kampala.

Word is spreading in other ways too: Advertisements in newspapers tell women about their rights, volunteers make house calls, anti-violence posters are plastered up in public restrooms and high profile women are speaking out. The consequences have been far-reaching.

from the engineer is difficult to guess. She could have been inspired by this year's women's day theme Break the Silence, Stop Domestic Violence.

What is certain, however, is that there is widespread belief in many developing countries that domestic violence is no big deal. Ugandan women blame it on machismo – a lame concept embraced by many men that decrees, among other things, that women are the “property” of their husbands.

But Kazibwe is no ordinary Ugandan woman and her confession was least expected. Said Hanifa Namakula, a tomato vendor in a Kampala slum: “If the country's highest ranking woman could be beaten, how about us who have no bargaining power?”

Clearly, it is not all about “bargaining power.” To some, women's unequal relationships with men are accentuated

GHANA

Stop attacks on women, say angry protesters

By Charity Binka and Golda Armah

It was the kind of procession rarely seen in Accra. But those who turned up for the Saturday, April 6, march were out to make a point – this time in support of women.

As the thousands of protesters in mourning clothes wended their way through the principal streets of the Ghanaian capital, they chanted war songs. The placards they carried bore the slogans: “Stop killing us, Stop the violence against women” and “Women are also human beings.”

The group had been brought out into the streets by a series of unresolved killings of 36 women in and around Accra from 1999 through to 2001. In the preceding months, six women had been killed by their husbands following disputes over alleged infidelity, pocket money

and family meals.

Says Emelia Arthur, co-ordinator of Sisters’ Keepers, the coalition behind the street protest: “This is part of a series of protest marches we will embark on until violence against women is brought to an end.”

Sisters’ Keepers, which brings together men, women and organisations committed to violence and discrimination against women, has submitted petitions to the inspector-general of police, the minister of the interior and the attorney-general.

Beatrice Ofei, a trader who participated in the march, believes that the murders are an indication that society has lost its values. She offers one solution to

Nurse calls for public executions of murderers, whether male or female

the crisis: “Execute such people, whether men or women, in the full glare of the public.”

Nurse Gloria Quartey argues that even though men are more likely to be unfaithful to their partners, it was rare for a woman to kill her partner.

The executive director of the Ghanaian chapter of the International Federation of Women Lawyers, Gloria Ofori-Boadu, believes there is no justification whatsoever for marital murder.

According to Esther Appiah, head of the women and juvenile unit, most women who are murdered by their husbands do not take initial threats seriously. “Many women are not even aware that it is a crime for their spouses or

partners to threaten them,” she adds. “They take these threats for granted.”

Even when women report violence, they may not follow through – giving in to pressure from family members and religious leaders. “By the time they report to the unit, they might have suffered serious violence which might have maimed them and even affected them mentally,” says Appiah.

But all is not lost. The chief administrator in Kadjebi District of the Volta Region appears to be a step ahead of everyone, including gender activists. He arrests any man who molests the wife, whether or not the case is reported to police. All he needs to know is that a woman has been battered and he will ensure the man is arrested. How much more progressive can the campaign against domestic violence get?



UGANDA

Desperately seeking refuge

By Edith Kimuli

AFTER a decade in a violent relationship, Sarah got up and simply walked out. Now living in a makeshift home in Kamwokya, Kampala, she ponders her next move. Matters are not made any easier by the fact that she has no job and has five children to provide for.

“He always came home drunk and battered me,” she recalls. Her supposed offences included taking too long to open the door on his return and denying him sex. “I always thought things would get better and, besides, I did not have anywhere to go with my children. But a time came when I realised that I would be more useful to my children alive, so I quit.”

Women often put up with abuse in the

Crisis Centre looks after women and children who have been driven from their homes

belief that they must have a woman in their lives and also because they are economically dependent on their abusers.

Ann, who has only basic education, says she has to remain in her abusive marriage because she has nowhere to go. “I would leave this man if I had an alternative, but I cannot look after the children because I am not employed,” she says.

Educated women do not do better, however. “My aunt told me these things happen,” says Josephine, a 30-year-old teacher. “And how would people take it when they hear that I left my husband af-

ter such a big wedding, which they contributed to?”

It is yet another day at the Women and Children Crisis Centre in Kampala’s Kamwokya suburb, the only one in the entire country. The director, Josephine Kasolo, says the centre offers temporary refuge to battered women and adolescent girls unable to continue living in abusive homes.

At the centre, they can receive counseling, medical treatment and family planning services. They are also helped to start small-scale business so they can be self-reliant.

Kasolo’s outfit joins only a handful of refuges for battered women in Africa. A similar institution was opened last month in South Africa and Kenya’s Women’s Rights Awareness Programme has had a shelter for women and children since the 1990s.

Helena Dahlstrom, who runs a shelter in Stockholm, says though Sweden is considered the most liberal society in the world, women are still abused verbally and physically. There is no excuse for a man to abuse his wife or girlfriend, she says, and they do not suggest reconciliation at their centre.

It will be a while before African can hope to have enough crisis centres for abused women, but that is no excuse to let their tormentors get away with it.

KENYA

Big bucks, poor women

Organisation leads fight for dignity and security of wives who can't have children

By Grace Githaiga

VISIT any African market and you are bound to find women the majority of traders in agricultural produce. It is the kind of business that does not fall in the category of "big bucks." But it often means the difference between going hungry and meeting the basic needs of families.

In Kenya, men routinely look for jobs in the big towns, leaving their wives to take care of rural homes. Formal employment is not only hard to come by for these women, but they are also locked out of the jobs market by limited education, training and other opportunities.

African women produce 80 percent of subsistence crops and provide the bulk of labour for cash crops. However, their contribution is not accounted for in Gross Domestic Product. They also lose out when it comes to payments because they are not recognised as

landowners. In Kenya, for example, payments for cash crops such as tea, coffee and sugar are made out to the holder of the title deed – in most cases men.

A recent study by the Africa Nordic Institute found that women in male-headed households received no bonus or monthly payments from the Kenya Tea Development Authority. Women in these households worked in the tea field mainly as unpaid family labour. This, together with the fact that they cannot control the income from tea, is likely to have a negative effect on their incentive to work in the plantations.

Marginalised

Despite their significant role in farming, women end up being marginalised in commercial agricultural trade – being pushed into markets for domestic consumption. This has been blamed on paternal-



Women's work – visit any African market and you'll find that most traders are women.

istic bias and the attitudes of women, who often undervalue the value of the work they do.

But Kenyan women's place in big-time farm trade is changing. The National Cereals and Produce Board's Mutia Mwandika says women traders account for between 25 percent and 30 percent. In the maize basket areas to the west – especially Kitale, Eldoret and Uasin Gishu – women are the majority of the middle persons who purchase maize from the farmers and supply it to the board. "We pay

the person who delivers the grain, regardless of whether it is the husband or the wife," Mwandika says. He speaks of a reasonable proportion of women trading in maize and other produce. "Most are accompanied by their male relatives not because they are not capable of negotiating, but because of crime in certain areas where they have to get the produce."

Mercy Karanja, chief executive of the Kenya National Farmers Union, says farming in Africa is a way of life and not a simple commercial

operation. She adds: "Women play an important role in farming. The government must demonstrate its commitment to food security by supporting women farmers with more funding and a stronger commercial environment."

Despite their central role in agriculture, women's farming activities are rarely reflected in official statistics. Nor are they recognised as a contribution to the family budget. Moreover, women have less access to markets, inputs, land ownership and credit than men.

ZIMBABWE

Infertility is not end of world

By Regina Nyirenda

IMAGINE this: You have been married for eight years, blissfully unaware of any undercurrents. Out of the blue, your husband bursts into the living room one evening with a complete stranger – or maybe even your niece, cousin or younger sister – and introduces her as his second wife.

Would you cry, express shock, feel enraged or simply be dumbstruck? While this may seem a far-fetched notion, many women have found themselves in this situation in Zimbabwe, albeit in different circumstances. Where a couple has no children, the woman may feel compelled to accept this situation because, in the African perspective, it is only women who can be infertile.

Infertility posed a peculiar dilemma in the traditional society. In the rare case where it was accepted that the man was the "problem," families would go to great lengths to avoid the "shame" of it.

Sent on mission

The man would be sent out on a mission that would take up to three months and his younger brother would be encouraged to take over his "duties" in the matrimonial bedroom.

On his return, the man would not suspect anything had happened in his absence – even in the event that she announced that she was pregnant. Such missions would include going out hunting

Organisation leads fight for dignity and security of wives who can't have children of their own

with other men.

Says George Moyo of the pressure group Vukani Mahlabezulu, "This was done solely to save the marriage from collapsing and for the sake of carrying forward the family name and also to save the man's integrity. No selfishness or carelessness was expected out of the act. It was very important to keep it a secret from the affected husband. That way, there were no problems of infertility that were encountered."

Where the woman was infertile, her niece or younger sister would be given to her husband to play the role of surrogate mother. The monogamous marriages of these days do not allow for this scenario, however, and women are lobbying the government to do away with this tradition on the grounds that it infringes on their rights.

Betty Chishami, who has been married for more than 26 years and has had no children, has had her share of hard times as her husband and in-laws pressured her to have children. In 1995, she launched the non-governmental organisation Chipu Chedu to help women in her situation. Today, Chedu boasts a membership of 500 in Harare and neighbouring Mutoko.

The women are counselled and trained in different skills. Now Chishami's organisation is lobbying the government to help them in their struggle for recognition because she believes they are "just as human as anyone else." When their husbands die, for example, childless widows are often asked to return to their parents.

"Where is home after more than 30 years of marriage?" she asks. "I am expected to leave everything that I worked for with my husband and my matrimonial home just because I was not able to bear any children? That is so unfair!"

Most members of Chipu Chedu have been forced to adopt nieces or other female relatives to bear children on their behalf. Rona Muchemwa, a skills trainer at Chipu Chedu, says the threat of HIV/Aids has curbed the practice somewhat, but some people still believe in it.

Sexual relations

And, in their desperation, some women have resorted to forcing or helping their husbands into sexual liaisons with their nieces – all in the name of having children. Some steal babies from unsuspecting mothers who have just had babies at clinics and hospitals.

Some even bring up children they know full well are not biologically theirs in order to maintain their dignity. There is some comfort in the knowledge that women are gradually realising that being infertile does not mean the end of the world.

GHANA

Donors praise poverty plan

GHANA'S Poverty Reduction Strategy document (GPRS) has gained recognition from countries willing to assist in her programme. Whatever the shortcomings, the document on poverty reduction is a Ghanaian product and needs to be supported.

Donors have pledged one billion dollars, including a debt relief, to support the overall financing gap for the year.

At the just ended 11th meeting of the Consultative Group (CG) for Ghana, in Accra donors were of the view that the current government is doing excellent job by drawing the kind of programme on Poverty Reduction.

Not made public

According to the meeting – pledges from various donors were not made public, but Mr Peter Harrold, World Bank Country Director, at a news briefing said Japan had pledged about 742 million Yen (43million dollars) making her the second largest donor aside the World Bank. This is a grant excluding technical assistance.

The meeting brought together 300 people, including 14 bilateral partners 18 international organizations, government representatives, civil society and the private sector.

All the groups lauded President Kufuor's government's effort at improving the economy and hoped that it would translate its good intention on the live of Ghanaians.

The groups encouraged the government to move forward with its chosen path and make change in the living standards of the people.

U M B E Y A

{ NOT THE OFFICIAL NEWS }

The meaning of life is not what happens to people. It is what happens between people. Our very own Lesley Riddoch has found a new reason for living in her newly wedded husband Chris Smith. The last we heard of the two lovebirds, they were on honeymoon far from the madding crowd.

For a moment there, we entertained the thought of gatecrashing the party but, what the heck, the girl deserves a break after working so hard to get *Worldwoman* and *Africa-woman* off the ground. Have fun, Lesley, but we are not letting you off the hook entirely. In the true tradition of journalism, we at *Africa-woman* expect a story from the new Mrs Smith – even if it's just a teenie weenie one – for *Umbeya!* Now, who's next?

Winning streak

The *Africa-woman* brood appears to be on a winning streak in many other ways. Despite an emotional rollercoaster beginning with resigning from her job at Parents magazine of Kenya and losing her mother in March, Florence Machio

has bounced back as the *Africa-woman* co-ordinator. Since early May, she has had her hands full trying to put together an office with Project Editor Lucy Oriang and Administrator Pamela Sulwey. Long live *Africa-woman!*

Courageous Sandra

And the magic continues. Zimbabwe Deputy Editor Sandra Nyaira has just won herself the Woman of Courage \$2000 award for her bravery in keeping true to the profession. What would one expect from the only female political editor in Zimbabwe? As Ruth Omukhango, Kenya's country editor, puts it "Africa-woman has the best of female journalists in Africa." We are glad someone has noted her talent. We at *Umbeya* are proud of her and can only say: "Go for gold, sister."

London lady

Elizabeth Kameo, the *Africa-woman* sister who was among those who received the highest commendations in the yearly appraisals at *The Monitor* in Uganda, is also working hard at honing her skills – this time in London, where

she is attending a short course. Elizabeth is still writing and it is our sincere hope that we shall be hearing from her at the next Virtual News Room. Clearly, the sky is the limit for this team.

On-line Joy

Finally, Joy Machau has taken up a new job as online sub-editor at the *East African Standard* in Nairobi. Joy has swung back into the business after a short course in South Africa, following a stint at the Nation Media Group. There is an African adage that goes: "The rain never stops falling until you ask it to."

Sarah's award

Sarah Namulondo, Uganda country editor, is currently in the United States on an Alfred Friendly fellowship. For the next six months, she will be training at different papers. The Alfred Friendly is awarded to exemplary journalists working in Third World countries. This means that Margaret Ziribaggwa (the deputy editor) will be sitting in her for. She is doing a great job, too.

**Women:
The
missing
link in
football**

By Margaret Ziribaggwa

SEPP Blatter is back in the saddle at FIFA, world governing body for football. Is there any chance that women will ever head this prestigious organisation?

They certainly have a long way to go, considering that there is not a single woman on the 25-member executive committee and none was courageous enough to stand in the May elections.

Although women's soccer teams are hardly news any more, they have not had a chance to participate in the World Cup. Italian sports club Ruco Line Lazio was founded in 1969 and became part of the Polisportiva S.S. Lazio in 1975.

It is the oldest female Italian club and has always been in the A Series National League, winning several titles throughout its history. In addition, the club takes part in the juvenile sector with its youth team, and has won seven Italian titles in the junior category. FIFA's media office says the committee for women's football is working hard to develop women's football around the world. Two major achievements recently: |The creation of a dedicated section on the FIFA website (Fifa.com/women).

The second achievement is the creation of a new FIFA competition – the FIFA Under-19 Women's World Championship to be held in Canada from August 17 to September 1. In preparation for this tournament, the participating teams are to hold friendly matches in various cities.

As the Chinese saying goes, a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. Women will have to make their mark at soccer federations in their own countries if they hope to go for FIFA's top leadership. They can seize the moment and start with the new tournament. Come on, sisters, let's give a rousing cheer to women in the world of football!

Women must change upbringing patterns

By Chrispat Okutu, Ghana

African Women must put in more effort in changing their up-bringing patterns, which tend to favour the superiority of the male child over the female because it has been proved not be beneficial to society. Children are jewels whether male or female.

Therefore parents must stop ruling lines between male and female children.

In every part of the globe today, women are talking about their reputation in society, and the fact that they have been cheated by their male counterparts for far too long.

Today, women around the world are saying that enough is enough. After all women and men have an equal right to dignity and a decent life.

Women have been ordained as good administrators for the world's families, and they do well in this area but one wonders why men feel

POINT OF VIEW

so jealous and envious of women when they forge ahead to hold positions in public administration.

From time immemorial, society has been benefiting from the management skill of women who engineer all affairs in the home from where the world's people sprang up from.

All the world's presidents, ministers and the male population were nurtured from childhood into adulthood by women, but it is surprising that after they have turned adults they look down on women and claim superiority over them.

Women are fighting for recognition and the rights to freedom and men say, "No, we are in control; do as we say or we'll beat you". This is why the writer is suggesting to the world's women to consider changing the pattern of the up-bringing of children right from the cradle,

through the kindergarten level to the adolescent years in the home to streamline the gender inequality and make it more proportional.

Women must stop creating division among their male and female children by drawing lines between them as to what a man must do that women should not do.

Teach children the principle of oneness, love, honesty, caring etc. and they would grow with it for the benefit of society.

The fact remains that children brought up through violence grow up to be violent, whilst those tutored in the home on how to care, love and respect the opposite sex also grow up with that concept.

The writer believes that if the pattern of children's up-bringing is changed by women, it would go a long way to curtail the violent attitude displayed by some men and would bring sanity into the gender inequality problems between men and women.

So, women, over to you.

GHANA**Alima earns freedom to choose a career**

By Catherine Nartey

ALIMA Ibrahim is smiling all the way to the bank. The 32-year-old dressmaker from Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region of Ghana has just completed an advanced course managed by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation. She has also received money from Women's World Banking to expand her business.

Considered one of the lucky few in this West African country, Ibrahim can now produce quality fabrics for export. Better still, her new status has freed her socially:

she can choose when to marry and do so on her terms. For a young woman in a rural and traditional setting, this is a remarkable achievement.

Women face almost insurmountable hurdles in business. It begins in childhood, when they may be denied schooling and forced into domestic service, and continues into marriage, when husbands take charge of their lives.

They must face up to a fresh set of obstacles should they choose to start small enterprises – they will most likely not have technical and managerial skills, and enough in-

formation about business solutions. They have problems identifying and finding appropriate technologies and production sites and have trouble diversifying into other products. Moreover, they may not have access to transport, electricity and water. Worse still, the chances are that they will be unable to raise enough capital to make their enterprises viable.

In the face of these odds, African women have had little to fall back on except the services provided by organisations such as UNIDO and Women's World Banking. UNIDO's Promoting Women Entrepreneurs

programme offers training in technical and managerial skills and support services to improve quality and the working environment.

Women's businesses in Ghana and the rest of Africa will grow only if governments come up with comprehensive policies that effectively tackle financing and bureaucratic bottlenecks that stand in the way of an entrepreneurial culture.

African women can also help themselves by strengthening their support networks. There is a world of opportunities on the electronic market for enhancing their business – particularly in exports.