

Africa *woman*

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN IN AFRICA • MARCH 2003



Striking nurses in Kenya: Low pay has driven many of these caring professionals to England

BRAIN DRAIN HURTS AFRICA

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

By Sandra Nyaira, Zimbabwe

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

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

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

The women, who now form a very powerful economic group in their adopted land, leave their husbands, extended families, children and friends to work in the UK. The skilled women do all the menial jobs that the British and Eu-

ropean Union nationals do not want, mainly because of their irregular immigration status.

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

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

British recruiting drive

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

This prompted former South African President Nelson Mandela to tell the British govern-

ment in 1999 to stop "systematically stripping" Southern Africa of its most vital resource — skilled medical staff.

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

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

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

In the years since Mandela appealed to Britain to stop poaching nurses from southern

Turn to **NURSES** / Page 12

UGANDA

Good friends look out for each other

By Margaret Nankinga

ADDRESSING the Commonwealth Business Council at London's Reform Club early this year, Secretary-General Don Mckinnon said: "For too long, the developing world has been promised a new deal - aid, investment and real trade opportunities - and for too long the affluent world has not delivered on its promise."

Yes, developing countries in the Commonwealth have been receiving aid. Yes, there is investment and inter-trade among the Commonwealth nations. But there must be fairer terms of trade if this aid, trade and investment is to generate development and if these countries are to become real partners in development.

"Why is it that the developing world is being criticized for protecting a manufacturing industry that builds a consumer product at three times the world price, yet it seems acceptable that, in Europe, farmers spend five times more than developing countries do to raise a single cow?" Mckinnon wonders.

This is the essence of international trade that hinders the development of real partnerships between Commonwealth countries:

Turn to **GOOD FRIENDS** / Page 2

INSIDE

Cricket row splits Commonwealth

— Page 4

Why women should be leaders

— Page 8

Tired of a senseless war

— Page 11

Editor's Note

Commonwealth Day is celebrated on March 10, just two days after International Women's Day. This annual event is a time for reflection or the 54 member countries, which have a rich heritage borne out of their common links with each other and Britain.

Queen Elizabeth II traditionally sends out a special message to citizens of these countries, through Commonwealth prime ministers and presidents. Everyone celebrates in their own way — from official receptions to school assemblies, sports tournaments, concerts, multi-faith observances and tree-planting ceremonies.

This *Africawoman* edition is dedicated to both Commonwealth Day and International Women's Day, which are of special interest to us as women journalists and also as members of the Commonwealth. The theme, *Women as Partners in Development*, seeks to shed some light on the status of women in development in Africa while at the same time linking the ideas to the Commonwealth Day theme, which is "Partners in Development".

We set out to contribute to the debate on the Commonwealth's role and effectiveness in making a difference to women's lives in Africa. In these pages, you will meet women whose lives have been changed by the different assistance packages of the foundation; you will also find straight-from-the-heart articles pointing out the gaps in the lives of African women.

The modern Commonwealth evolved out of Britain's imperial past and, today, helps to advance democracy, human rights, and sustainable economic and social development. With English as a common language and similar systems of law, public administration and education, the Commonwealth has become a vibrant and growing association of states in tune with the modern world.

Committed to racial equality and national sovereignty, the Commonwealth became a natural association of choice for many new nations emerging out of decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. Issues of racial justice became key as the Commonwealth threw its weight behind the cause of freedom. With all the colonies free, the Commonwealth's work has been to foster development in these countries through partnerships.



Nubian women make a living out of selling their hand-woven baskets and carpets. Do they also enjoy maximum returns?

UGANDA

Good friends look out for each other, says Commonwealth boss

From Page 1

We are not investing in the vital sectors that would greatly benefit the economies of the beneficiary countries.

According to Uganda Investment Authority records, 26 foreign nations had invested in the country as at 2002. Of these, nine are Commonwealth countries that contribute investments worth US\$670,868,585. Britain heads the list at \$560,257,760 followed by Mauritius at \$24,848,000, Kenya at \$24,320,825 and Australia at \$23 million.

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

Agriculture, forestry and fishing - considered the backbone of Uganda's economy and the sector that directly employs women - takes only 9.1 percent of the total investments, with \$81.9 million and directly employing 4,714 in 28 projects.

Manufacturing is third with 5.7 percent of the investment and 45 projects employing 2,973 people at



\$51 million worth.

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

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

Rise to challenge

To boost fairer trade, developing countries also need to rise to the challenge of competitive trade. Fair trade should be a two-way traffic. It is for this reason that Commonwealth Business Council Mohan

Kaul recently called on African nations to improve their business environment.

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

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

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

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

If they are to make any breakthroughs, local investors will need

to improve on quality, be more organised and create more awareness of international labour, human rights and environment laws. Kigozi has words of advice: Developed countries will buy your goods only if you have up-to-date book keeping, high quality goods and if you do not engage in child labour and protect the environment.

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

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

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

KENYA

Cricket wrangle splits Commonwealth

By Florence Machio

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Africans immediately cried foul. Kenyan police spokesman King'ori Mwangi dismissed New Zealand's position as "outrageous and dishonest". South Africans Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki were quick to join the



Kenya's cricket team vowed not to play elsewhere if their match with the kiwis was switched

fray, with President Mbeki saying: "Given what has happened with regard to Kenya and Zimbabwe, it may very well be that the false 'travel alerts' about South Africa were intended to convey a global message of general African insecurity to prepare for the campaign against Zimbabwe and Kenya and, therefore, the African-hosted Cricket World Cup."

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

Less than charitable

It was not the first time that Kenya had been at the receiving end of less than charitable remarks from fellow members of the Commonwealth. While pitching for the Toronto Olympics bid, Mayor Mel Lastman said to a freelance journalist before leaving for a trip to Kenya: "Why

the hell would I want to go to a place like Mombasa? I just see myself in a pot of boiling water with all these natives dancing around me."

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

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

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

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

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

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



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EDITORIAL

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Africawoman is produced by 40 women journalists from Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Ghana who meet in a virtual newsroom once a month. The information produced is then linked to community radios throughout Africa to reach grassroots women.

Let partnership flourish forever

In keeping with international trends, African countries are focusing on strengthening regional connections — hence the East African Community, the Southern Africa Development Corporation and the Economic Commission for West African States. All of these form the building blocks of the African Union, whose key initiative is the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

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

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

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

These teams played a key role in recent elections in Sierra Leone, Ghana and Kenya. Kenya's recent peaceful transition was witnessed by a group of eminent persons, led by former UN under secretary-general Adebayo Adedeji, lending weight to the fact that the Commonwealth's position as partner in Africa's development remains crucial.

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

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

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

Nevertheless, the very basis of Commonwealth unity has recently come into question at the Cricket World Cup held in South Africa, with New Zealand, Australia and England refusing to play in Kenya and Zimbabwe for fear of terrorism and violence.

It will be recalled that immediately after the terrorist attacks in the Kenyan tourist region of Mombasa, the Australians announced that they had prior knowledge of the raid against Israeli holidaymakers that was linked with Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network. They had chosen not to share the information with Kenya in much the same way as New Zealand claimed it had information that its cricket team would be targeted for terrorism in Kenya — and did not see it fit to share the details with their intended hosts.

The tensions between the UK and Zimbabwe have lasted long enough, and the British and Australians expressed concern that they might face violent protests if they went to Harare.

Far from being a major threat to the Commonwealth, however, these tensions should be seen as part of the continuous growing pains of a family cobbled together from different cultures and expectations that must learn to enrich one another's experiences while helping to smooth out the rough edges.

Whatever else the Commonwealth countries do, they must not compromise the virtue of pulling together towards the common cause of raising living standards for the people of this unique family of nations. This spirit is captured succinctly in the Kenyan call to unity of purpose, "harambee!" Long live partnerships in development.

POINT OF VIEW

Need new partners? Turn to women

By Golda Armah, Ghana

If Commonwealth countries are looking for partners in combating hunger, they need look no further. They can find credible partners in the rural women of Africa.

Research shows that rural women, the majority of them farmers, are crucial partners in the fight against hunger and poverty. Indeed, there have been various commitments and agreements to enhance the status of rural women and promote gender equality in agriculture and rural development.

The UN Millennium Development Goals on reducing hunger and poverty by half by the year 2015 recognises that in rural areas, where 70 percent of the poor live, women's equitable access to resources is key to development. The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, underscored the fact. A paper presented by Food and Agriculture Organisation Director-General Jacques Diouf said: "The fight against hunger and poverty will come to nothing unless we make sure that women, especially rural women, are placed at the heart of the process."

Despite all these views, however, rural women remain voiceless in decision-making processes and are often not taken into account when it comes to designing, implementing and monitoring agriculture development policies and programmes. Nothing poses a greater threat to the fight against hunger in Africa.

According to FAO, 30 million Africans face famine — 15 million in the Horn of Africa and over 14 million in Southern Africa. Forty to 50 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa goes hungry.

Clearly, we need to develop policies and strategies that shape an enabling environment for the advancement of rural women. Paramount among these is a comprehensive programme to train women in innovative agricultural practices that boost productivity. Access to production-related services and labour-saving technologies will free them from tedious manual farming and go a long way to increase their harvest.

Rural women and African farmers are even more essential in the globalisation process. As the key players in their homes, women need to be empowered to extend their versatile role to the local level.

Despite close commercial ties between tropical Africa and industrial Europe, the former remains the poor and least developed despite a wide array

of natural resources. One reason for this is that the present terms of trade mean African exports, particularly agricultural produce, command low prices and cannot compete on the world market. A level playing field will motivate women to produce more for their countries and explore the export market.

Over the years, farming in Africa has been based on the weather; any climate change, be it good or bad, has an impact on the harvest. This has contributed a great deal to famine in many African countries. How about developing partnerships for irrigation dams? Poor education and lack of access to land and credit pose a formidable challenge to prospective partners with women farmers.

Processing and storing perishable food crops is yet another challenge for African governments. Most food is left to rot when in season for lack of the technical know-how to preserve it. Bad roads in rural areas compound matters. Yet the women may just need trucks to cart their produce from the farm to buying centres.

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

Marketing her produce is another headache. She is at the mercy of middlemen from Togo who buy it for as little as \$3 a tonne.

Women tobacco farmers at Wute and Semanu in the Akatsi district work from sunrise to sunset, only to be forced by circumstances to sell at throw-away prices to middlemen in Ghana, Benin, Togo and Nigeria.

For Yawa Agboyibor, the main problem is that half her tomatoes and other foodstuff goes to waste because of poor roads. The same tomatoes cost a small fortune when they reach the capital, Accra. "We toil for nothing, and we are still waiting for the day the government gives us the technology to preserve our tomatoes," say the farmers.

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

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

"I wish someone would tell me what to do with my farm produce. I work very hard with my hoe and cutlass but at the end of the day a quarter of my produce goes to the landowner."



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KENYA

The scholarship that changed Njoki's life ...

By Lilian Juma

WHEN Njoki Ndong'u won the prestigious Chevening Scholarship to study for a masters degree in human rights law, she had no idea it would see her rise to become a member of parliament in Kenya.

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

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

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

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

She says: "The fact that I was interested in human rights law, constitutional law and abuse of human rights under the practice of criminal law made it favourable for me as the British Council immediately agreed to increase the number of scholarships to four."

Ndong'u, one of five women nominated to parliament by the ruling National Rainbow Coalition following Kenya's recent poll, adds: "I was shocked that things worked out for me. Above all, the advantage was that I was a woman. The scholarship came at a time when many organisations were investing much of their resources in uplifting the status of women."

Different experience

But learning in the UK was a totally different experience from studying at local universities. "The standards of education at the University of Nairobi, where I studied in the 1980s were very high and everyone worked hard. The pressure of work was very intense and there were continuous assessment tests every week."

She arrived at Leicester University expecting much more pressure, only to find that things were done differently in the UK. "The pressure and competition in class in the UK is not necessarily very high and one can decide what one

wants to write, including the subjects to take."

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

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

Her next stop was the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, where she worked as a protection officer for two years. Her time at Leicester proved particularly useful when she started her consultancy firm specialising in human rights. But she was soon off again, this time to the Organisation of African Unity (now the African Union) as an adviser on human rights for two years.

On her return home, she planned to start on her doctorate and was also interested in teaching at the University of Nairobi's Institute of Diplomatic Studies. "But things moved so fast that I had to post-



Njoki Ndong'u – a leader who has benefitted from the chevening scholarship

pone my PhD plans," she says.

She joined opposition politics at a time of major changes in Kenya, working at the coalition's secretariat, where she actively participated in strengthening the opposition's move to present a united front against the 40-year rule of the Kenya African National Union.

Very uplifting

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

In parliament, Ndong'u aims to contribute towards developing policies to improve the status of mar-

ginalised people and to address human rights issues.

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

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

Every year, about 2,500 scholarships are given to deserving students in over 150 countries to study in the UK. The Chevening scholarships and funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and administered by the British Council.

UGANDA

MP 'shadowing' project off to good start

By Anne Mugisa

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

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

MPs in the UK have constituency clinics, or "surgery". This is time set aside to meet the

people and get feedback. The MPs also hold door-to-door meetings occasionally.

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

Most women MPs

Of the six countries, Uganda has the highest number of women MPs at 70 out of 304. The country had no women MPs before 1986, however. Male dominance of political parties and negative attitudes towards women ensured that they stayed out of politics. "I am not aware of any political party in Uganda that allowed women to run for parliament,"

Bwambale told *Africanwoman*.

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

The "shadowing" project – known formally as Effective Constituency Service – is an extension of the Effective Leadership project that sought to gauge voters' perceptions of their parliamentarians. The voters felt their leaders were motivated by self-interest rather than a national vision and service to their constituents.

Both voters and their leaders appeared to have difficulty understanding the role of MPs, who accused the electorate of harassing them with requests for financial assistance. The study also showed that women were generally considered to be more in

touch with their people's needs, more serious about their work and less corrupt than men.

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

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

If used effectively, the "shadowing" project will give women the extra edge to boost their careers – to the benefit of those who vote them in.

The courage to

Zimbabwe / Priscilla Mhlolo lost her husband and daughter to Aids. Her son killed himself when he thought he might have caught the disease. Now this brave and anguished woman breaks her silence and tells her tragic story to **Reyhana Masters-Smith**

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

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

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

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

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

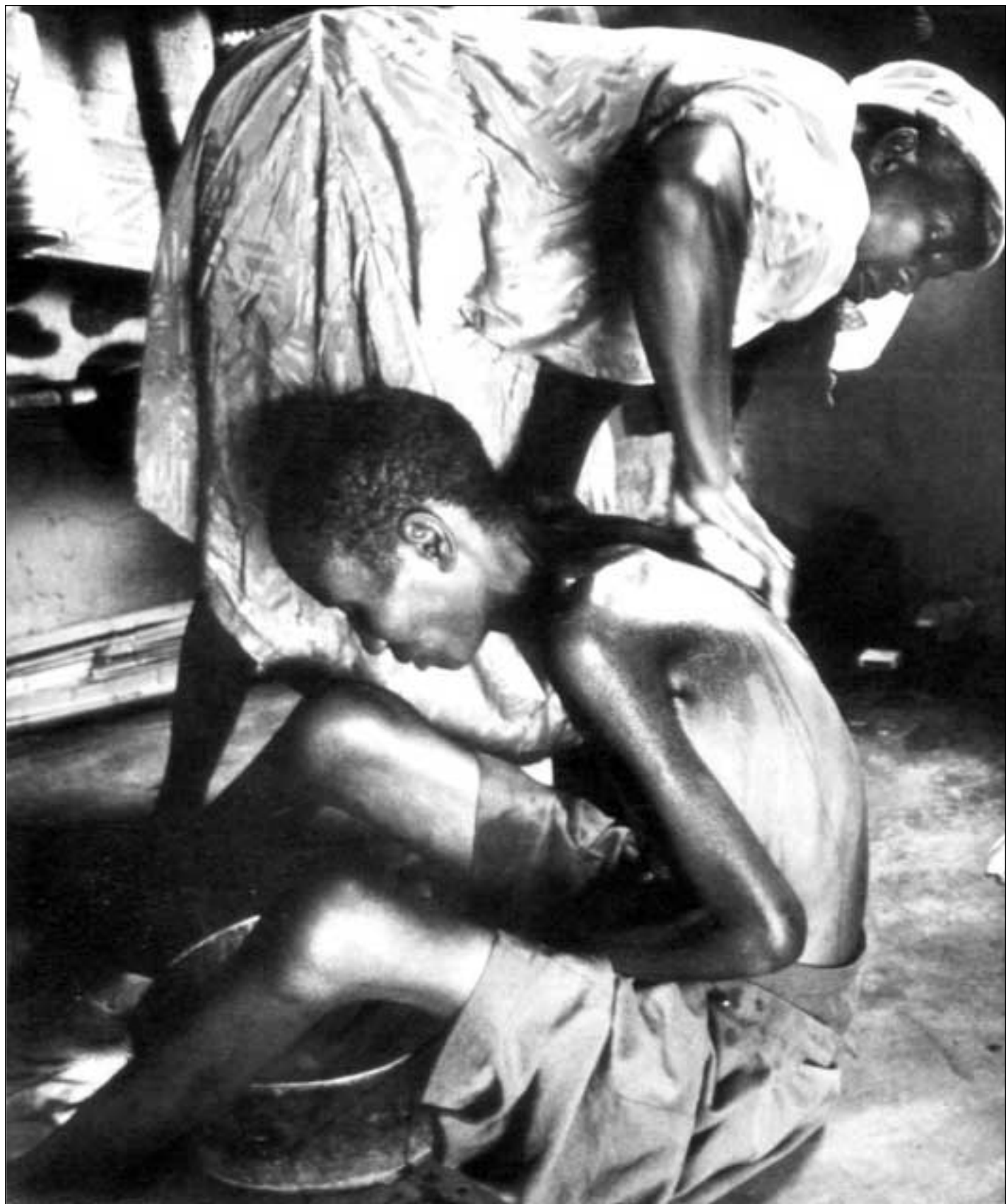
This is Mhlolo's story of courage and determination. She speaks slowly, calmly and with authority. She tells her story in a confident and dignified manner:

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

I asked to see my husband when I woke up. Then I asked the doctor how long I had to live. He told me I had three months. In those days even the medical

staff were negative about HIV/Aids. So when I saw my husband, I told him that I was going to die. I knew that it was a killer disease. My husband was cool, calm and collected.

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

Speak out



A woman takes care of a terminally ill relative in a rural Zimbabwean hospital. These photographs by Gideon Mendel have been taken from *Positive Lives*, an exhibition at the National Arts Gallery in Harare, Zimbabwe, that highlights the courage and the reality of living in a world of HIV/AIDS in Africa opened in January. *Positive Lives* is an international photographic project initiated in 1992 by the Terrence Higgins Trust, an HIV charity, and Network Photographers, a photo journal agency.

At the time, I didn't think at all. My husband did the thinking for us. A month after I was discharged, I tried to kill myself. I was in the room with my husband and children and they were all asleep. I took the bottle of paraffin and poured it over myself. I then lit a match. It blew out. Another one. That, too, blew out.

My husband woke up just as I lit the fourth match and my nightie caught fire. He saw that I was on fire and he threw a blanket over me. He saved me. But I was still in despair. I wouldn't talk to anyone. I lied and pretended that everything was fine. I even stopped going to church.

Some days I was fine. Other days it was bad. I cried as I watched my daughter suffering. I cried every day. In 1995, my husband was sent to remand prison. At the same time, Agnes was very sick and I eventually ended up at Mashambanzou – a shelter for people living with HIV/AIDS. I was torn. My husband wanted my support and my daughter also needed me. I chose to be with my daughter. After a few days, we went back home.

My husband Bruce also returned. At first he was mad with me, then he saw Agnes and I explained that she had been really ill. He was fine. Agnes died on

November 2, 1995. She was buried two days later. From that day on, Bruce was never the same. He changed from a caring man to a monster. He would shout and scream at me. Each day he got worse. Finally his family came and accused me of being a witch who had killed my daughter. They took their son Bruce with them. He was too weak to protest.

A few days later, I went to Kwe Kwe but his family would not allow me to see him. He died on August 26, 1996. I was never told. He was buried the next day. My children and I only found out two weeks later. I had not even been allowed to perform the rituals.

All this time, Lynde Francis from The Centre was helping me. She eventually became a good friend. She gave me courage, strength and a great deal of support, both financial and emotional. Whatever she had she gave me.

The final blow came in 1997. I was working at The Centre when I was contacted and told that my son had died. I knew I could have continued on the journey of lies and pretence, but I chose to take a different road. I want to see my daughter Bianca grow. I want to hold my grandchild so I choose to live positively.”

GHANA

Malaria: the case for getting our priorities right

By Charity Binka

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

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

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

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

Taxes on nets

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

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

ventive treatment.

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

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

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

More than promises

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

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

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

Research indicates that only in 75 percent of the cases does chloroquine succeed in treatment in Ghana and only 60 percent of the parasites respond to the drug when isolated. By World Health Organisation standards, such a drug needs to be replaced. But it costs a dollar to get the full dose of chloroquine while the new malaria drugs could cost as much as three dollars for a full course of treatment. The challenge for African countries is this: If the cure is so expensive, why not settle for prevention?

KENYA

There's every reason why our women should be leaders

By Mildred Barasa

After nearly three decades of women's rights activism, the question still lingers: Do women in leadership make a difference? *Africa-woman* went on the campaign trail and came back with a big "Yes" and a few "buts". Here's a sample:

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

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

In parliament, she says, women tend to lobby for motions to improve social services and those that affect their lives. Of immediate concern are laws that deal with ownership of property. Leadership is generally associated with higher pay, which will boost women's economic standing. Kenya has 17 women MPs, three of them in the Cabinet and three assistant ministers. Kenyan MPs earn close to Sh500,000 (about \$6,000 per month).

The women in the Cabinet head the ministries of health, water development and part of the vice-president's office.

According to research carried out in the United States of America, women are 50 percent more

likely to take up issues of concern to women than their male colleagues - regardless of the political parties they belong to.

Says Laura Liswood, secretary-general of the Council for Women World Leaders, which is based at Harvard University: "The problem is that the number of women in political life ebbs and flows. You need a critical mass of women holding political posts before you see leaders coming through regularly."

This has been achieved only in a few countries, and even then countries that have marginal influence on the international scene. Sweden, Finland and Norway boast between 30 and 44 percent female representation in parliament while Britain is far behind with 12.5 percent.

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

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

Since women have exceptional experiences from those of men, she argues, they should be represented adequately in leadership so that

their different skills can be highlighted. "Women have unique experiences. When you block out a whole category of people, the political world is poorer for it. We are cutting out a whole area of experiences."

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

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

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

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland, believes it is not too much to ask that women be allowed the opportunity to rise to the highest levels of leadership. "I don't want women to run the world alone. But if women and men could run the world together, things would be very different."



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

UGANDA

Maggie Kigozi makes her mark in business

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

Now the director of the Uganda Investment Authority and the focal point for Commonwealth business leaders, Maggie Kigozi joined the business world in 1994 and systematically put into practice the tricks she had learnt from him.

Her journey to success began when she was appointed marketing manager of Century Bottling Company, which produces such popular soft drinks as Pepsi Cola and Mirinda. "My decision was sudden, but I have no regrets," she says, and quickly adds that women should be ready to take on challenges and adventures.

After working day and night to prove her worth at Century, Kigozi was ready to take on the greater challenge of becoming the director of the investment authority. In the early days, even progressive women had difficulty speaking about money and business, she recalls, perhaps for fear of ridicule or simply because they

considered them a private matter. Kigozi considers it a personal achievement that more women are able to discuss investment freely these days.

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

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

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

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

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

—Margaret Ziribaggwa

Quote, unquote

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

ZIMBABWE

Women in leadership: A dream too far for some

By Sifanele Ndlovu

IN 1996, ministers of women's affairs from the Commonwealth set themselves a task: To increase women's representation in decision-making positions in the political, public and private sectors to 30 percent by the year 2005.

With only two years to go, very few countries have achieved this target; in fact, some have taken a few steps backward. According to the Commonwealth Secretariat, only seven countries – including South Africa and the Seychelles – had 30 percent or more women's representation in parliament and local government by January 2000.

South Africa is the only country in the Southern Africa Development Community that has attained the 30 percent benchmark, as women constitute 29.8 percent of the number of Parliamentarians. Zimbabwe lags behind at a meagre 14 percent following a drop in the number of women parliamentarians in the 2000 parliamentary election from 21 to 15 in a 150-seat parliament.

There has been a corresponding decline in the number of women in the Cabinet. Only one of the 15 women now in parliament is a fully fledged Cabinet minister; two are Ministers of State, one is a provincial governor and sits in Cabinet, one is the deputy speaker in parliament and another a deputy minister who does not sit in Cabinet.

This means that the highest decision-making body in the country is almost 100 percent male, contrary to the country's claims of being committed to gender equality.

Zimbabwe, on whose soil commonwealth countries met to craft the Harare Declaration – in which members committed themselves to promoting principles of democracy, good governance, human rights and gender equality – stands accused of reneging on the very

principles espoused under its own roof in 1991.

With a general election marred by reports of violence and intimidation, and a presidential election that is still the subject of court action, many Zimbabweans believe democracy is in the intensive care unit. Lying alongside it are noble programmes such as the 1995 Commonwealth Action Plan on Gender.

The country was slapped with a 12-month suspension from the 54-nation club in March 2002 after the Commonwealth Observer Mission for the March 9-10 Presidential Election came up with a report alleging widespread violence and intimidation of the opposition, among other irregularities. The decision is due to be reviewed in March.

It is widely held that the violence and generally tense atmosphere that has characterised the Zimbabwean political landscape since 2000 discouraged women from active politics, leading to the decline in the number of women political leaders.

Women drop out

Says Nomalanga Khumalo, MP for Umzingwane constituency, about 30 kms south east of Bulawayo: "Women and violence don't mix. The moment the campaigns become violent, women drop out of the race. Unless something is done about this culture of violence in politics we will always have less women than men in leadership positions."

She is one of seven women who got into parliament on an opposition Movement for Democratic Change ticket in the 2000 election despite the violence.

Khumalo believes the two dominant parties, the MDC and the ruling ZANU (PF), do not have gender sensitive policies. There are few women in the top structures of the parties and they do not have a quota system to

encourage the participation of women in politics. Yet the women's wings in both parties are the driving force at the grassroots level.

The MP adds: "We need to introduce a quota system to ensure women are adequately represented in decision-making positions. Women form a majority in the support base of these parties but somehow when it comes to top leadership positions, they are not visible. Because of that, we have led our society to believe that only men can be leaders. They need to see practical examples of women in leadership positions in order for them to get used to it and change their attitudes."

Florence Buka, MP for Gokwe East Constituency and a minister of state in the President's Office, also believes the quota system will not only help increase female representation but also have an impact on the quality of debate in parliament.

Buka felt that issues such as gender, HIV/Aids and the welfare of the elderly and children were not being adequately addressed because there were fewer women to champion them as men tend to concentrate on "mudslinging and being partisan".

Although limited by the partisan nature of the proceedings in the highly polarised Zimbabwean parliament, women members of parliament have come together to form a caucus to discuss issues of common interest.

"With the formation of the women's caucus, we hope that all women MPs will unite and push for a gender agenda regardless of which party they belong to," says Khumalo. "If we stick to partisan debates, we will never be able to push our own cause as women and our numbers will continue to dwindle. Who knows, there might even be less women in the parliament after the 2005 election."

Of the 150 seats in Zimbabwe's parliament, 120 are constituency seats contested by po-

litical parties and individuals. The rest are distributed at the discretion of the president.

Ten of the non-constituency seats are reserved for traditional leaders chosen by the chief's council and the remaining 20 are used to accommodate various interests. Usually, the president reserves eight of the remaining 20 seats for governors and the rest are given to individuals considered to be strategic allies but who could not garner enough support to win an election.

In 2000, President Mugabe used 12 seats to rescue heavyweights like Speaker Emerson Mnangagwa who had lost to the opposition. He also used them to accommodate people he wanted in his Cabinet but could not win a popular election. Clearly, it was within the president's power to intervene to increase women's representation in parliament following the loss of some women MPs in elections. "If we can have seats reserved for some sections of Zimbabwean society, why we can't we do the same to accommodate women," says Khumalo. "There is scope here for women to lobby for a quota system."

When Commonwealth ministers for women's affairs resolved to increase women's representation in politics, they argued: "Without an equal number of women in politics, there is no true democracy."

Although the Commonwealth is a voluntary organisation without a constitution, it is well placed to influence member countries to comply with an agreed agenda.

Despite its dispute with some members of the Commonwealth, the Zimbabwean government has not said it will pull out of the voluntary club. This, hopefully, means that the country still wants to be a respected member of the international community and is prepared to abide by the principles mutually agreed at these international forums.

UGANDA

Still a raw deal for Ugandan women

By Elizabeth Kameo

ON the face of it, Ugandan women have it all: 71 women in parliament, 16 in the Cabinet and 30 percent of all seats in local government councils are reserved for women. Indeed, the constitution states "one-third of the membership of each local government council shall be reserved for women."

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

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

Since coming to power in 1986, President Yoweri Museveni's government has made significant strides towards including women as partners in the country's development and decision-making process.

But tradition dies hard and Ugandan women argue that they still have a long way to go. Though the 1995 constitution clearly sets out the rights of women, which include participating in the social, economic and political development of the country without discrimination.

However, women MPs' efforts to introduce laws giving women equal rights in society have been frustrated by lack of goodwill.

Do not own land

Customarily, African women do not own marital land or property. Thus when a husband dies, his land and property – including his widow and children – are "inherited" by his brothers. When women parliamentarians

lobbied for the law to include women's co-ownership of matrimonial homes, the amendment was omitted from the legislation. Their efforts to re-introduce the issue have been unsuccessful so far. Without land, women have no authority in family matters.

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

Africa Online late last year quoted renowned Ugandan feminist Sylvia Tamale arguing "the guarantees of equality in the constitution and the promotion of women's participation in decision-making, from grassroots to national level, have largely failed to eradicate entrenched cultural, religious and traditional authorities, which implicitly discriminate against women."

Asimwe-Mwesigwa says women's participation in local politics in Uganda has long been viewed as an extension of their traditional involvement in household management. We trained gender officers at local council levels but they said they were mainly considered for jobs such as organising dance groups and preparing meals for celebrations," she told *Africawoman*.

The Ministry of Gender's budget has decreased over the years, with claims that it gets money only after all the other ministries' budgets have been met – chiefly because it is considered to be an "add-on."

In its 2000-2005 Plan of Action, the Commonwealth seeks to accelerate the implementation of policies for gender equality and to improve their outcomes at national, regional and international levels.

The plan targets strengthening of national women's machineries ability to mainstream gender issues and develop policies.

Prize for top writers of fiction

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

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

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

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

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

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

– *Florence Machio*

Addressing the challenge of learning

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

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

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

– *Florence Machio*

UGANDA

Monkey business as women pay price of war

By *Nabusayi L. Wamboka*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"There is fear that poaching is increasing as people hunt the pri-



Eating bush meat is one of the traditions and habits of refugees from the Congo.

mates and sell the meat to the refugees, and we fear that eating primate meat might spread to Uganda."

Moeller spoke soon after two men were jailed for 18 months each for being found in possession of chimp meat near the western Ugandan town of Kasese.

Cook the apes

An estimated 3,000 chimps and 400 mountain gorillas live in western Uganda, along the Rwandan and Congolese borders. Minister of State for agriculture, animal industry and fisheries Kibirige Ssebunya recently advised islanders in Kalangala district on Lake Victoria to cook the apes and eat them after they complained about monkeys destroying their crops.

The islanders have never forgiven him. "We made a genuine complaint to the minister about monkeys destroying our crops," says Margaret Kayaga. "He told us to eat them. What kind of support is that?"

Agriculture is the mainstay of

the island women while lumbering timber and fishing, which fetch more money, are largely done by men. Monkeys constantly destroy the crops and women are not amused.

"Our problem as women is that we get our money from farming. The men go fishing and for timber. But despite this we can't make a good harvest because of the monkeys. They are too many and soon they will be more than the islanders," says nurse Sempero Bridget Nansubuga.

In Karamoja, the women are fleeing hunger and torture from marauding Karimojong warriors who have sent thousands feeling to neighbouring districts.

The war between government forces and the Lords Resistance Army, covering the region bordering Southern Sudan and stretching throughout the north, has left the Karimojong, who are primarily pastoralists, searching for food and water at gunpoint.

A government call for a voluntary gun surrender expired on Feb-

ruary 15 last year and only 7,676 guns out of an estimated 40,000 were collected.

The government then launched a "forcible disarmament operation" in Karamoja. According to National Review Online columnist Dave Kopel, the remaining gun-owners refused to disarm. The Uganda Peoples Defence Force went on the rampage, beating and torturing Ugandans, and raping and looting at will.

There were media reports of the death of an expectant mother said to have "died of injuries sustained when a soldier kicked her in the stomach during forced disarmament".

The mother of external security chief David Pulkol was "mistakenly" forced to eat and swallow the beads she was wearing after she failed to convince soldiers she knew of no guns.

10,000 guns

By mid-July, the total number of confiscated guns had reached 10,000 — only about 25 percent of the expected total.

The fight for protection and survival has led the Karimojong to attack, kill, rape and displace thousands of people, especially women and children in Katakwi and Kapchorwa districts.

Many are now camped in displaced people's camps but even these are randomly attacked by the raiders. The national army is either too weak or not prepared for the swift attacks.

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

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

Gearing up for the first Games of the century

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

The first Commonwealth Games took place in Hamilton in Ontario, Canada, in 1930. Eleven countries boasting 400 athletes participated in these first games. Except for 1942 and 1946, during World War II, the games have

been held every four years. Sixteen games have been held in total, with three of these hosted by Australian cities — Sydney in 1938, Perth in 1962 and Brisbane in 1982.

While other games around the globe have been founded on geographic or climatic factors — such as the Asian and African games and the Winter Olympics — the Commonwealth Games are based on a common history and language, English. All athletes and officials can converse in the language, creating an atmosphere

that has led to the Commonwealth Games being known as the "Friendly Games".

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

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

Uganda has performed remarkably well in boxing, with James Nyakana and Justin Juuko win-

ning gold medals. Kenya and Nigeria have also won medals in athletics and other sports.

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

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

– *Margaret Ziribaggwa*

KENYA

Tired of a senseless war

By Grace Githaiga

REBECCA Okwaci comes from Malakal in Southern Sudan but went to school in Khartoum. The ones in her home area had stopped functioning, thanks to the war. She later married a commander in the Sudanese People's Liberated Movement (SPLM) and moved to Addis Ababa.

She now lives in Nairobi with her children while her husband is in Khartoum working for the government. "This war is tearing families apart and I feel women must have a much larger voice in peace matters," she says.

Manel Mohammed Al Ajabu, 33, says her grandfather married one woman from the north and another from the south. She is from the northern branch of the family. When she was growing up, the family maintained cordial relations.

She trains women both from the north and south. "What we have in common is the fact that the current conflict in Sudan is making our lives a misery," says Ajabu. "By listening to one another and sharing our lives' experiences, we bridge the gap and work towards peace."

Nyabenyi Tito Tipo 38, lives in Nairobi while her husband has gone to look for work in Botswana.

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

She has been left with the task of raising her children on her own. "My children are growing up in a strange country, among strange people who do not speak the Shiluk language and do not know Shiluk culture. The war is so destructive — I would rather think of peace."

These are just a few accounts of devastated Sudanese women who have been living in Nairobi because of the war in Sudan. Most are concerned about the war and the need for peace in their country. It is for this reason that they got together and in 1998 formed a network of what is known as the Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace (SUWEP).

Search for peace

SUWEP's main objective is to support Sudanese women to be effective in the search for peace. The majority of the women are illiterate.

Mary Apar, the SUWEP-SPLM United chair says that the quest for peace in Sudan has been dominated by men. Women's roles and efforts are often neither acknowledged nor recognised. Their agen-

da for peace is not taken into consideration during negotiations.

Though the Sudanese peace talks are taking place in Nairobi, SUWEP is not participating. Yet women play a central role in any society. They bring up children, they share love, and resolve conflicts among families. It is necessary to recognise women's inherent gifts, says Major Sammy Ndegwa of the Kenya Navy and a specialist in disaster management. Besides, women and children are the primary casualties of war.

Most African communities are grounded in patriarchy, and this may partly explain the absence of women in the Sudanese peace talks.

But Ndegwa urges women to cultivate the skills associated with peacemaking, such as dialogue and the ability to listen, if they are to survive.

SUWEP has written to the Inter-governmental Authority on Development to request observer status and still awaits a response.

The network has a crucial advocacy role in the peace process, says Apar. "We want all women to un-

derstand our situation and push for women to talk on behalf of other women. In fact, we are in the process of opening an information centre for proper networking and to facilitate information and experience sharing."

Humble achievements

Okwaci speaks of their "humble achievements" with a great deal of pride. They have been able to build the capacity of their core members, formed a structure and built team work. They have been able to conduct awareness workshops on peace and leadership and they can tell that the women on the ground have grasped what peace means.

She adds: "Most of the grassroots women are illiterate but they are now aware of their rights and very interested in the peace workshops. They are thirsty for knowledge. They feel that that is the knowledge they missed for a long time and often tell us that they want to know how to handle the paper and understand (meaning how to read and write)."

One of the greatest achievements for SUWEP is the fact that

the four groups from the South — SPLM, SPLM United, Sudan People's Democratic Front — can sit at one table with the five groups from the North. "But as women, mothers and builders of the nation, we realised that despite our differences, it is futile to have war," says Okwaci. All the groups meet three times a year. Sudan has many factions and it is necessary to create blocks for good governance.

SUWEP has teams on the ground based at "peace centres". These are basically meeting points for women and venues for workshops. The trainers usually conduct door-to-door campaigns for days, encouraging the women to attend workshops.

Due to high illiteracy levels and financial difficulties, the network is unable to ascertain whether the messages passed on during training workshops are being put to use. At the international level SUWEP has attended meetings in the Hague and in Washington, where it won a peace award in 2002 from the National Peace Foundation.

Together with others, the women of SUWEP are trying to convince their leaders that they must stop this war and that political negotiations are the right path to end the human tragedy in Sudan.

POINT OF VIEW

Let us benefit from democracy, too

By Eunice Menka, Ghana

Kafui and Sarah* died in January this year. They died within months of each other, the victims of gruesome sexual abuse. Sarah had to stay away from school for three years after her classmate's father defiled her. The media covered the two cases extensively, setting off a huge outcry.

Civil society has protested that the government has not done much to protect the rights of women and girls in the face of a steep rise in rape and defilement. At least six cases of sexual assault are reported daily in the capital, Accra. The winds of change are said to be blowing across the continent, but women's rights do not seem to have benefited much.

Human rights activists have appealed several times to the ministries of justice and women's and children's affairs to crack down on the rapists — to no avail. And this despite the promise of freedom and good governance when President John Kufuor took over in 2002 after 20 years of the military and civilian rule of the Rawlings administration.

Gone were the excesses of the former government. Human rights abuses were particularly rampant from 1979 to 1981 and women traders were often whipped for alleged corruption. President Kufuor replaced the army, formerly the keepers of law and order, with police. A women's and juvenile's unit was soon created, but the police were too ill equipped to do much. And so the sexual abuse continues.

Although there are no legal barriers to women's participation in government and politics, cultural and educational factors hamper their progress. Besides, political parties rank women low on the party lists, making it difficult for them to win elections — and, therefore, influence laws and policies that will change the lives of women and girls. Ghana has only two women in the Cabinet.

Ghana is not alone in this. When Senegal's Abdoulaye Wade came to power in the

recent elections, he appointed only two women to the 19-member Economic and Social Council, the government's policy-making body. He appointed a female prime minister, though, putting himself a cut above his predecessor. Mame Madior Boye ensured several women got high ranking jobs, but she was recently sacked.

The National Council of Women in Nigeria has lamented what it describes as the "systematic elimination" of women contesting elections.

The president of the Plateau State chapter, Jubie Ser, recounted at a recent meeting how "many female aspirants for elective offices have been either edged out or defeated at party primaries".

It may not all be bad news, though. The expansion of the democratic space has led to the growth of a vibrant civil society, which champions the rights of women and children with zeal and passion. The growth

of a stronger and independent media has helped too.

There is a glimmer of hope for women in the democratic transformation sweeping across Africa. In war torn Sierra Leone, recent elections saw the number of women MPs rise from eight percent to 15 percent — statistics much higher than in some West African countries.

Sarah Diabate of the Guinea People's Union, who was in a group of women who traveled to Senegal as part of a USAID-sponsored political study tour said of the country that has now become a symbol of Africa's democratic reforms reported: "This was a pilgrimage for us. What struck us was the solidarity among the women in Senegal. Regardless of their political affiliation, women were helping other women to promote development. There was solidarity, synergy and commitment."

If anyone needed the evidence, this should be enough testimony of what democracy can do for women. It might just spur Ghanaian women into putting up a stronger fight to ensure that girls like Kafui and Sarah do not die in vain.

*Full names withheld

The National Council of Women in Nigeria has lamented what it describes as the "systematic elimination" of women contesting elections.

Nursing brain drain hurts Africa

From Page 1

Africa, the numbers of recruited health personnel entering the UK has risen more than five-fold – from 393 in 1997-98 to more than 2,114 in 2001.

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

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

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

The ban did not extend to commercial agencies, which critics say are now doing the "dirty work" for the NHS. A spokeswoman for the Nursing and Midwifery Council says: "Our impression is that most nurses from Africa are coming through private recruitment agencies despite the government's advice not to recruit from there."

34 agencies

Thirty four recruitment agencies listed on the Health department's website were registered for following its code and operating ethical recruitment practices, including not recruiting from the developing world.

In a parliamentary written answer to the Liberal Democrat MP Paul Burstow, the department said there were 92 agencies in all – meaning two out of three had not signed the code of conduct.

Evan Harris, the Liberal Democrat health spokesman, said at the time: "It's disgusting and it was predictable that reliance on overseas recruitment would pull in the precious trained staff from other countries. It is morally indefensible to allow this to happen without admitting it, quantifying it and offering some reciprocation."

The Health department spokeswoman says NHS trusts were "encouraged" to use only those agencies that followed the code of practice, but they could not be ordered to do so because of the government's policy of devolving decisions.

She adds: "We are committed to the ethical recruitment of staff from abroad. The NHS does not actively recruit nurses from developing countries or through recruitment agencies."

Several nurses had learnt of the



Caring professionals: Low pay has driven many nurses to England

opportunities through word of mouth or by learning of job opportunities on the Internet. "We can't prevent people coming to this country and getting a work permit if they want to," she says.

The Royal College of Nursing supports overseas recruitment but says it must be done ethically and that proper support must be given to nurses once they arrive.

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

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

Last year 6,256 British nurses emigrated, the highest number for 10 years. There was a strong recruitment drive from the United States of America, which took most of the nurses.

Britain needs 2,000 nurses to run a 600-bed hospital and professional women from Africa continue to pour into the UK to fill the gap.

Recruiting

Investigations by *Africawoman* reveal that British recruitment of medical personnel in Africa centres mainly on Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi and South Africa. In total, according to the Nursing and Midwifery Council, these countries supplied more than 3,614 nurses to Britain last year, compared with 91 in 1998-99. The number continues to rise.

The Manchester Royal Infirmary says it has recruited more than 250 nurses from the developing world in the past two years by placing advertisements in local newspapers and hiring recruitment agencies. Those 250 nurses mean the difference between triumph and disaster for the infirmary. Without them, almost 20 wards would have to close,

according to head of nursing Cheryl Shuttleworth.

Adeline Mlambo, 25, from Zimbabwe, arrived in London two years ago and is now working in an orthopaedic ward in Manchester. "I got my work permit and my flight was arranged in a very short time," she told *Africawoman*. "I am here because the money makes a difference when I send it home. I have a lot of people to feed and patriotism is not going to do that for me."

4,000 vacancies

Shuttleworth adds: "We anticipate there will be 4,000 vacancies for nurses across Greater Manchester by 2005 unless we do something to boost recruitment. That is a huge number. Our own trust is growing massively and services are expanding but the available workforce has shrunk. There is huge competition for staff."

By earning the much-needed foreign currency, the women have become the engines that keep their home country's economies ticking.

Figures from the NHS reveal most health professionals were from the Philippines, which last year exported 7,235 nurses to the UK, bringing its total to 11,000 in three years.

The UK government target of an extra 20,000 nurses by 2005, set in the NHS 2000 plan, has already been achieved two years ahead of schedule due to the overseas recruitment. Now it has set a new target of recruiting 35,000 more nurses by 2008. Tough competition awaits, with countries like the USA fishing in the same pond.

But the global market is getting tougher as countries vie for position in the increasingly desperate struggle for extra pairs of skilled hands. The US needs to recruit one million nurses over the next 10 years.

The brain drain means that the nurses left at home in the developing countries are generally overworked. Hospitals are not only understaffed but also lack the medicine to help the sick

ZIMBABWE

Women strike gold in war-torn countries

By Sibongile Ncube

AS African governments attempt to rebuild the economies of war torn Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwean women have taken advantage of peace in the two countries to hunt for gold.

With virtually no infrastructure due to the civil war that ravaged Angola for over two decades and the political upheaval in the DRC that led to the assassination of President Laurent Kabila, most countries in Southern Africa have intensified their efforts to market their products in the emerging markets.

Angola is potentially one of the richest countries in Africa, with its mineral reserves, fertile land and capacity to produce electricity. The DRC is also rich in diamonds and has the potential to do a booming business in food, clothing and agriculture.

Zimbabwe having participated in the DRC war through military intervention and the peace negotiating process, a clear signal has been sent to the local business community to make use of the new markets to build their businesses and increase the country's foreign currency earnings.

While the business world, particularly the export market, has been considered a male domain, Zimbabwean women have taken the bold step of going for the external markets, regardless of the risk.

One such woman who has been rewarded for her efforts in the Congolese markets is Dolita Mpofu, from Gwanda in the southern region of the country, who won the businessperson of the year award for 2002 and the rural businessperson of the year award given by the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce.

Mpofu trades in very rare products, particularly for the export market. She exports traditional foods such as dried vegetables, peanut butter, dried worms and dried fish. "When I started this business, friends looked down on me and discouraged me, saying I would not make it," she told *Africawoman*. "But with determination and the assistance of some busi-

ness organisations in the country, I proved them wrong. My business in the Congo is growing by the day."

Mpofu says her dealings with grassroots women through HIV/Aids awareness programmes helped her realise the potential business that rural women were sitting on.

She explains: "They were producing a lot of traditional foods which they traded among themselves within their communities. Some were harvesting stacks and stacks of amacimbi (dried worms) but had no market to sell them. It was then that I realised that this could be big business for rural women who have no source of income whatsoever, if only they could get a market for their produce."

She submitted a proposal to the Ronald Brown Foundation, a non-governmental organisation based in Pretoria, South Africa, which was looking for rural women with viable project proposals. "My project was approved and I've never looked back," she says. "Besides the DRC, I am also scouting for other markets in and outside Africa."

Her company, Heritage, now exports dried worms worth over US\$80,000 every year to the DRC and has already received orders from as far afield as the USA and Europe.

Mpofu has employed 10 women and subcontracted scores others to supply her with the products. Her company has provided the vital link between the markets and the grassroots women, who collect the produce while she does the marketing. She now hopes to open up a cannery, where she will not only dry traditional foods but also package them for the export market.

Mpofu is not alone in the great trek to the regional markets. Rebecca Mpofu exports soft furnishings to Botswana and other countries in the Southern Africa region.

While no exact figures have been given on the number of women engaged in cross-border trade, the association representing cross border traders has a membership in excess of 10,000, most of them women.

Women in Business has a membership of more than 3,000, most of whom are in export trade.