

# Africa *woman*

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN IN AFRICA ● OCTOBER 2002

## No easy way out for people ravaged by war

The African Union faces its first major challenge as rebel troops in Ivory Coast threaten to overthrow the government. The AU has pledged 'zero tolerance' of coups and mutinies in an attempt to rid the continent of wars. But are the forces of rebellion so deeply entrenched in Africa listening? **Nabusayi Wamboka** visited northern Uganda to measure the progress of President Yoweri's campaign against the Lord's Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony

**IT IS LATE IN THE NIGHT IN GULU,** northern Uganda. There is no respite from the booming sounds in the neighbourhood. No, it is not the bombs that one might expect in a war-torn zone. It is the latest in hip-hop and Lingala music from Aloba Night Club and Travellers Inn on Kampala Road. I toss and turn, praying that the loudspeakers will

blow up and allow us some peace. Images from my trip to Lacor, Agwe, Bungatira and Irianga-Lalya villages flash past my tired mind — hungry and angry faces, sickly children and adults resigned to their fate. Life has been a daily ordeal for the Acholi who have been displaced by the war that has raged between the Lord's Resistance Army and

the Ugandan Government for the past 15 years.

The booming music is the least of their worries. For a people who have listened to bomb blasts day and night, suffered humiliation, been torn away from their families and still ended up being blamed for their misfortune, loud music offers some reprieve from

the hardships of life.

I fell asleep still pondering the implications of this long-running war between the rag-tag army led by Joseph Kony and President Yoweri Museveni's Government.

Today, a generation of Acholi has been born and raised in protected camps — yet more people are at

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**Out looking in:** Children who were locked out of Lacor hospital wait outside the fence for a chance to be let in for the night's shelter. The majority of people affected in Gulu are women and children.

## It's got to be love if Joburg is to mean anything

Western leaders claim to love Africa, but still play a major role in helping the continent's citizens sink deeper into poverty — at least that is what some of its leaders, including Namibia's Sam Nujoma, think. **Susan Naa Sekyere** questions this love for Africa, with reference to Tony Blair's speech at the recent Earth Summit

**THE MESSAGE WAS STARK:** A CHILD dies in Africa every three minutes due to famine. This was the opening statement in British Prime Minister Tony Blair's speech in the high level segment allotted to heads of state at the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Blair spoke minutes after his Namibian counterpart, Sam Nujoma, who delivered a stinging condemnation of both Mr Blair and the European Union for allegedly causing all of Zimbabwe's woes.

Nujoma went on to claim that some of the countries represented at the summit developed HIV to wipe out people in the Least Developed Countries. He challenged the supposedly guilty countries to pay

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## Wild leaves can't be better than GM food

**MARITA BENVHURA'S FAMILY LAST** had a proper meal of sadza, vegetables and peanut butter nearly a month ago, when her husband received a 50-kg bag of maize from the Grain Marketing Board centre in Shangure village, about 50 kilometres east of Harare. It was enough to feed them for just a week.

After poor rains in the last farming season, hunger has left a trail of suffering in this small rural community. "Our yields were not very good this past farming season because of the drought. We also lost a lot of time trying to get land on the

Biotechnology was high on the agenda during the recent Earth Summit, with heated debate for and against GM foods. Zambia, which didn't want GM foods for its starving citizens, has agreed to take them on condition that they are not in the form of seeds. And Zimbabwe, faced with six million starving citizens, will also accept GM food. However, the debate on whether or not to have GM foods or not still rages on. **Grace Mutandwa** reports from Zimbabwe.

white-owned commercial farms. But, as women, you know how difficult it is to get land in your own right, so we came back home and tried to grow crops. It was too late by then, and there was no rain."

Benhura adds: "We failed to grow as much as we usually do because my sons, who normally help

me, were out on the commercial farms trying to get land. Only one of my three sons got a piece of land, so the other two are back."

She can no longer cook porridge for her family in the morning. They have only one meal a day — at night — and spend the day looking for wild fruits and honey. For al-

most three weeks, they have kept their eyes peeled in the hope that a lorry or two will deliver maize, the staple in these parts. About 400 families are hunger-stricken at Shangure.

Six million other Zimbabweans — half the population — could starve to death unless they receive more than 800,000 tonnes of emergency food aid required to feed the nation between now and the next harvest in March next year. Already, three million women and children are described as being in distress because of hunger. The

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## Wild leaves can't be better than GM food

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poor rains last farming season that affected five other southern African countries are partly to blame.

But aid agencies and agricultural experts say the food shortage in Zimbabwe, traditionally a net food exporter, was exacerbated by President Robert Mugabe's chaotic land reforms in which land is seized from white commercial farmers for redistribution to landless blacks.

Without adequate training and inputs, poor peasant farmers cannot maintain productivity levels in the agriculture sector.

But village headman Silas Bangure, who is in charge of food distribution in Shangure, says it is the deepening economic crisis, with rising prices and shortages of nearly every basic commodity that has worsened the situation.

Says Bangure: "We have not had any bread deliveries for more than a month. At the beginning of the year, one could buy as much bread and flour as possible. But the shops have run dry and the shop owners tell us that they have been told by their suppliers that wheat is in short supply."

Baking industry players recently announced that the bread shortage would ease as farmers start harvesting the year's crop. But they warned this would be short-lived, as farmers could not plant enough because of the disruption caused by the government's land reforms. The 165,000 tonnes they are expected to produce is expected to run out by January.

Like so many other villagers, Bangure does not understand why the government has turned down maize from America.

"They tell us that it is dangerous because of something called genetic engineering but we are hungry and are already eating wild leaves that we are not even sure are safe. We want that maize, why are these men deciding without asking what women think?"

As the villagers wait for the next lorry to bring food, hunger is gnawing deeper into the social fabric, with crime now on the rise. Emerina Shangure confides: "Crime has gone up. You cannot leave the house unattended now because these young men have all turned into petty thieves, stealing anything to raise money to buy beer. They abuse our teenage daughters when they get drunk."

The village women also lament the fact that decisions on who gets to buy the maize when it comes are made by men despite the fact that the women are responsible for feeding the family and minding the food stocks.

# There's no easy way out for people ravaged by war

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risk of losing their national identity. "Even in situation of no war or conflict, women and children are marginalised," says A.A. Otto, secretary-general of Human Rights Focus, a non-governmental organisation that monitors human rights abuses in camps for displaced people.

Women in war situations have been stripped of their traditional family protection, according to Otto. "Most men have taken off, joined the rebels or been killed," adds Otto.

In the backyard of Lacor hospital in Gulu town, one of the places that have become a home for thousands of desperate people fleeing the war, a large field has been cleared to accommodate the rising number of new arrivals. Hospital Superintendent Opira Cyprian says: "We are always stressed. It is not sustainable for us to even offer the basic necessities. But we can't close the gates in their faces. These people need help."

When Museveni and his National Resistance Army took power in 1986, he declared Uganda a "no-party" state and imposed severe restrictions on political and civil rights. This quickly led to armed resistance and gave rise to rebel groups that have left a permanent dent on his largely respected leadership.

Northern soldiers were dominant in the Idi Amin and Milton Obote armies and many fled to Sudan for fear of retribution. They formed the Uganda People's Democratic Army, which soon took on religious overtones under the leadership of the "prophetess" Alice Lakwena of the Holy Spirit Movement. The movement developed into the Lord's Resistance Army after Lakwena fled to Kenya.

Attempts to crush the group have borne no fruit since 1994. Museveni, in fact, lost a Ushs 1m bet with veteran journalist Tamale Mirundi when he promised to flush out Kony in a week and failed. The president has camped in Gulu several times and threatened to leave only after the rebel is "cooked". His presence has provided only temporarily relief.

Two high-ranking officers, Salim Saleh and James Kazini, have talked tough — to no avail. Kazini has now given Kony until December to lay down arms. Salim Salim, the blue-eyed boy of the military, returned to active combat recently with an ultimatum to Kony: "Give up or die." Kony still lives and the war still rages.



A village that was razed to ashes by Kony as he retreated to the bush with the UPDF in pursuit.

Other high-ranking government officials, including Defence Minister Amama Mbabazi, have dismissed Kony as no threat and gone on to ignore the plight of the people of Gulu, whom they accuse of aiding Kony. This is even after statistics from UNICEF in the year 2000 indicated that 429 children abducted by Kony have not returned. With the recent intensified attacks, the number could be more.

**"The immediate worry is food and shelter. You can't tell a girl who doesn't know where to spend the night or what to eat about Aids."**

An update on Uganda by the UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs gives the total number of displaced by the war in the north as 370,781 in Gulu, 2,692 of them children. In Kitgum, the number of those displaced stood at 82,645 in 2000, with abducted children numbering 3,114. 141 children were abducted in Lira.

Says Northern Uganda Youth MP Dan Kidega: "There is no doubt that 98 percent of the people that make up the LRA are children and youth. The method the rebels have used is by conscription, abductions and coercion. It is also true that about 50 percent of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces soldiers fighting in the north are youth."

Kidega fears the suffering of the Acholi may lead to a cycle of revenge. "It is important to preach forgiveness not only to the foreigners in

this war but to our own people who have been part of it. There may be reprisals in future and that is most frightening," he adds.

The worst war is set to be fought, however, when the guns go silent. "Because alcohol and sex are forms of entertainment and relief for people in such situations, the threat of HIV/Aids is looming and might wipe out more people than the Kony war," Kidega says. "People are having sex like animals and they are not protected. This is very worrying. HIV/Aids could be a bigger war to fight than Kony."

The most worrying factor for now is the immediate health, education and social well-being of the people of Gulu. With the biting cold and hunger, the only safe place for the majority of children is schools. They walk to school with empty oil tins, which they turn into stools in class then into buckets as they return home.

Out-of-school youth and the majority of displaced young people have resorted to what some people in Gulu describe as the "easy way out". Several weeks ago, the local church in Gulu town chased away those who had taken refuge at the church at night for what they described as immoral behaviour.

"The immediate worry is food and shelter. You can't tell a girl who doesn't know where to spend the night or what to eat about Aids," says Stephen Latek, who works for the Red Cross. "They will simply sleep around. If they don't sleep on the verandahs in town, they will find their way to the discos or offer sex services in some lodges."

Sources in the WFP Uganda country office say the northern region may suffer the worst famine ever in the next six months since there is no kind of agricultural or economic activity going on, a statement supported by Minister for Agriculture,

Animal Industry and Fisheries Kisamba Mugerwa. "It is true the war has halted agriculture activities in the northern region and this may affect the general production but government is working to reverse this problem," he said during a videoconference organised by *Africawoman*.

With Kony said to have crossed over to Sudan, the Acholi can only wait and see in a land where death can come by way of the gun, hunger or HIV/Aids.

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for research to eradicate it.

Completely ignoring the personal attack, Blair reiterated a point he had made earlier: That "if Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world, then the world must do something about her" — a line that has almost become synonymous with the name Blair. "Africa for me is a passion," he said.

Indeed, the EU loudly blew its own horn at WSSD, reporting that it had overtaken all major groupings and countries, including the United States of America, in funding Africa. It announced the launch of the Water for Life initiative, a 1.4 billion Euro a year project for water and sanitation in some African countries.

No summit has ever produced immediate results, but Blair thinks the WSSD can make a difference if there is the political will to deliver certain specifics. But the sceptical dismiss the Western leaders' supposed love for Africa as mere infatuation. What kind of love is it, they ask, when they enact stricter immigration laws to shut Africans out of their continents?

The European Union says it has given primary importance to the Doha Development Agenda and signed the Kyoto Protocol. According to UN and IMF statistics, the EU is the most important trading partner for Least Developed Countries, absorbing about 52 percent of their exports in 2000.

The EU is reportedly looking to

develop a 10-year programme for sustainable production and consumption after the WSSD. If free trade does not mean more money for big corporations and little money for smallholder farmers, then it is the way forward for developing countries.

But Blair will need to back up his passion for Africa with some passionate action to prove to the sceptics that he is not just infatuated. The West must show its true commitment by implementing the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development to the letter.

The September 4 Declaration must be the binding force for building a humane, equitable and caring global society cognisant of the need for human dignity for every-

one. The world's leaders must not merely pay lip service to the declaration and turn it into just another paper coming out of their numerous talk shops. They must all — including those African leaders who want to hang on to power — commit to it by promoting dialogue and cooperation among the world's civilisations and peoples, irrespective of race, disabilities, religion, language, culture and tradition.

It is only then that those Millennium development goals whose target have been set for the year 2015 by the 189 member states of the United can be realised. The G7 industrialised countries and the world's advanced economies, backed by the UN, must show the way.

*"It's poverty that drives people to live in these houses, it's poverty that makes parents send their daughters to sell themselves and it's poverty that will drive a teenage boy into crime and a girl into early marriage."*



**Sarah Langa: Changing the face of a South African squatter camp.**



**Leonorah Khanyile: "Sarah has been instrumental in changing the attitudes of young women."**

## Never too young to make a difference

By Florence Machio, Kenya

Once a shy and rebellious girl, 24-year-old Sarah Langa is changing the lives of the people of Kliptown, a squatter camp in the neighbourhood of South Africa's famous Soweto Township. When she was 18, Langa enrolled in the Women's Leadership Training Programme held in Johannesburg. The head of the project at the time, Leonorah Khanyile, described her as "not focused".

How times have changed! Driven to do something about the poverty that afflicts her people, Langa has made it her business to improve the circumstances of her people – especially young women. With seven programmes to pull together, no one could be more focused.

Freedom Charter Square is the name given to the area where Kliptown squatter camp is located. This is where the African National Congress freedom charter was adopted back in 1955 during the struggle against apartheid. The same charter helped the ANC fight apartheid and take over power in 1990. Ironically, Freedom Charter Square is home to about 30,000 of the poorest South Africans. Many of them dreamt that when the apartheid government was they would be able to afford to take their children to school, get decent living quarters and never have to worry about crime.

The charter says: "All people shall have the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security . . . slums shall be demolished and new suburbs built where all have transport, roads, lighting, playing fields."

With 2,000 families sharing 252 toilets, this is hardly what the people of Kliptown had expected. Against this backdrop, Langa decided not to pursue a career as a pharmacist. There were more pressing needs that needed attention.

In a community where the people have resigned themselves to a particularly harsh fate, it is a David and Goliath challenge to try and change people's attitudes, according to Langa. "In this community people do not want to stand up for their rights, women

still feel that this is where they belong," says Langa. "The girls are often sent by their parents to have sex with older men so that they can get money."

It's been five years since she left the leadership training programme, which has since collapsed. "After the project folded up due to lack of funds, I was selected to co-ordinate all the girls who went through the training and form a network," Langa says.

She later joined the Soweto Kliptown youth group and was soon in the management committee. She now manages seven programmes in Kliptown that involve girls, the aged, women and young men. All these she does without pay or funds from anywhere. "During my leadership training, I learnt how to manage funds."

We found Langa surrounded by girls aged between eight and 17. She has a passion for this age group because "poverty causes high teenage pregnancies. It takes time to change the mind-set of an individual and the earlier you begin the better."

She mobilises the girls to help with community development projects, encouraging them to build their aspirations around what they have — however limited. The girls have formed income-generating projects such as selling paraffin and vegetables. They have also formed women's groups. "It is frustrating to see girls still selling their bodies so that they can get quick cash," says the youthful crusader. "Sometimes I wonder why I try, but when I see a girl pull herself out of this place I am happy that I helped in one way or another."

### Met Bill and Hillary Clinton

Langa's work won her the Clinton Democracy Fellowship in 1999. She and 11 other people — most of who had university degrees while she only has a secondary school certificate — were chosen from South Africa. She had an opportunity to hold discussions with former US President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary. Being part of the fellowship has given Langa added incentive. "I want to push for housing for our people. The song about decent housing has been sung for the last 10 years and nothing has changed."

She attributes this to the fact that most policy makers are detached from what happens on the

ground. "I see myself as an activist and I want to be in a policy-making position and push for the rights of the people," she declares.

Langa believes the bottom line is to eliminate poverty. "It's poverty that drives people to live in these houses, it's poverty that makes parents send their daughter to sell themselves and it's poverty that will drive a teenage boy into crime and a girl into early marriage."

### Deals with the government

She was recently nominated the chairperson of the South African National Civic Association that deals with community development. "I will now be dealing directly with the government in the town planning meetings, which also involve budget allocation."

Khanyile, now the deputy director of education at British Council South Africa, says: "In many ways, Sarah has been instrumental in changing the attitudes of young women in that community — from feeling obliged to be victimised to feeling that they can contribute to their development in the midst of an almost helpless situation." She adds: "Sarah has been able to demonstrate resolve in standing up for women issues and goes out to grab opportunities, if she is not given them, to make that point."

When a reference group was set up in Kliptown to look into a strategy to address a local development issue, no woman was considered, Langa promptly challenged the all-male committee. She volunteered to participate in the planning meetings. Not only did she become a full member of the committee but she also raised the issues that affect women like safety, health and violence. The elderly were also being abused by men, who would take over their shacks and even the money they were receiving from welfare.

She pointed out that it was about time they included women — and young ones at that — in development matters. Indirectly, she was able to influence the new thinking and played a major role in sanctioning decisions, ending up a signatory in the project account. "She is still an important member of the committee and I think she has potential for growth and leadership," says Khanyile.

## EDITORIAL

Africawoman, P.O. Box 6064 (00200), Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-2721429/39  
Fax: 254-2-718469. E-mail: africawoman@swiftkenya.com

Lesley Riddoch BBC, The Tun, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8JF, Scotland.  
Tel. 00 44 131 557 5677. E-mail: lesley.riddoch@bbc.co.uk

## Women in politics: more than just numbers

A couple of months ago, the British Council sponsored a two-day workshop for 10 women parliamentarians as part of its Effective Leadership project. The workshop focused on the nitty-gritty of leadership as opposed to the common pre-occupation with numbers.

We at *Africawoman* consider this a significant breakthrough in strategies to boost women's participation in leadership. This is particularly important on a continent where the number of women in politics continues to generally rank low.

According to statistics from the Geneva-based Inter Parliamentary Union, only six African countries have women's representation above 20 percent. They are South Africa at 29.8 percent, Rwanda at 25.7 percent, Namibia at 25 percent, Uganda at 24.7 percent, Seychelles at 23.5 percent and Tanzania at 22.3 percent. Zimbabwe comes in at 10 percent, Ghana at 9.0 percent and Kenya at a measly 3.6 percent.

Whereas getting a critical mass of women into parliament is a worthy objective, the Effective Leadership survey carried out in the last quarter of 2001 brought out surprising insights.

Though women are generally believed to bring values such as integrity, loyalty and commitment to leadership, there are those who also argue that many are soon co-opted into the traditional political leadership structure that is centred on power games — with the voters being neglected as leaders get into sycophantic mode to remain in power.

*Africawoman* believes that it is not enough that there are more women in political leadership; they must make a difference and change the face of politics by taking the power back where it belongs —

with the people. The good news is that most people in East and Central Africa believe that women politicians are more grounded in the reality of their people's lives. They return home more often and are more likely to appreciate the needs of their people.

How to translate this goodwill into numbers and a more people-centred form of leadership depends on how well women are able to package themselves and their leadership style. This calls for a two-pronged approach: polishing their personalities and fine-tuning their principles and values.

Both are predicated upon good communication, which is where we women journalists come in. In much of the region, media women's associations have spent small fortunes on programmes to help women leaders use the media more effectively to "market" themselves and also to reach out to their constituents.

Significant breakthroughs have been made, but we still have a long way to go. There is, of course, the saying "Rome was not built in a day" but we must not forget that they were using the most rudimentary technology

then.

We at *Africawoman* can readily pledge our commitment to advancing women's interests and giving them a guaranteed platform from which to speak with their own people and the rest of the world.

Whether Africa's women political leaders rise to the challenge of developing their own skills and outreach is another matter altogether, of course. It all begins with a commitment to a vision and a strategy that will ensure that women leaders get where they want to go. And that initiative must come from prospective women politicians themselves.

**We at *Africawoman* can readily pledge our commitment to advancing women's interests and giving them a guaranteed platform from which to speak with their own people and the rest of the world.**



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

## SCOTLAND

## African aid workers tackle Scottish poverty

**AFRICAN AID WORKERS ARE BEING** posted to Greenock and Port Glasgow to help deprived Scots overcome social problems.

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

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

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

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

They are living with local families and work with the poor, children's groups and unemployed workers, helping them to acquire new skills ranging from the basics of numeracy and literacy to computer skills. After the three months, the volunteers will move as a group to a project in Nigeria.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## LAGOS v GREENOCK

## Lagos, Nigeria

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

## Greenock, Scotland

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



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**KENYA**

**Ruth Omukhango** looks at how financial troubles and mismanagement at Kenya Railways has set off a chain of reactions that has left hundreds of women traders poor and disoriented.

# Can't wait to get back on the train

**DEEPLY MIRE**D IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES, Kenya Railways has had to cut down on services — and the first to go has been the passenger train service to Western Kenya. It makes sound business sense, according to Manager Tumaini Masha, who argues that cargo accounts for 80 percent of the profit while passenger services contributed only eight percent of the corporation's revenue.

There's only one problem with this position: No one bothered to ask locals what they wanted when the corporation withdrew the train service between Nairobi and Butere, a small town in Western Kenya.

It's been two years, but Zipporah Okiya, a vegetable vendor who used to shuttle between her home and the capital with sacks of indigenous delicacies, is still trying to recover from her losses.

For many women in her village, the train was the cheapest mode of transport. Besides charging reasonable passenger fares, luggage fees were also extremely low. At only Sh200 (US\$2.6 at the current exchange rate of Sh78), Okiya could travel more than 500 kilometres to Nairobi twice a week. She made handsome profits of about Sh500 per trip (US\$ 6.4).

The technical case for withdrawing the service is pretty strong. The corporation has been a constant cash drain. According to records at Kenya Railways headquarters, it lost about US\$7 million in 1995/96 — the last year for which we were

able to get data.

For over two decades, the century-old railway line has crumbled under the weight of lack of investment, negligence and sheer incompetence. This has raised serious concerns over its ability to guarantee the safety of passengers and cargo.

"We have made huge losses, but we are trying to break even at the moment," says Masha, justifying the decision to minimise costs by cutting down on some passenger services and concentrating on freight. The only passenger service still running is the Mombasa route, and the Kenya Tourist Board sustains this as part of efforts to maintain the attraction of this lucrative circuit.

Masha estimates that the passenger service to the lakeside town of Kisumu to the west used to bring in only Sh200,000 (\$2,564).

Maintenance costs came to Sh140,000 (\$1,794), leaving only Sh60,000 (\$769) from which to pay staff salaries and other utilities.

Okiya is not impressed by the financial argument. All she knows is that life has never been the same since the train stopped going her way. Unpacking her sacks of vegetables, Okiya recalls how she would arrive at Nairobi's Kibera Railway Station in the wee hours. By late afternoon, she would have sold all her goods in time for the return trip.

"I would make at least three trips to the city in a week," says Okiya, who had to pay two-and-a-half



Business women along the Kibera railway line are reduced to living from hand to mouth.



times as much on the bus. She eventually moved to the city and depends on better-endowed traders to deliver the vegetables to her stall at Kibera market.

"Things are just too bad. We are surviving from hand to mouth," she says, nostalgic about her 10 years of trips on the train.

Her colleague, Jane Ayieko, abandoned the business and moved to Sultan Hamud, more than 700 kilometres from her home, where she had little luck selling fruit. She returned to Nairobi, where she now buys vegetables and fruits from brokers before selling them at her stall in Korogocho market, about 10 kilometres from the city centre.

For many years, the Kenya's railways passenger transport system was celebrated as the safest and the cheapest in a country where over 50 per cent of the population live below the poverty line. The railway line also serves landlocked countries such as Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and Sudan, which rely on the Kenyan port of Mombasa for their exports and imports.

The management is aware that the country's main railway lines cannot cope with heavy cargo but the revenue gained from traffic to and from its neighbouring countries is important for Kenya.

Masha confides that although there has been pressure to restore the passenger services, the management has to evaluate whether it is a viable project.

In its publication *People, Economic Affairs and Politics*, the Institute of Economic Affairs accuses the government of failing to adopt a comprehensive policy framework for the transport sector since independence in 1963.

According to the report, efficient co-ordination of planning, implementation and operations of the activities of the various transport sectors: roads, railways, air, marine and pipeline has never happened.

Although the government now plans to revamp the corporation through privatisation, the plans are moving at snail's pace.

Okiya is willing to wait, anxious to cut out the middleman and raise her profits to the high levels of yesteryears.



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## UGANDA

# Women athletes lead the way

By Margaret Ziribagwa

It used to be that you could tell a lot about people from their appearance. A man with a creased shirt and a shabby necktie was seen as an alcoholic bachelor who spent the better part of the previous night in a bar.

A muscular man was considered physically fit and, if he lived in a rural community, he could win the majority vote to become the chief. A person's appearance could win him a leadership position in school or fail him. When it came to marriage, he would be spoilt for choice among women seeking security and impressive looks.

Social and historical circumstances seemed to favour men more especially when it came to physical activity like sport. Women were regarded the weak sex and it took time for them to be accepted as serious athletes. The situation was worse in Africa, where women who ventured into sport were called names. In Uganda, where unmarried women are scorned, girls were scared off games with stories that they would lose their virginity — facing the risk of being humiliated in public. This prejudice deprived the country and the African continent of women's significant contribution to sport.

With the advent of education for girls, however, African women have come into their own in sport. Like the proverbial mustard seed, the women are storming the world of sport, breaking free of the shackles that held them back.

Now the names of women who have excelled in sport are quoted freely worldwide.

**Maria Mutola**, the 29-year-old Mozambican who has enjoyed more than a decade at the top in athletics, clocked a winning time of one minute and 56.25 seconds before an appreciative crowd at the Olympic Stadium. It was a new record for Lausanne.

Says Mutola: "When you grow up in a war,



**Mozambique's Olympic champion Maria Mutola:** "When you grow up in a war, you learn to appreciate sport."

you learn to appreciate sport. We had no freedom. We couldn't do anything; we couldn't go anywhere. Many people were killed or maimed by land mines."

The Mozambican civil war ended in 1992

and Mutola is now a foot soldier in the war against drugs that the athletics' governing body, the IAAF, appears to be losing. Drugs threaten to eclipse the triumphs of athletes. Mutola's motivation came when she met for-

mer South African President Nelson Mandela.

Between 1992 and 1995, Mutola did not lose a race over 800 metres. She won a gold medal at the Sydney Olympics, set a world indoor record at 800 metres of 1:56:36 seconds, surpassing the old mark of 1:56.40 set by Christine Wachtel of East Germany on February 13, 1998.

Mutola successfully defended her 800 metres title at the City of Manchester stadium with an impressive final sprint won in a time of 1:57:35 seconds, shaving three-tenths of a second off her Commonwealth Games record. Namibia's Agnes Samaria won a bronze.

Ugandan **Dorcus Inzikuru**, 19, won a gold medal in the World Junior Championship held in Spain in 2000. In the same year, she was voted sportsperson of the year by the Uganda Sports Press Association.

**Gete Wami**, of Ethiopia, won the 10,000 bronze medal at the 1996 Atlanta Games and took the 1999 World title in a time of 30:24:56 seconds, a World Championship record. Wami's victory came two years after she missed the 1997 final after she pulled a muscle. Kenyan **Catherine Ndereba** won the Chicago Marathon and broke the world mark by nearly a minute. She has won both the Boston and Chicago marathon twice.

In the 2000 Olympics, African women did almost as well in the distance races as their men. Maria won her first-ever gold medal in the 800 metres.

World record holder **Mouria Merah-Benida** of Algeria won the gold medal in the 1,500 metres and Ethiopian runners Derartu Tulu and Wami took gold and silver in the 10,000 metres.

There's no doubt about it: African women have defied the odds and brought a measure of pride to their continent. Now they should strive to ensure that the mustard seed grows.

## Women hold up half the sky

By Catherine Nartey, Ghana

At a time when poverty is the central focus of development strategies, it is increasingly apparent that women are disproportionately represented among the poor — hence the phrase "feminisation of poverty".

Despite some progress since the United Nations Decade for Women, generally it has been slow and patchy. Women's health is a major concern, but remains at the bottom of the rung in terms of investment.

The poor health status of women begins in childhood when inequity between boys and girls is widespread, even at the level of sharing family resources such as food.

Many girls enter reproductive age without the physical and social maturity required for childbearing and parenting.

More than 60 percent of pregnant women in Africa and Asia suffer from nutritional anaemia. This leads to low birth weight that not only threatens the survival of children

### POINT OF VIEW

but also impedes growth and development.

How do we address this feminisation of poverty? Micro-credit and micro-enterprise have long been considered the principal means to reduce poverty among women. Much of this takes place outside the formal financial sector and it has been difficult to assess its effectiveness. There have been mounting protests that micro-credit schemes hurt women rather than help them. In East Africa women say outrageous weekly repayment rates have turned them into prisoners of micro-credit institutions.

Although Ghanaian women are hard-working, they experience serious problems trying to raise funds from banks to finance their trade. Some have resorted to other financiers, such as money lenders, who take as much as 50 percent of the loan until the principal amount is cleared. Women farmers may also borrow from middlemen, who

then buy the produce at ridiculous prices — leaving the women poorer than before.

All this is set to change with the establishment of a Women's Development Fund set up to provide credit for entrepreneurs seeking to improve their ventures.

The fund is to be based at the Bank of Ghana and will operate as a revolving fund with an interest rate of 20 percent — far below the 50 percent that women often pay to money-lenders. Priority will be given to small-scale women traders.

It is widely acknowledged that when women have money, families tend to benefit. India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, said the greatest revolution in any country is the one that affects the living conditions and status of women. In 1981, his daughter Indira Gandhi added that when women are deprived, humanity loses half of its creativity and resources.

In trying to describe poverty, one woman said: "Poverty is like heat. One feels it but cannot describe it". Another says: "Poverty

is the inability to meet the basic needs of life such as food, shelter, clothing, health care and basic education."

Women are closely associated with providing these necessities since they have primary responsibility for family care and welfare. The fact that most African countries fall within the category of extreme poverty is an indication that women are increasingly unable to fulfill their responsibilities because they are getting poorer.

Although women are dominant in domestic trade, there are few policies to promote this kind of trade in Ghana. Lack of access to markets, post-harvest losses and poor road and support systems work against the development and growth of internal trade and women's ability to build up capital.

The Chinese have a saying that women hold up half the sky. Whenever there is a problem in Ghanaian families and wise counsel is required, we say: "Let us consult the old lady." Indeed, women hold the key to ending hunger and poverty.

# Teachers, mini-skirts and dreadlocks

**M**buya Nehanda is saluted as one of the most powerful and influential political leaders of Zimbabwe for her role in initiating the war of national liberation. She is also praised for her deep commitment to upholding Shona culture.

The few photographs and illustrations of Mbuya Nehanda depict a small, plump woman with stern features and a proud look. In some pictures, she has a cloth tied around one shoulder which falls to the knees and another cloth wrapped around her body from just above her breasts. In other illustrations, the cloth is wrapped from just below her waist.

Black and white photographs of Shona and Ndebele women in the late 19th century show very similar attire, with small differences in detail. Baskets on their heads, beads around their necks and heavy breasts glistening, the women exude grace and pride.

Plain pieces of fabric are tied just under the navel. Bracelets adorn their hands and ankles.

The occasional glimpses of bare breasts and flesh in all these illustrations is common.

This "traditional dress" would have no place in modern day Zimbabwe — especially in the civil service. Culture is often cited as the reason for restrictions, espe-

Dress codes are implemented, partly, to ensure standards of attire in a workplace, yet it sounds as if there are some disparities in implementing the same on teachers in Zimbabwe. **Reyhana Masters-Smith** wonders whether the idea of a dress code doesn't interfere with African culture

cially restrictions on women. This time the target is female teachers.

A circular handed to teachers in government schools, courtesy of the secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, insists that women should "all times wear decent clothing, avoiding any dressing which may attract disapproval from the communities they serve".

Such disapproval may be in response to slacks, tight fitting dresses, dresses with slits and dressing that "conflicts with cultural norms and values".

Tatenda Mufudze is scornful of the "cultural" argument. "Why should anyone be talking cultural when we do not even have a national dress?" she asks.

"This is a personal agenda confined to a certain section of society which can only survive through the perpetration or, rather, consolidation of patriarchy... and this is just one way to do it, to keep the women under control! It's about getting personal and into her wardrobe. Basically it means even our partners or hus-

bands have been disempowered in determining how their partners dress."

Activist Nancy Kachingwe is just as candid: "In what other cases are we issuing regulations on the basis of culture? For example, it is 'our culture' to pay *lobola* when women get married, but the state has not legislated over this matter, so why should they do so in this one, if indeed we accept that 'Zimbabwean culture' says women must dress in a certain way?"

Kachingwe argues that men's public morals need a great deal more working on than women's. "Unfortunately, patriarchy is never sufficiently concerned about women's public and private safety to actually put restrictions on some of men's anti-social habits," she adds.

Lawyer Gerald Chihota supports the idea of a dress code: "I think the starting point should be to consider whether teachers should be allowed to wear whatever they want. I think a fair-minded consideration of this leads to an

answer in the negative. It is commonly accepted that certain professions/environments require a higher degree of 'dignity' than others."

He adds that while he would not mind being served in a hotel lounge by a waitress in a rather short dress, he would be offended if an undertaker sent a female attendant to his grandmother's funeral wearing a bright coloured floral mini-skirt with a male companion in a yellow shirt and Mick Jagger leather pants. "I would not feel comfortable being attended to by a nurse in tight fitting hipsters, dangling earrings and chewing gum or a doctor in Bermuda shorts a muscle hugger," says Chihota.

University student Wishart Mushape speaks of a difference between the ideal and the situation on the ground. "The ideal situation is the poor kids go to school and concentrate on nothing but their books, without taking notice of the 'wonderfully and fearfully made' teacher in front of class. The real situation is by the

time the guys get to Form One they are sexually active and curious, and their hormones are highly flammable. Why play with fire by bringing Miss Sexy Thang to class in a mini?"

While opinions differ on this touchy subject, all commentators agree that there are more serious issues to consider.

"It would be commendable if those responsible for these restrictions would solve fundamental issues first, that is increase teachers pay and recognise the major role they play in society," says Mufudze.

"What I care about is real values which we are losing in society — solidarity, respect, honesty, humility and tolerance," says Kachingwe. "Instead, as a society, we are becoming more greedy, corrupt, intolerant, abusive, arrogant, vindictive. These are the values that are in our culture that we should be worrying about, not whether women are wearing dreadlocks or mini-skirts to school."

But artist Ramai Murusi, who argues that there is nothing new about dress codes in the professions, urges caution.

"Let's not create a myopic seeding of doubt and cynicism by use of extremist language, because we have a very serious task of shaping an inclusive future," she says.

## Safe motherhood? Think safe babies

Unlike in Sweden where men take leave off work to look after their newborn babies, men in Uganda only want to see their children after they start teething. **Nabusayi L. Wamboka** reports that this has led to increased infant and maternal mortality.

**A TETANUS OUTBREAK IS RAVAGING** Iganga district, killing over 150 children every year. And the situation is bound to get worse, given local culture that considers the mothers of these children unclean and unfit to sleep on a decent bed.

Iganga, the third biggest district in Uganda, now faces an uphill struggle against deep-rooted cultural beliefs if it is to reverse the needless infant deaths, says Lydia Kibwika Kasinda, vice-chair of the local council. People here believe in delivering in banana plantations. "They say when you deliver quickly when you hold a banana plant," says Kasinda. "The labour is believed to be short and quick."

The infants are later laid on a banana leaf. Women also use such contaminated instruments as rusted razor blades, knives and reeds to cut the umbilical cord, raising the chances of tetanus infection. The biggest threat, however, is

### UGANDA

what the women use to heal the navel — cow or sheep dung, lizard droppings and soot.

District Health Educator Sister Eva Suubi blames these practices for the rise in tetanus. "People believe these things make the cord drop off early from the baby and allow the women to resume normal duties of working in the fields and sleeping on a bed."

Local men only recognise the baby when it grows its first teeth. According to Suubi, the unhygienic conditions of birth are the primary cause of many of the infant deaths, and then it is up to the women to bury their children. "Men believe as long as it is not the women who are affected, there is no cause for worry," she adds.

With the help of UNICEF, says District Director of Health Services D.G. Muwanguzi, the district has embarked on a massive immunisation programme. But the people are reluctant to come forward. "The services are there; we have clinical centres where women can seek medical help but people are not willing to come," Muwanguzi says. "They associate immunisation with infertility."

Besides, many women report

that they need the permission of their husbands to seek these services.

Social worker Margaret Masege says they are working on a sensitisation campaign to bring the men on board and educate them on the importance of allowing their wives to go for antenatal and post-natal checks.

She says: "We have realised that once the men are knowledgeable about the causes of the infants deaths, they do let their wives visit clinics. Sometimes they accompany them."

Muwanguzi says 54 tetanus deaths were reported between January and June, but the figure could be higher since many deaths go unreported.

**The biggest threat, however, is what the women use to heal the navel — cow or sheep dung, lizard droppings and soot.**

Says Suubi: "Those are the reports we receive at health centres, and they account for about 15 per cent. You have to triple that to get the real picture on the ground. The biggest problem is the cultural beliefs associated with women and

childbirth."

Health worker Masege says women and their newborns are made to sleep on the floor because they are considered unclean. District leaders worry the situation might get out of control. UNICEF has quickly responded with money for vaccines. "Tetanus means death in most cases. Iganga is the most affected but 31 other districts are also at risk," says Lukyamuzi Mbidde, the regional manager.

Suubi says neonatal tetanus can be prevented and eliminated. A germ that grows in dead tissue and decaying matter causes tetanus or "lock-jaw".

It is everywhere but is more common in manure, dust, dung and on skins and rusty tools such as nails, reeds, needles, old razor blades, barbed wires, wood splinters and in the intestinal tracts of animals and humans.

Tetanus attacks children aged three to 28 days. Symptoms include crying and spasms. A child stops suckling and has difficulty in breathing. A person may be infected if they are injured with contaminated objects or soil or animal excreta contaminate their wound.

Local people associate tetanus with witchcraft and evil spirits in the family, so they try to keep the

disease as secret as possible instead of seeking immediate treatment. According to Masege, men's reluctance to help pregnant women or their babies adds to the problem.

"Men don't care whether the women get adequate health care before or after delivery. We are encouraging them to get involved since men make the major decisions affecting their wives. Men are also the ones with the money to send women to hospitals."

When children under a month old die, it is usually the women who bury them because they are not recognised as "real" children.

Health authorities plan to involve the men at all levels of a massive immunisation campaign, says Masege.

"The men are the gatekeepers of tradition and they are also the ones who control their wives. We want them to encourage their women attend antenatal clinics and to go for routine immunisation."

Studies suggest that educating prospective fathers in reproductive (especially antenatal) health has a positive impact on their women and children. Such men are more concerned about their partners' health needs during and after pregnancy.

# U M B E Y A

{ NOT THE OFFICIAL NEWS }

## Sandra heads West

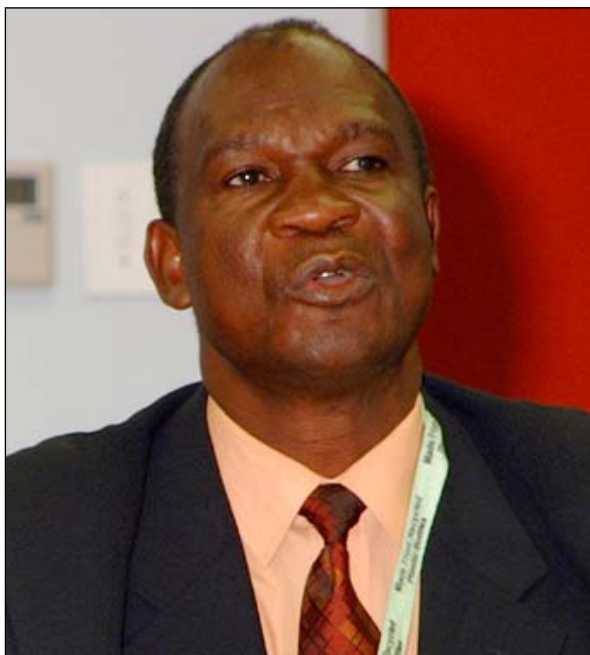
FROM Zimbabwe comes the news that political writer Sandra Nyaira is going from strength to strength. Sandra, whose work won her an award to study in the UK, is now stomping around Big Brother country — the US. She will be there for a year fine-tuning her skills. The *Africawoman* team in Harare did the honourable thing and threw our Sandra a big bash. Better still, what's good for Sandra is also good for *Africawoman*. We now have our very own ambassador in the US: Sandra wrote Umbeya, saying she is spreading the *Africawoman* gospel. Everyone who has seen our work is hooked! Way to go, girl.

## Grace is new head

BACK in Kenya, Ms G — also known as Grace Githaiga — is also going up in the world. She has not only been appointed the new head of Econews Africa but as soon as she landed from Joburg she was chosen to coordinate the Media Council of Kenya, a lobby group bringing together all media houses in Kenya, civil society representatives and the Media Owners Association. Congratulations are in order, we believe. She is in Stockholm, Sweden, all through October, fine tuning her IT skills.

## Fun in Joburg

IT was all work and no play — in the best sense, of course! — when *Africawoman* set up



Stayed the course: Uganda's Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Kisamba Mugerwa.

a real newsroom down south. Editor Lesley Riddoch and coordinator Florence Machio turned out to be slave drivers in disguise, making everyone sit up until the wee hours to produce what was widely acclaimed as one of the best newspapers at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. At the end of the 10-day event, we just had to admit it: It was GREAT. But don't just take it from us. Look up the Joburg editions on site!

## Candid minister

THE videoconference experience during the summit taught us one valuable lesson: Even government ministers have a human face, if they come from Uganda that is. Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Kisamba Mugerwa not only arrived, bang on time but also stayed on course as the questions got hotter and hotter, the challenge being led by Nabusayi Wamboka. He candidly answered questions, giving the lie to the conventional wisdom that politicians are anything but honest — at least in public!

## Inspirational AW

BY this time, most of the *Africawoman* journalists who wrote for the WSSD Special Edition will have received your "pay". A little bird told us that the edition was so well received in Joburg that many delegates wanted to buy it. Designer Tony Sutton's magic touch went down so well that some people — we will keep him guessing who — have framed the front page of the edition, hoping to gain inspiration from it every morning and evening. Other delegates reported that *Africawoman* was their preferred reading during the conference. Considering that we published only every other day, that was no mean achievement. Now, now, girls, there's no reason for all this flattery to go to your heads. Let's get cracking on the next super edition. We have high standards to maintain.

## KENYA

# What next, now that the WSSD is over?

By Grace Githaiga

**THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE Development**, held in Johannesburg, has been touted as the biggest conference in history. This conference was meant to have tackled the myriad problems afflicting planet earth and come up with ways of saving it.

But how much of this was achieved? Documents and declarations are now being presented to suggest "ways forward" after this "successful" summit. What is not clear is how these declarations will, for example, help Zambians in the throes of a famine, who were recently reported to have broken into a store for genetically modified food. For the hungry, it is a close contest between the need to survive now and concerns over the effects of genetically modified food that might come in the future — a time that may well find them long dead of starvation, anyway.

As for developing new energy sources, which is fundamental for Africa, there were no concrete measures set out to ensure that renewable sources would be developed. Neither were strategies developed to ensure less consumption of fuel, the summit only affirming its commitment to the Kyoto Protocol. Without action, there will be no major breakthroughs.

Perhaps the biggest victory for women was the intense lobbying that led to the revision of language that would have subjected women's reproductive health rights to a wide variety of controlling forces, especially religious — in effect reversing all the gains made in previous conferences, which have recognised women's human rights over their own bodies.

Most of the action points that emerged from the summit have a 10 to 15 years time frame. The question is how many of today's governments and authorities will still be around in 2012 or 2017?

It was fascinating to see the multiple usage of the term "sustainable development". Since Rio, the term has become the buzzword for everyone, from plastic manufacturers to small non-governmental organisations, and it is guaranteed to appear in most mission statements. Whether it means the same thing to all people is a different matter.

A summit is probably not the place to try and sort out the world's problems. A more realistic approach would probably be smaller meetings with realistic plans lasting over three to five years.

## KENYA

# Big cars and leaking roofs

By Lilian Juma

**IF POLITICS IS TOUGH FOR MEN, IT IS** doubly so for women, if women parliamentarians from East and Central Africa are to be believed. First, they have to overcome traditional prejudices, then they have to contend with offensive language and other tactics meant to intimidate them.

But are these good enough reasons for women to accept subordinate roles and expect sympathy from the top?

Not if the British Council has anything to do with it!

During a workshop held in Nairobi recently under the auspices of its Effective Leadership project, 10 women parliamentarians from five countries — Ethiopia, Zambia, Malawi, Uganda and Kenya — were put through their

paces in areas such as access to information to enable them meet the expectations of their people.

The workshop's title, "Big Cars and Leaking roofs", alludes to the mismatch between the expectations of voters who need the help of politicians to get leaking school roofs fixed but instead get leaders who are content to just drive big cars. Women leaders are no exception.

The training could not have come at a better time for Kenyan women, many of who are just emerging to declare their interest in the General Election due in December.

So far, 130 women have registered with women's lobby groups that have spent a significant part of the past five years preparing them to seek parliamentary and local authority seats.

Kenyan women have routinely performed poorly in national elections, with only four having been elected to parliament in 1997.

In recent times, women's lobby groups have put up a spirited campaign for affirmative action as a bridge towards boosting the numbers of women in political leadership. But despite parliament have approved a motion to this effect, there is little evidence that much progress will be made before the current session ends.

At the workshop, participants agreed that overcoming the challenges that women face requires courage, determination and vision.

Women are now being encouraged to take bigger positions in the running of their countries, including politics and economic development. But they will need to be well informed to achieve these goals.

Led by consultant MaryAnn Stephenson, the women worked through such subjects as the characteristics of good leaders, people's attitudes towards their leaders and how women can build their confidence.

At the end of the two-day training session, two critical factors emerged: That women should be vehicles of change and that they should not seek the easy path in going for top positions. They must strive to overcome fear and never lose track of what they aspire for just because they encounter major obstacles.

Though moral, financial and material support are crucial in achieving leadership posts, women must first seek communication skills to know how best to package their information.

Any takers out there?