

# Africa *woman*

FOCUS ON THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT • AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2002

## In the beginning there was ...

**THE** 1992 United Nations Conference on Development and Environment (UNCED) or the Earth Summit, as it is popularly known, brought together heads of government, multinational organisations, non-governmental organisations and individuals in the city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. It was the culmination of years of international negotiations for a development process that would fully integrate social, economic and environmental needs of all people on earth.

Earlier conferences and initiatives included the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and the 1983 World Commission on Environment and Development. The Stockholm conference took place against a background of the mounting threat of industrialisation to human health and the integrity of natural resources. Commitments made and the accompanying declarations in these and other conferences have not had much of an impact.

In 1993, the United Nations established the World Commission on Environment and Development to formulate global environment policies. It produced many reports, one of them being "Our Common Future". Also known as the Brundtland Report of 1987, the report's main focus was the threaten-

Turn to Page 2



Many development programmes either ignore African women's contributions or actively work against them. What they expect is that leaders meeting in Johannesburg do more than meet and agree to make promises that they know they cannot practically fulfill.

# From Rio to Johannesburg

## *There's little to show for Agenda 21*

By Susan Naa Sekyere, Ghana

**PICTURE** the following scenarios. We are in the Techiman district of Ghana. It is June, and a solemn funeral is being held for more than 300 sacred fish from the Tweredaa River. The burial has been preceded by a state of mourning in honour of the fish, which have been poisoned.

The species have been preserved since the founding of the Techiman State more than a century ago. According to the local chief, Osabariima Dotobibi Takyi-Ameyaw II, the fish have been preserved to protect and sustain useful plant, fish and animal species in the area. Their presence has ensured the perennial flow of water.

Local people have been advised not to drink water from the river until the actual cause of death of the fish is established by laboratory testing. As usual, police are investigating the matter. The culprit remains free. The traditional council has warned it will deal "drastically" with poachers of the sacred fish, suspected to be members of neighbouring ethnic groups.

In the same month, in Maryland in the USA, nearly 100 snakehead meat-eating fish are found in Crofton pond. The fish, native to China, has big teeth and can survive out of water. According to police, a pet owner released two fish into the pond in 2000. Biologists have since caught several young snakeheads.

Poster pictures of the fish are

placed around the pond and also on the US State Department of Fisheries Web site. One of the fish weighs 15 pounds and is 40 inches long. It has distinguishing features such as long dorsal fin, small head, large mouth, toothy jaw and big teeth. These are described as a warning and a death warrant, and an additional sign reads: "If you come across this fish, PLEASE DO NOT RELEASE. Please KILL this fish...." Further instructions are given on how to do so.

Although US State officials are said to be setting up a scientific panel to investigate the problem, no charges have been filed against the owner of the fish. The police will not identify him because the statute of limitations has expired.

There are clear differences in identifying the causes of the problem in these scenarios. One has narrowed down the crisis to manageable levels while the other cannot even identify the culprit. This is just one of the situations that the Conservation and Management of Resources section of Agenda 21 of the Earth Summit of 1992 sought to address.

Agenda 21 is the blueprint for sustainable development into the 21st century, which was adopted by heads of states and their representatives in 1992 in the city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. In the declaration, the world leaders made wide-ranging promises, including co-operation in conserving, protecting

Turn to Page 2

## Inside

**3. Did you bring us our radio licence?**

**8. The death knell for coffee farming**

**11. Powering the lives of rural women**

In the beginning there was ...

From Page 1

ing global environmental problems derived from poverty in developing countries and the excessive consumption in developed countries. Accordingly, the report defined sustainable development as "that which meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs".

On this basis, the United Nations prepared for the Rio summit. As stipulated by Agenda 21, the Commission on Sustainable Development was established in 1992 by Resolution 47/191 of the United Nations General Assembly. CSD was to ensure the effective follow-up of the Earth Summit. It would promote international co-operation and monitor and report on the implementation of the agreements at the local, national, regional and international levels.

### Five documents

The Rio Earth Summit adopted five documents, among them Agenda 21. It was a framework to guide nations by suggesting strategies to manage development and the environment in a balanced and sustained manner, thus establishing the interdependence of social, economic and environmental issues.

The main focus of Agenda 21 was the eradication of poverty by giving poor people access to resources for sustainable living. Various stakeholders, working in partnership with governments and citizen groups, were called upon to develop workable national strategies for sustainable development out of the Agenda. If harmonised, it was believed, those strategies would help eradicate poverty and reduce the disparities in living standards in different parts of the world.

Combating poverty falls under the Social and Economic Dimensions, the first section of Agenda 21. It states in no uncertain terms: "Poverty has so many causes, no one solution will solve all the problems in every country. It is important that nations address the root causes of poverty, which include illiteracy, lack of basic education, lack of employment, population pressure and lack of access to land and natural resources. The United Nations and its members should make the reduction of poverty a major priority."

— Susan Naa Sekyere

# Closest to land, furthest from cash

Poor women less likely to own land or have access to credit

By Nabusayi L. Wamboka, Uganda

**P**riscilla Wandeka makes a living selling roasted maize harvested from the small farm she shares with her co-wife in Mbale, Eastern Uganda. She worries that the land will soon be sub-divided to provide for her husband's older sons.

"I can't decide what to plant now until my husband has settled the issue with his sons," she says. "For now, we can sell some maize and take children to school. But once the land gets smaller, we can plant only enough to eat."

It is a scenario that Vice-President Specioza Kazibwe is familiar with. She may wield power from boardrooms to the political negotiating table, but back home she works on a small chicken farm she plans to retire to.

For a woman to be empowered, Kazibwe believes, she must own land. Her chief concern, however, is the environment in which women draw their livelihood. "As our population grows, the search for water, food and energy resources increases pressure on fragile resources and has adverse consequences on women," she points out.

Without economic assets such as land, women and men can never make a dependable living. Women provide 80 percent of agricultural labour in Uganda and most of Africa, and 90 percent of labour in food processing and production. Despite their central role, they are either not aware of their ownership rights or are denied them. Indeed, women receive less than 1% of total credit available to agriculture.

Women are unable to exploit the full agricultural potential of their land, let alone use it to get credit and services they might require to increase their income. Because they have no control over the resources, women's contribution to agricultural production is invisible. This makes them vulnerable to arbitrary and subjective decisions regarding returns on their labour.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), many women around the world are trapped in a vicious spiral of environmental degradation, poverty, high fertility and limited opportunity. Risks to their health are greatest if they live in a poor country. In

## POINT OF VIEW

the next 50 years, the combined population of the least developed countries is expected to triple – from 658 million to 1.8 billion.

Though women are central to development, poor women are less likely than men to own land or have access to credit, adequate employment or economic security. "Poor girls receive less schooling, food, health care and pay for their work," UNFPA says.

Without secure access to land, it is also difficult for female farmers to gain access to services such as credit. Without titles to land, it can be hard to settle land disputes quickly. Uganda's 1998 Land Act introduced individual ownership to encourage more productive use of land, based on the principles of economic liberalisation. It converted customary ownership into formal ownership through title deeds.

**I**n the run-up to the legislation, the Uganda Land Alliance lobbied the government to ensure that the Act protected women's rights to land as much as possible, giving women the right to consent before their husbands sold land. The Alliance lobbied for the names of women to be entered on the certificates of ownership and title deeds. Says Judy Adoko, programme manager at Oxfam: "We believe that what is happening to women on the ground should be the basis for future lobbying work, and we have encouraged a re-consideration of customary tenure."

Sustainable development is a major challenge on a continent dogged by poverty, natural disasters, HIV/Aids and illiteracy. Rapid population growth and high fertility also pose major challenges to poverty eradication. Women are often closest to the land, collecting water, gathering firewood and producing children. But many lack the freedom to manage the natural resources or decide the number of children they will have. Peace Beyendela from Bushuro has eight children and does not know whether she has stopped. "Men don't allow us to use family planning," she says. "We know it

can help but you can't use it without the man's knowledge. And he just won't hear of it."

Men have strong traditional beliefs when it comes to children and land. Karuhize Robert, an English teacher at Buranga Secondary School says: "Children are precious. If you have many boys, you know you have security. Boys defend you and girls you can sell. Girls are wealth. Men administer the wealth and command everything, including the money from the sale of goods. Women are supposed to effect the commands because they are workers on that land."

But even where farmers have done their part, there are often no markets for their goods. Ndiribakinga Amos, a farmer who comes to Kabale district to sell his potato seedlings, is cynical: "How hard do they want us to work? We have a lot of potatoes and have nowhere to sell them." Ndiribakinga had been waiting in the market with his sack of potatoes, going for Sh45,000 (slightly under US\$25), but had not found a buyer by 1pm. "If I manage to sell it, I will have Sh5,000 profit. I will 'eat' Sh1,000 before I get home and will use another Sh2,000 for my family. I can only save Sh1,000," he says. If he manages to clinch a sale.

Women are more optimistic. They have formed co-operative societies, from which they can borrow. Two such associations are Abarya Kamwe Bigabiro Savings and Credit Scheme and Muyebe Bakyala Tukole. They save up to Sh30,000 per woman and give credit of between Sh3,000 to Sh100,000.

"They can't tell us to grow crops when we have nowhere to sell them," says Jemimah Matsiko, a mother of four. "The roads are bad and the infrastructure is simply not there. If they want us to achieve something, let them provide us with these services."

Unless gender imbalances are addressed, the World Summit on Sustainable Development may turn out to be like the proverbial chandelier. It is glamorous, glitters and shines bright in the room. But it can never be shared. The small local candles that most of our African societies use, though dimmer than the chandelier, can be passed on to everyone in the room, making it even brighter.

# From Rio to Johannesburg

From Page 1

and restoring the health and integrity of the earth's ecosystems. They also promised to eradicate poverty by reducing disparities in living standards in different parts of the world to achieve sustainable development and meet the basic needs of the majority.

Under Conservation of Biological Diversity, Agenda 21 clearly states: "Worldwide, biological resources are being lost mainly from habitat destruction, over-harvesting, pollution and the inappropriate introduction of foreign plants and animals." This decline, caused largely by human beings, represents a serious threat to development.

The historic Rio summit agreed that development should not take place to the detriment of the environment. A decade later, however,

most citizens of developing countries are still grappling with extreme poverty. The gap between the living standards of the rich and poor has grown wider.

Worse still, customary beliefs and traditional laws still regulate wildlife in the developing world even though common sense and scientific analysis clearly demonstrate that the protection of the ecosystem promotes biodiversity.

In Ghana, structures of both central and local government such as the unit committees that should have been strengthened and used as implementing agencies have been left to malfunction. Ghana's local government system, in which local residents are elected to represent their people's interests in district assemblies and unit committees, would have been the ideal

vehicle for achieving the targets of Agenda 21 – had they been effectively utilised.

The unit committees would be effective vehicles because they are comprised of the community members themselves, some of whom represent government at both the lowest and highest levels. They are close to the people and take the lead in most of the work within communities. The unit committees assist in the collection of revenue and keeping records of births, deaths, marriages and so on. They mobilise the people for communal labour and self-help projects, monitor and implement these projects and also supervise the staff of district assemblies.

Heads of governments that met in Rio in 1992 have failed to live up to their promises. The deadlines

and targets set for 1996, when local authorities were expected to have consulted their people and developed a localised Agenda 21, have passed without being noticed. Nevertheless, Rio+10 is here and our leaders must give an account of their actions to their people. It is a safe bet that most ordinary people in the streets do not have an idea what the earth summit is about.

Inaction on the part of governments and major international corporations as well as the continuous unrestrained abuse of the environment has cost a great deal and continues to destroy the earth. Alongside higher levels of absolute poverty, we are now experiencing global warming and many other ecological disasters. Rio+5 came and went without any impact. Will Rio+10 make any difference?

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## KENYA

# Did you bring us our radio licence?

*Mang'elele Community Radio Station is ready to go on air*

By Grace Githaiga

In the small, dusty village of Thongoni in Kenya's Eastern Province, a soloist is leading members of 34 women's groups in song and dance. "Did you bring us our broadcasting licence?" the chorus goes. "We just don't want to hear about the voices of others, and the problems of others. We want to also hear in our radio station, about ourselves. We also have brains. We also have hopes and views of how to do better as families, as communities..."

The women are members of the Mbosoni Integrated Community Media Project and they have turned out to welcome Nominated MP Grace Mwewa, who is on a tour of the Mtito Andei-based Mang'elele Community Radio Station.

It has yet to go on air and the group has been pressuring the government to grant it a licence to broadcast.

This has not deterred the women who own the station. They have gone ahead and installed broadcast equipment and are training in radio production techniques in anticipation of going on air.

The community radio station is an offshoot of a project in which the women discussed health and nutrition and recorded their views on cassettes, which they would then exchange between the different groups spread out in the vast Kibwezi. The excitement is intense. In the words of one old woman, 'here, women create the radio!'

In what will be their transmission studio, Production Officer Lilian Mang'oka is at ease as she connects a jack here and another there, playing music from one CD player and fading out a programme from another source. The villagers gaze on in admiration.

Mwewa, sitting comfortably in the studio, leans forward to speak into the microphone. She greets the women "over the air". Mbosoni women have made a difference, she says, in the sense that they have moved from "merry-go-rounds" and are now in "serious business that has been a preserve of men". Her audience responds with a burst of ululation.

Community radios may be a new phenomenon in Kenya but have long been established in southern and western Africa. Bush Radio in South Africa received a licence to commence broadcasting in 1995 on August 9 – South Africa's National Women's Day – as a token of appreciation

for the role women played during the struggle for liberation.

Zane Ibrahim, the station manager, describes a day at Bush Radio, popularly known as the Mother of Community Radio in Africa: "When Lungiwa's little seven-year-old daughter Thandi didn't arrive home from school at the usual time, she ran to the school which was four miles away along a badly worn dirt trail through the bush. Everybody had left and a sick feeling overtook her. She hurried to the local store and, at exactly 3.21 pm, she called Bush Radio to report little Thandi missing. It went on air a minute later at 3.22pm.

"As a rule, all programming comes to a halt when a child goes missing in the community. We received the first call at 3.37 pm to say that Thandi was safe at a friend's house, two miles in the other direction from where she lives. Why did it

Can we say that community radio has empowered women in any way? Christine Kiilu, manager of the Mang'elele Community Radio Station, says: "Misinformation and ignorance come from the fact that communities, and more so women, are not adequately informed. What we are trying to do is to bring out the voices of the people themselves, and especially women. We hope that once we go on air, the radio will serve that purpose."

Mang'oka cites the myths associated with family planning. She has been recording radio documentaries on health in readiness for going on air. Through the recordings, she believes, there has been progress in terms of getting the right information out as women discuss and get to clear the air on issues that touch their lives. Her programmes "seek to create connections between people, vital ideas and important information".

Says Redempta Nthia, chair of Mbosoni Women's Group, which owns Mang'elele Community Radio Station: "For us, participatory radio is a new model of communication. In this country, the mass media are not accessible to local people. Community radio is an option. Even if some of our people may not entirely understand it, they have a sense that it is theirs."

In many parts of the world, community radio was born as a response to social, economic and cultural struggles – especially in places where freedom of speech is restricted. Community radio is often the only way to give voice to

those who have been silenced, and also to help spread information far and wide.

"Radio has been a central tool used by grassroots movements worldwide," says Dominica Haule of the Grassroots Female Communicators.

Today, low-power community stations are cropping up all over the developing world. Kadra Hussein, a broadcaster at Radio Galkayo in Somalia, says: "Even in places like Somalia, with very little resources, we are using radio to inform and create dialogue about social, political, health, conflict resolution and economic issues."

Agnes Tiisa, station manager at the Uganda Media Women's Association Mama FM, adds: "Our radio station seeks to contribute towards empowering individuals and marginalised communities, especially women, by promoting their concerns and increasing their participation in the local and national development programmes."



Raditapole Malehloka, the Assistant Station Manager of Radio MoAfrika in Lesotho.

take 15 minutes to find out where she was? Because that's how long it took to run, fast, to the nearest phone."

Just like democracy, community radio is defined as a station for, by and about community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community. Community radio pursues a social agenda, is participatory in nature and allows people to capitalise on local knowledge.

Michelle Ntab, executive director of the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC Africa), says that community radio ensures that communities that have been denied access to resources participate in producing ethical, creative and responsible radio that encourages them to communicate with each other, to take part in decisions that affect their lives, and to celebrate their own cultures.

## UGANDA

# Famine looms as banana wilt strikes

By Margaret Nankinga

**MEN** look on, dejected, as sobbing women hack away at their banana plantations. Soon, what used to be forests of banana trees will be no more.

The new bacterial wilt disease threatens the survival of the banana, the staple good in central and western Uganda, alongside the livelihood of many Ugandans. Researchers from the National Agricultural Research Organisation say little is known of this disease. The only solution is to cut down the entire infected crop and bury the stems, leaves and fruits.

Says Elizabeth Namubiru, a widowed mother of four: "It is my only source of income." Her husband died in 2000, leaving her the piece of land on which she grows the bananas, her sole livelihood.

Scientists at the research organisation say the bacteria attacking the banana plant, *Xanthomonas campestris*, was first observed in Ethiopia. How it made the leap into Uganda remains a mystery.

When the bacterium attacks the plant, the fruit and the leaves turn yellow before they dry up. The infected fruit is yellow on the outside and black on the inside. Initially, people tried eating the banana anyway but gave up after bouts of diarrhoea. Not even cattle and goats are fed the bananas for fear that the bacteria will spread through their dung, used as manure.

The Ministry of Agriculture has imposed a quarantine in the areas affected and no bananas or banana products can be transported outside the central region.

Farmers in Mukono and Kayunga districts routinely inspect their plantations every morning, cutting down any infected plants.

The disease is being taken so seriously here that all tools used in cutting and handling the plants are sterilised with disinfectants. The farmers are required to wash their hands and boots using disinfectant in order to avoid further spreading.

Worse still, the spread of the disease raises the spectre of famine. "This wilt is of greater danger than the known Fusarium wilt, which attacks only exotic cultivars," says a researcher.

Not only are rural incomes likely to be affected, but the national economy will feel the effects. Uganda exports bananas to Kenya, Egypt and Israel. All hope now lies in research being undertaken by CABI Bioscience of the United Kingdom.

## EDITORIAL

Africawoman, c/o The African Women and Child Feature Service, P.O. Box 48197 (001000) 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

## This is no time for rhetoric, we want action

Over 100 of the world's leaders are expected in Johannesburg for this year's edition of the World Summit for Sustainable Development. They are expected to put together a new global implementation plan and forge partnerships to promote sustainability.

This is as it should be, going by research undertaken by Environics International.

The survey of 25,000 people reveals that the world's citizens expect their leaders to launch a concerted action on poverty at Rio+10.

When asked what should top the agenda of heads of state at this WSSD meeting, eight of every 10 respondents pointed to poverty ahead of wars and armed conflict – a surprising result, given the much-vaunted war on terrorism spearheaded by the United States of America.

This and other findings suggest that the public sees poverty reduction as the key to a more secure world. They contradict the views of experts on sustainable development experts, who rate water supply higher than poverty reduction.

For African women, there can be no doubt that poverty is the major handicap to development. Women are the majority in most African countries and also the backbone of agriculture and other economic.

They feel the bite of poverty most, especially because of their reproductive responsibilities.

Yet many development programmes either ignore African women's contributions or actively work against them. African women are thus especially susceptible to HIV/Aids, maternal deaths and illness—all exacerbated by high illiteracy levels.

What the women of Africa expect is that leaders meeting in Johannesburg do more than meet and agree to make promises that they know they cannot practically fulfill.

Developing countries are increasingly confronted with the need to address policy issues related to trade in international agreements such as the World Trade Organisation. Determining how international trade agreements can support economic development is a major challenge for those genuinely concerned about

self-reliance and less donor dependency for African countries. Even more important, stakeholders in developing countries must be informed on the issues and how their interests can be pursued through international cooperation.

The Rio summit came up with a detailed blueprint for sustainable development. It had a great deal going for it, including provisions for co-operation between governments, business and non-governmental organisations. A decade later, even the most committed believers admit that not much progress has been made.

Many of the articles in this special edition of *Africa-woman* attest to this. We bring you a collection of news, analysis and commentary designed to live up to our reason for publishing: Giving African women a voice in all the international, national and local development debates that have become the hallmark of our times.

The Johannesburg Summit must go beyond rhetoric and come up with concrete and pragmatic outcomes that will break down the barriers that have handicapped implementation of Agenda 21.

## Museveni, Nepad and women

The bottom line is that emancipation is a never-ending struggle

By Mercedes Sayagues

Oh dear. Another Good Man Gone Bonkers. That's Yoweri Museveni, once the enlightened president of Uganda and one of my favourite world leaders. He has drunketh too much Nepad wine and thus spoke last month.

"You cannot talk about women's emancipation in a disempowered continent like Africa," he told 2,000 delegates at the international conference "Women's Worlds 2002" in Kampala. Building a better world for women was the conference theme.

Delegates must have been amused – or angry. Museveni said that for African women to be emancipated, Africa must develop through unlimited market access to Europe and the US, according to Agence France Presse.

"More market access will mean more factories in Africa that translate into more jobs for the Africans and, therefore, more income and rights to talk about," he said. Hear, hear, Nepad's intoxication with foreign investment seeping through his speech. Does this mean that poor women can't have rights yet? Or that women acquire rights by working in the formal sector? African women work, and a whole lot of it, doing unpaid and unvalued work in the home, the fields, the market, the village.

But this work is invisible to statistics, to national accounts, and to a lot of men. It's the survival of the labour force, the reproduction of the human race. It's for free.

Sorry to burst your bubble, Mr Museveni. Since women already have one unpaid job; when they land a paid job at the factory or the office, they end up doing two jobs – one for pay and one for free. No wonder all women workers, from the cleaner to the microchip assembler to the manager and the vice-president, dream of a 26-hour day, according to a recent British survey. You can't cope with two jobs, and one of these knows no weekend.

Museveni recently fought a bitter battle with food giant Nestle to process Ugandan coffee beans locally, creating many jobs. The international corporation refused. He is un-

derstandably upset. Museveni is right in fighting to open American and European markets to Africa. What's silly is to tie women's emancipation to factory jobs.

Yes, an income gives women a chance to assert themselves, acquire some independence and defend their rights. But a salary is only one of many steps towards equality. Income-earning women are still battered and raped at home, denied promotion and sexually harassed at the workplace.

Life for a woman factory worker in a slum of Nairobi or Luanda is not necessarily better than in a rural village. "In the rural areas we had freedom but no money. In the factory we don't have freedom but we have money to provide for our families," sums up the ambivalence of an industrial worker interviewed for "Rigged rules and double standards", a recent report on trade by Oxfam.

**"Sorry to burst your bubble, Mr Museveni. Since women already have one unpaid job; when they land a paid job at the factory or the office, they end up doing two jobs – one for pay and one for free"**

Globalisation has not been kind to women. Markets are not gender-neutral. Markets reproduce, even deepen, gender-based discrimination. Women today make up one-third of industrial workers in developing countries, concentrated in labour-intensive sectors such as garments, shoes and micro-electronic assembly.

At first glance, job creation has benefited women with new income and potential independence. Their salaries pay for family food, clothes, medicines and school fees. On second glance, the cost-benefit analysis is more sobering. Women have the jobs with less pay, less status, and most prone to abuse. "In many countries, export growth has been built on highly exploitative employment practices," says Oxfam.

### GUEST COLUMN

Any gains must be matched against the following:

- **Excessive hours of daily work**, on the job and in the house. Twelve-hour shifts are common in export zones in China, Bangladesh and Mexico.
- **Weak union rights**, especially for pregnant workers. Only eight out of 500 companies in export-zones in the Dominican Republic have signed agreements with trade unions. Only one in 10 women workers in the Philippines is a union member.
- **Unsafe work conditions**, such as exposure to toxic chemicals or factories with inadequate fire protection.
- **Inequalities within the family**. Often women cannot control their income. In Zimbabwe, at every cotton harvest, dozens of women cotton-pickers and growers drink pesticide or hang themselves because the husband drank or gambled away the harvest money. There is a name for it: "cotton suicides".

Not necessarily is a factory job a ticket to equality. But then, who among the Nepad merchants would notice? Look at the group photo of African leaders at the launch of the African Union in Durban last July. How many women – not wives – among them? Zero.

"We need to make dialogue among different civilisations because what makes women liberation in one civilisation might not be necessarily in another," added Museveni.

Sure. Women in the developed world – including affluent South Africans – battle against a medical system that promotes unnecessary caesareans and hysterectomies. Women in East Africa fight against genital mutilation. Are these so different? No. Both are attacks on the female body by a man-ruled society.

Women's issues wear a different dress across the world. But the bottom line, Mr. Museveni, is that emancipation, like housework, is a never-ending struggle that cannot wait.

*Mercedes Sayagues is a community radio journalist who works in Southern Africa. Africawoman partners with community radio stations to bring information closer to rural women*

## GHANA

# We have failed our women and children

By Chrispat Okutu

**AMA ASABEA** works in a quarry. Her husband, Kweku Ansah, is a carpenter. After wedding 15 years ago, they travelled to Accra in search of greener pastures.

They settled in one room at Malam suburb and proceeded to add another three children to the two they had before they arrived in the city.

In the true spirit of a woman born to struggle, she sought a job at a quarry. She has worked at chipping stones for over three years. Her first child, Nsiah, is 12 and a dropout. They could not pay his school fees. He too ended up at the quarry.

Mother and son set off at 6.30am and return home at 7pm, too tired to do more than wash away the dust and sleep.

A visit to the quarry finds children aged from three to 18 exposed to serious health hazards. Some of the women come here with infants

barely older than a week. They are placed in the sparse shade and are exposed to the scorching sun and the rumble of dynamite. Everyone here inhales the dust that is constantly released as the rocks are broken up and loaded into trucks.

Predictably, infant deaths are common. But parents unable or unwilling to understand the link between the environment and the deaths find it “logical” to blame their misfortunes on witchcraft.

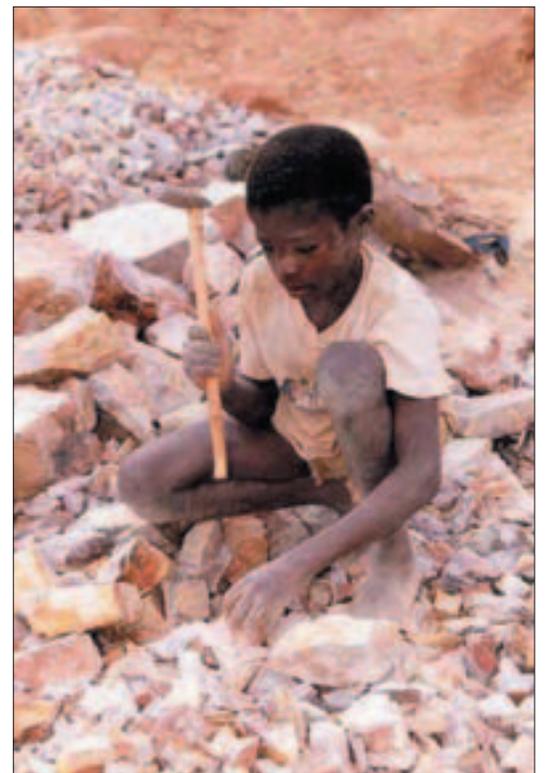
## Cracking stones

When you first enter the quarry, you are met with the sight of children cracking away at the stones – just like any hardened adult. Four teenaged boys remain crouched on one knee all day, cracking stones into various sizes for building houses the kind of which they will never occupy.

Infants grow into toddlers in this environment, sitting around their mothers or being cared for by siblings not much older. It is a hard



Babies play, children work in the Ghana's quarries.



life, and they are all here from dawn to dusk six days a week. Does the government care? What of the rest of society? Does anyone pay attention to all the conventions on the rights of the child?

The African Charter recognises key economic, social and cultural rights. It also places responsibility on the state to protect and promote these rights.

Under health, the charter states that the governments must take measures to protect everyone's health and to ensure that all people, including those without money, receive adequate medical care.

The charter grants everyone the right to education and to participate freely in the cultural life of his or her community. It further states that governments must promote

and protect the morals and traditional values recognised by the community.

Only God knows what all these charters and the rights declared therein are doing for mankind. For some, they are merely political gimmicks supported by paper work.

There is no implementation. Government officials seemingly prefer to buy big cars, wear designer suits and build big mansions instead of directing funding to children and families in need.

## Free education

We have little choice but to invest in free and compulsory basic education if we are to set in motion action to salvage these children. Who knows? They might just grow up to

become the best policy makers Africa ever has.

The government can also send mobile clinics to the quarries at least once a week to attend to the women and their children. They could do with crash helmets to protect their heads from injury.

A decade ago, government representatives meeting in Rio de Janeiro declared that human beings are the centre of sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

In Johannesburg, we must ask hard questions of our governments and remind them that they have not only failed to tackle poverty but also allowed the spiralling of diseases such as HIV/Aids, tuberculosis and others.

## ZIMBABWE

# City is choking in a cloud of dust

By Regina Nyirenda

**LOCATED** in the eastern side of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, Mahatshula is a residential suburb that was built in the early 1990s. The residents bought stands from the local city council and built their own structures, unaware of the problem that would dog them for a very long time.

Almost 12 years later, some of these structures are still at slab level, some at roof level. Some residents have opted to build one or two bedrooomed cottages while others have not started at all.

Laiza Sibanda, a single mother of three, says she was overjoyed when she first heard that she had secured a stand in this medium low-density suburb. She had been on the city council housing waiting list for 10 years before she finally got a

stand. After putting up a two bedrooomed cottage, she says she is disappointed to learn that she did not get the “best”. She explains: “My children and I cough all night. My neighbour says these coughs happen because of the dust that comes from the cement plant, which is situated to the east of our suburb. If it is not true, how come we have these coughs each time we go to bed?”

Alfonse Murwira, another resident, concurs. “Someone erred by agreeing that this piece of land be allocated to people to construct their houses. I have this gut feeling that there is a reason why this land has been lying idle for so long without being given out as a residential area. Go on and ask the city fathers if it is true that the place was initially not earmarked for some other projects or something like that.”

In the southern parts of the country, there have been similar complaints of chest problems by retired staff and those who have been laid off by the neighbourhood cement factory. The management, it seems, has an unerring instinct for laying off workers who go below the ground in search of the cement at just the “right” time.

Managers have their residences to the south and east of the plant, while all the workers' houses have been built either on the western or northern side of the plant—where all the cement dust is blown by the wind.

Besides, all the vegetation that was once the envy of motorists passing by en route to either Bulawayo or Beitbridge has turned a harsh brown. Shrubs have spiders' webs full of dust and the rooftops of houses are an eyesore because

they all look grey. With time, operations at the plant were scaled down due to lack of resources. Attention was then diverted to Cement Siding, where the bulk of the cement available nationwide is now produced.

Mahatshula is likely to go the same way, with the dust slowly but surely threatening to wipe out the entire vegetation. The once lush vegetation has also started turning brown and layers of dust can be seen on the rooftops of the houses. No matter how much they dust their furniture and other household belongings, residents complain, the dust settles in thick layers by the time the day ends.

A local councillor, who declined to be named for fear of victimisation, says it came as a surprise that people were given the go ahead to build homes in the area. Before in-

dependence, it had been made explicitly clear that the land could not be used for residential purposes, no matter the circumstances. Though exclusive to council members, he says, the reports should have been available for inspection by all stakeholders. The mayor of Bulawayo could not be reached for comment as he was said to be out of his office.

At the Rio summit, world leaders agreed that development should not take place at the expense of the environment. Agenda 21 is based on the understanding that human beings, through their actions, determine the nature of the environment in which they live. The environment, in turn, provides the resources and conditions necessary for development. It may be too late for the residents of Mahatshula, but the blueprint is there for those who care.



# Globalisation

## Why is it so bad for Africa?

By Florence Machio, Kenya

**M**y grandmother cannot afford to buy sugar, yet the crop that produces it stretches as far as the eye can see in her home in Kenya's Busia district. Selpha Maende Okweno is 87 and nostalgic about the days when she did not have to depend on her children for a living. Sugarcane was gold to her. "This 'gold' educated my sons and daughters," she says. Once a rich woman, by local standards, she has been impoverished by the same 'gold' that made her the talk of town.

Busia, in western Kenya, was once part of the agricultural hub of the country. But, according to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Busia is one of the districts on the decline. Expensive farm inputs, lack of credit and the collapse of irrigation schemes have conspired to turn sugarcane into an unreliable cash crop. Delays in the construction of the much-vaunted Busia Sugar Factory have not helped.

My grandmother was commissioned by the government to increase the amount of sugarcane she grew because a new factory was being built closer to her home. That was 12 years ago.

All sugarcane produced in Busia is crushed and processed at Mumias Sugar Company, which cannot handle the surplus resulting from the increased production. Mumias can only afford to buy from farmers what it can grind and sell.

Lately, Mumias has lost out on even its small share of the market. Why? There are cheaper imports coming from as far as Brazil. The cost of processing my grandmother's sugarcane makes it very expensive and Mumias can barely afford to pay the price. This is all in the name of liberalisation, globalisation and free trade. The Kenya government gave in to pressure by World Trade Organisation and liberalised its economy in 1990. This has brought a myriad of problems to farmers in the sugarbelt.

While liberalisation has "spoiled" consumers with a wide variety of "pure white" imported sugar, thousands of sugarcane farmers have seen their dreams of a better life snatched away by the so-called free trade.

"Globalisation is a curse to many sectors, especially agriculture, in this country," says Director of Internal Trade Seth Otieno. He adds that it is high time Kenyans and Africans admitted that liberalisation is a "national disaster" in much the same way as HIV/Aids.

The director argues that Africans were bombarded with concepts and terms such as the information superhighway, new economy, one market and opened up their countries for trade, yet their products cannot

### OPINION

compete in the markets of the developed world—not because their products are of inferior quality but simply because the developed world does not play fair when it comes to products outside its own markets.

Otieno shakes his head as he speaks. African markets were not ready for the kind of "free trade" everyone is talking about, he says. "We needed to prepare for things like inspection manpower to enable us sieve the imports that are coming in."

But even inspection will not help. Globalisation cannot be divorced from the unequal relations that have long existed between rich countries and the poor. It is a change in terminology more than anything else.

The Bretton Woods institutions insist that countries such as Kenya liberalise their markets to create room for globalisation if they are to receive foreign aid. Few governments in the developing world have the means to resist. Their hands are literally tied and they have no choice but to submit.

My grandmother has watched helplessly and hopelessly as her earning power is eroded systematically. Busia Sugar Company would be celebrating its tenth anniversary had it taken off. Not that it would have made a difference in the long term. Liberalisation of the market would have seen it go the Mumias way—plenty of sugar and nowhere to sell it.

**While liberalisation has "spoiled" consumers with a wide variety of "pure white" imported sugar, thousands of sugarcane farmers have seen their dreams of a better life snatched away by the so-called free trade**

Many farmers in Busia do not understand these dynamics. Trade in Kenya is handicapped by poor export promotion and marketing strategies, challenges for regional integration, high cost of doing business, lack of regulatory framework, poor infrastructure and insecurity. Kenya used to have the Import and Export and Sales Supplies Act that regulated what came into the country. It was scrapped to pave the way for liberalisation.

These days, Kenya and other African countries have been reduced to clutching at straws. For Kenya, the straw is in the form of a Counterfeit Committee that was recently launched to look into inferior quality products that are being dumped locally in the name of free trade.

According to Otieno, African countries should trade among themselves through regional integration ini-

tiatives. "Kenya's economic growth is dependent on the African region," he adds.

Yet some African countries would rather trade with developing countries than their own neighbours. A case in point is Tanzania's refusal to allow in Kenyan tea. Western countries have locked African countries on the basis of issues such as "minimum residue levels". They have set standards African economies cannot meet in what appears a deliberate move to take the best of Africa and leave it high and dry.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development, which has been praised as the blueprint for Africa's deliverance from poverty does not go far enough. The document, which the newly launched Africa Union proposes to push forward as its first agenda, fails to address the absence of a fair and just global market. Instead, it says: "We hold that it is within the capacity of the international community to create fair and just conditions."

There are those, like John Mungwe, who believe that multinationals are setting the agenda. They want "cheap labour and cheap inputs from Africa by insisting on the continent opening up its doors, yet they leave us poorer than we were".

Much as investments are necessary, let them be regulated. Let us not just agree to take in anyone who is willing to give us a few dollars. This is what economists call international sub-contracting or even neo-colonialism.

Executives of the sugar factories and farmers say "heavy and enforced" levies on imported sugar would make it economically unattractive to importers (and consequently consumers) and give Kenya's six sugar factories a new lease of life.

Mungwe suggests that African countries slap the same tariffs on the developed countries when they bring in their goods. Is that possible? Not according to Otieno, who argues that we still need their money, no matter how little.

It seems that African countries will be attending Rio+10 as underdogs. If the ruling elite forge alliances with foreign corporations that want profitable investments in these countries, African countries are likely to leave the summit the same way they are going to it – as underdogs.

They will have no negotiating power. Even if they do, the fact that developed countries such as the United States have demonstrated little or no commitment to the summit does not augur well.

My grandmother awaits the day her sugarcane will once again be the "gold" that she once knew. After a long talk on globalisation, she has only one question: "Why should I plant sugarcane if there is no market for it?"

## KENYA

# Poverty comes at a high price

*Access to clean water makes life almost unbearable in informal neighbourhoods*

By Ruth Omukhang'o

A GROUP of women stand in the sweltering heat alongside containers arranged in a long winding queue. At the top end, a tap fixed outside a small kiosk pours water furiously into one of the buckets.

Some of these women have been standing here for more than an hour but they must wait a little longer before their containers are filled. Rose Achieng is indifferent to the discussions going on around her. She is number 11 in the queue. The mother of nine says getting water each day is a major struggle.

Poverty comes at a high price in her neighbourhood in Nairobi. Kibera, home to 800,000 people, is one of the largest informal settlements in Africa.

"I have to juggle to allocate my meagre resources to be able to cater for my other family needs and also afford water," she says.

"I cannot even count how many times my children have gone to school without taking a bath or even having breakfast because we cannot afford water."

She buys water from the nearest water kiosk at Sh2 (US\$0.02) for a 10-litre bucket. She needs about 15 buckets daily. She sells roasted maize and cigarettes alongside a

road reserve, but makes only Sh100 (US\$1.28) on a good day.

Her husband, who sells used clothes in the neighbourhood Toi Market, contributes little to the family's upkeep. His earnings often end up in the nearest drinking den and he sometimes takes her cigarettes as well.

To make the best out of a difficult situation, Achieng and her children sometimes wash and bathe in the river that cuts through the slum. Although she is aware of the threat of bilharzia and typhoid, she is resigned to her circumstances. "That is life," she says philosophically, "there is nothing I can do about it."

The 1999-2015 Poverty Eradication Plan acknowledges that inadequate access to water can have major adverse consequences on the length and hardships of a poor woman's working day.

## Paying more

Achieng's life epitomises what thousands of poor Kenyan women living in informal settlements and semi-arid areas experience daily. Ironically, poor families end up paying more for their water than better-off city residents connected to the city council's supply. When there are water shortages, Achieng can expect to pay five times more



In search of the scarce commodity. A woman fetches water from a stream in the Kibera slums of Nairobi.

for her bucket of water.

Eric Makokha, executive director of Shelter Forum, an NGO working in informal settlements, says people living in better-endowed locations pay about Sh500 monthly compared with Sh600 for those living in slums.

The 1999 Human Development Report acknowledges that clean water is a basic need and a foundation for improving the well being of individuals and communities. But only 12 percent of the plots in the city's slums are connected to the water supply. Most slum dwellers depend on a few communal water points and vendors who charge 10 times the city council rate.

According to World Bank studies, low-income urban households pay as much as 10 times more per unit of 20 litres than high-income households. Other studies indicate that more than 85 percent of households in slums buy water from kiosks at more than five times the rate charged by the water utility.

Nairobi City Council has blocked tariffs, which increase charges. For the first 10 cubic litres, consumers

pay Sh10. Where there is communal sharing, the charges are as high as Sh17 for 20 cubic litres. Even then, there are no guarantees over the quality of the water. In most of the slum areas, the water supply line and the sewerage system run parallel and this often leads to contamination.

## Other hazards

Apart from suffering the costs of ailments, women are exposed to other hazards. Japheth Mbuvi, operations analyst at the World Bank, says women are exposed to dangers of crime such as rape and theft, especially at night, as most of the water kiosks are situated more than 50 metres away.

For the past three years, Mbuvi says, the Nairobi City Council has not done anything to reduce the cost of water in the slums. Distribution networks have been increased, however, thus shortening the distances women have to cover to get water.

Although the Government promised to ensure access to clean and safe water for all by the year

2000, this target has yet to be met. More than 50% of Kenyan household have no access to clean water. "How can this dream come true, when there is no clear policy to water and sanitation to the informal settlements?" Mbuvi asks.

Laws on water that were enacted recently do not mention supplying the informal settlements, which are not recognised formally. Although non-governmental organisations have made an effort to address the issue, this has been on an ad hoc basis. Besides, most of their efforts have been unco-ordinated.

The report, Solutions for a Water-Short World, says Kenya is one of five countries likely to run short of water in the next 25 years, along with Nigeria, Ethiopia, India and Peru. Kenya's water per capita will halve by 2025 as a result of the doubling in population.

The report says that in 1995, when the population was 27.2 million, water per capita was 1,112 cubic metres. By 2025, water per capita will decrease to 602 cubic metres. This poses a risk to Kenyans, particularly slum dwellers.

## Ten years and still the suffering continues

By Susan Naa Sekyere, Ghana

Zara lives in northern Ghana. Every morning, her baby strapped on her back, she goes in search of drinking water from a guinea worm-infested stream many kilometres away. "Look at the animals," she says, tilting her strainer so the camera can pick the shot for a BBC documentary.

"There are fleas too. I know they suck blood. But the boreholes here, there is one for the rich and one for the poor. That makes the water too expensive. For me, it is either food or clean water."

The Ghanaian Government has lately introduced what it calls "Private Participation in the Water Sector". Some prefer to call it simply water privatisation.

Whatever it is, questions have been raised about what this development will mean for poor people. The key question is

### POINT OF VIEW

how privatisation of the water sector is going to help eradicate poverty and reduce disparities in living standards – as per Ghana's commitment to Agenda 21.

According to Prof Tachiyiwa Manuh of Netright-Ghana, a network of non-governmental organisations, there is no way that Ghanaians living below the poverty line are going to catch up if water is privatised. It could be that the government has difficulty understanding this, but then it could also be that it is not in control.

When the present government assumed power, it pledged to reduce poverty and create wealth. It set up a poverty alleviation fund, which gives loans at 20 percent interest to women traders, fishmongers and others. There is also the President's Special Initiative, which has come in the wake of the

African Growth and Opportunity Act. The government describes the President's Special Initiative as a public and private sector partnership that will create about 100,000 jobs in the next four years.

With a mandate of only four years, the government is probably hard-pressed to stay on target, which probably explains why it has come up with all manner of "privatisation" strategies.

Together with several utility companies, it talks of maintaining international standards, competitive prices, and breaking even to at least bring the country at par with its counterparts in West Africa. In view of this, new tariffs amounting to a 70 percent increase announced for the Electricity Company of Ghana by the Public Utility Regulatory Commission have been in effect since August 1. The government said it will pay a difference of 5,000 cedis as a subsidy to the electricity company.

This means that consumers of between one and 50 units of electricity will now pay 9,000 cedis, a little above US\$1, instead of the 14,000 cedis announced by the regulatory commission. The government reckons the rebate will lessen the burden of low-income earners. That's all very well, but it is neither here nor there for "no income earners" such as Zara.

These challenging inequalities in the social and economic order in the developing world are not made easier by strategies such as the removal of subsidies for agricultural products even as the precise opposite pertains in countries such as the United States of America.

The multitudes of poor people in the developing countries probably have no idea what the Johannesburg summit is all about, but one thing is certain: The past decade has seen little progress in improving their circumstances.

## KENYA

# Between a rock and a hard place

By Lilian Juma

**HELL** on earth may be a kind description for Nairobi's slums – all 10 of them. According to the Ministry of Lands and Settlement, informal settlements cover only five percent of the total housing area in the city. But they are home to 55 percent of the population.

Kibera, a sprawling mass of rusted roofs and mud walls, is one of the biggest informal settlements in east and central Africa. Mathare Valley, Mukuru, Korogocho, Sinai and Soweto closely follow it.

It is estimated that 47 percent of urban Kenyans live in these settlements. Besides the dense population, it is the rare slum dweller that enjoys security, electricity, clean water and sanitation.

Sarah Adongo once resided in Mukuru kwa Njenga. It is an experience she hopes will never be repeated. Now happily settled in her rural home, she has only one word to describe her sojourn in the informal settlement: Nightmare.

Ordinarily, polythene bags are an inoffensive utility. In the slums,

they make do for a toilets. Residents with no sanitary facilities dispose of the bags by simply throwing them on rooftops, pathways, drains or even unlucky passers-by – hence the term “flying toilets”.

Crime is rampant in informal settlements. For lack of gainful employment, many young people turn to crime and drug abuse. Why? “Because no one cares,” says a mother of six who sells illicit liquor in Korogocho.

Violent death is not a rare visitor in the settlements, says Adongo. The same applies to infectious diseases such as typhoid and dysentery. She adds: “It is women who suffer most. Many are raped. Their children are used for criminal activities. We can only hope that the government hears our cries.”

## Selling alcohol

Most residents depend on petty trade for a living and children are often forced to sell alcohol to supplement the meagre earnings of their parents. In some instances, children have been used to peddle small arms.

Although the government is striving to raise the living standards by upgrading houses in some of the settlements, negotiations on construction and rents often turn violent. Last year, more than 20 people were killed in Kibera during a dispute over rents.

Says Michael Mwangi, a graduate of Kenyatta University who says he cannot afford decent and affordable housing. “The government is indifferent to our problems. Rather than initiate projects to alleviate our problems, the poor are dealt with violently. In many cases, the city council uses bulldozers to flatten our houses to evict us.”

Demolition, clearance or relocation are no longer viable solutions to informal settlements, according to the African Medical and Research Foundation, which has been working closely with residents of Kibera in an attempt to improve their living conditions.

What are required, the organisation argues, are development projects to empower slum dwellers economically. With 1.6 million people living in informal settlements

around the city, what options does the council have?

The situation is exacerbated by migration into the city due to economic hardship in rural areas. With elections by the end of the year, the tensions in the informal settlements are likely to rise since politicians often treat the densely populated slums as cannon fodder. The uncertainties of life in the informal settlements are hardly an incentive for residents to undertake any development.

According to studies done by UN-Habitat, the lack of secure land tenure is a major obstacle to providing tangible support for the urban poor. The lack of security inhibits the poor from starting viable projects. “They are also unable to use the ‘illegal’ plots as collateral in order to get credit or loans,” says Dr Klaus Toepfer, the former acting executive director of Habitat.

The story of informal settlements in Nairobi is unlikely to have a happy ending any time soon – not until the authorities recognise them and the people who live in them as legitimate residents.

## GHANA

# When the river dried up

By Theresa Owusu Ako

**H**aving travelled to my rural home recently, I discovered that the only river had dried up. The search for water had become more hectic and strenuous than ploughing a two-hectare farm with a hoe. People had to walk long distances before they could get enough water for their essential needs.

It is frightening to see the water hyacinth take over waterbodies in African countries. The seas and oceans are being polluted by industry.

It is absolutely necessary to coordinate efforts to protect water resources at the global, regional and country levels.

There should be a shift in the approach to water resource management – away from traditional supply to the improved efficient use of conservation, recycling and re-use of water. Efforts should be made to build storage facilities for rainwater. We should discourage wasteful use of water by observing simple rules at home. Water conservation should be taught in schools.

A value-based water education programme has started in Greater Accra. Fifty subject and curriculum specialists and some NGOs recently completed a training of trainers session. Once the cheapest essential commodity, water now attracts high tariffs due to its scarcity and misuse.

I am not aware of any regulations or by-laws to do with water. Yet they can be used to set standards for water consumption via the public water supply. Recycling and re-use could be useful planning and management tools.

Rainwater harvesting, already common in many rural areas, could ensure improved supplies where rainfall is only seasonal. It can also reduce the volume lost in run-off.

As many water issues need broad public support and understanding, creating awareness is necessary in this era of low water levels.

Governments and companies must engage the public in such issues as water conservation, hygienic water use, preservation of wet ecosystems and Ramsar sites and user awareness.

It is also important to observe certain cultural and traditional values that help to protect water bodies. These include the banning of fishing at certain times of the year and sand harvesting along riverbanks and promoting tree planting.

## UGANDA

# The death knell for coffee farming

By Sheila C. Kulubya

**SOLOME NAMUSOKE** bends to inspect several coffee trees whose leaves spot a dull yellowish colour. “This one is gone too,” she says with dismay.

Namusoke, a 42-year-old mother of five, has been growing robusta coffee on a two-acre farm in Nakasongola district, in south-central part of the country. She knows that within days, the yellowing will spread to other leaves, to the stem and then the entire tree. Soon, all the other trees will follow.

The coffee wilt disease, also known as tracheomyces, causes the yellowing. Caused by a fungus (*Fusarium xylarioides*), the disease – like the HIV/Aids epidemic that has hit the area – has no cure. In an agro-based economy such as Uganda's, this is tantamount to sounding the death knell for women farmers and the families that depend on them.

The coffee wilt disease was unknown in Uganda until 1993, when it was identified in the coffee-growing areas of Bundibugyo district in western Uganda. According to official estimates, 75 percent of Uganda's 34 coffee-growing districts are affected. And it is spreading fast.

The disease previously occurred in isolated areas in Africa, but it has swept across the continent in the past decade – a huge tidal wave bringing destruction and financial

misery. Scientists say the virus that causes the wilt is spread by water and air, attacking one coffee bush before spreading to another.

Statistics from the state-owned Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA), which regulates the sector, show that the disease has destroyed more than 12 million robusta coffee plants so far. Uganda is the world's eighth biggest coffee producer, with about 4.2 million bags per year.

The country earns \$400million from coffee exports annually, accounting for about 65 percent of foreign exchange earnings. It also employs about four million people directly and indirectly. The majority are women like Namusoke, who traditionally intercrop it with food crops such as bananas, beans, groundnuts and shade trees.

## Exports down

But the spread of the coffee wilt, combined with unfavourable weather patterns, has forced coffee exports down by 20 percent. The effects will be felt widely in this coffee-dependent economy. Those who will be hurt most are small farmers like Namusoke, for whom a good coffee harvest is the best hope for cash, medicine, and school fees.

“It means starting over again,” says Susan Sessanga, a widow who has been earning about Sh200,000 (US\$100) a year from coffee. With the income, she has been taking

care of five children and several relatives, many reduced to dependency by the effects of HIV/Aids.

Namusoke, Sessanga and others who depend on coffee must find alternatives to earn a decent living. One option is switching to clonal coffee. Developed from robusta trees, clonal coffee has high yields and is resistant to diseases like the coffee wilt. It also matures faster and is ready for harvesting after two years.

22 million clonal coffee bushes have been planted so far, and UCDA officials hope to plant that number every year. “We want farmers to grow clonal coffee, given that coffee wilt is on the rampage, ravaging the old coffee trees,” says Apollo Kamugisha, a development officer at UCDA.

It is still too early to celebrate. A recent research on coffee in Uganda revealed that the fungus that causes the coffee wilt could also attack cloned coffee. “Some are susceptible to the wilt,” says a scientist from the National Agricultural Research Organisation.

Officials advise coffee farmers to plant six clonal lines since some lines might prove less susceptible than others. “Unless it is an excessively dry period, clonal coffee will do well,” says William Nagagga, board secretary of the Uganda Coffee Development Organisation.

The larger coffee plantations in Uganda have moved away or are in

the process of moving away from robusta coffee. But it is a harder task for the smaller coffee farmers. Clonal coffee involves a high cost of production and is more expensive to grow as it requires a higher level of inputs such as pesticides.

These constraints are not restricted to Uganda. Women farmers in most developing countries are faced with obstacles like lack of access to land. Where the land is available, they are likely to lack access to capital or credit to buy fertilisers or manure to increase agricultural productivity.

## Government intervention

Redressing this problem will require interventions from local and national governments, in the form of incentives to grow traditional and non-traditional cash crops as well as food crops. This strategy has been successful with women farmers in Tkalore Clubs in Zomba and Blantyre in southern Malawi, who now plant 1/10 ha in tobacco and 4/10 ha of local maize instead of 1/2 ha of local maize.

Governments can also encourage women to earn more incomes by enabling them to acquire credit on subsidised rates. It is only when women farmers have a cash income that they will have a sustainable way to buy or repay loans for fertiliser inputs, improve productivity, earn high incomes and contribute to national development.

## UGANDA

# Commerce triumphs over local interests

By Edith Kimuli

**RUTH NAKATO** is a bitter woman. "Before we started working in the forest, I earned less than Sh5,000 a month as a porter, and I was always in debt," she says. "My husband is a retired civil servant, so I am the sole breadwinner in my family."

Nakato is one of many women who once depended on Butamira Forest Reserve in eastern Uganda for a livelihood. Their lives have been turned upside down by a decision early this year by the parliament to endorse the allocation of 1,257 hectares to the Madhvani Group for growing of sugarcane.

Despite campaigning to stop a sugar milling company from taking over part of their forestland, the people of Butamira in eastern Uganda lost out to commerce after a four-year campaign.

Trouble began in 1998, when Kakira Sugar Works, owned by Madhvani, was allowed to cultivate more sugarcane on the land. The firm had cleared 700 hectares of forest before local residents protested, after which parliament cancelled the new lease.

## 80 per cent women

The residents, comprising 148 groups and 10 individuals, were allowed to replant the 700 hectares. They inter-cropped eucalyptus and food crops. With the reversal of their fortunes, life will never be the same again.

About 80 percent of the local population that depends on the forest for a living are women, and they now have to travel long distances in search of water, firewood and food.

A 30-year-old woman sits in front of her hut on the edges of the forest in Jinja district. She has five children, she says. She cannot cultivate the land she once had at Butamira because her family has been "compensated". She was paid about US\$200 for the crops she had planted but never had a chance to use the money. Her husband took it away.

She wonders where she will fetch water in the next few years since the springs are likely to dry up. Many women in Butamira depended on the forest for fuel, edible rats and fish. They also sold eucalyptus and maize. Now there is no forest, but the women still have the responsibility of feeding their families.

All they can do these days is recall the bountiful past. They did not only grow crops alongside the trees, but they also harvested herbs and weaving materials. They would make baskets and mats for the urban market in Jinja town, 20 kilometres away.

Butamira forest also served as a catchment area diluting the effluent from Kakira Sugar Works before the water flowed on to Kiko River and the Nile.

Gazetted by the Busoga monarchy in the 1930s, Butamira was



Women tending Eucalyptus nurseries at Butamira forest reserve in October last year.

leased to Kakira Sugar Works in the 1940s. It was taken over by the central government in 1966 after monarchies were abolished. The lease expired in 1998, but the company managed to extend it for another 48 years and promptly cleared 700 hectares.

Locals formed the Butamira Environment Pressure Group to save the forest. Parliament cancelled the permit and also dismissed the forestry officer involved. The Forest department was ordered instead to permit the villagers to replant Butamira in 2000.

Two years later, Butamira had the largest eucalyptus tree nursery in Uganda, but this is expected to make way for sugarcane soon. Protests by local people and environmentalists have not done much good.

Minister for Lands and Environment Ruhakana Rugunda argues that Uganda needs to produce more sugar for export to Europe. Uganda's quota in the European Union market has been supplied by Malaysia, he says. There is also a deficit of 50,000 tonnes on the local market.

Madhvani promises to pay US\$5 million in taxes every year. Outgrowers are also to be given a

chance to grow 50 percent of the sugarcane used in the factory. "Sugar cannot be productive if they get raw material over 30 kilometres away," says Richard Orr, marketing manager at Kakira Sugar Works.

## Immense power

Foreign investors tend to wield immense power in poor countries such as Uganda. Butamira is not the only gazetted area that has been given to investors. Kakira has also reduced Walubumbu Forest Reserve, also in eastern Uganda, from 2,686 hectares to only 119. In total, over 20,475 hectares of forest have been converted to either agriculture or industrialisation.

The Africa Environment Outlook report, launched in Kampala in July, says Uganda lost 20 percent of its forest cover in the last century – possibly the highest depletion rate in the world.

Between 1990 and 2000, Africa has experienced the clearing of 50 million hectares of forests. African people and economies depend largely on rain-fed agriculture. Yet records from 1900 show that the continent's annual rainfall has dropped significantly due to global warming.

Besides, there are fresh threats of climate change in the next three decades due to the expansion of cities and pollution from cars and industries. All these factors are bound to aggravate the levels of poverty, environmental decline and ill health.

Crop yields in parts of southern Africa may fall by as much as 20 percent in the next decade if environmental degradation is not checked, the Africa Environment Outlook reports.

The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro noted that the eradication of poverty is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Economic and social development priorities need to be integrated into forest conservation measures so that local communities can share in the management of resources and also benefit from trade in their products.

Developing countries are at a crossroads, caught between protecting what they have and attracting much-needed foreign investment. Whatever the priorities, there has to be political will to protect the environment. Africa must avoid being held hostage by investors if sustainable development is to be realised.

## KENYA

# Country prepares for return of the dreaded El Nino

By Joy Machau

**RECENTLY**, Kenyans woke up to the news that they should brace themselves for another El Nino spell. And this at a time when the country is still feeling the effects of the last disaster in 1998/1999.

Director of Meteorological Services Joseph Mukabana blames it on the mild warming of surface temperatures in the southeast equatorial and the Pacific oceans. Weather centres are coming closer to issuing formal alerts advising lo-

cal communities to prepare for the floods, drought and famine and shrinking food supplies that accompany the El Nino phenomenon.

Weather experts predict that the El Nino will hit the East African region from October through to the first quarter of next year. This weather condition has a major impact on agriculture, the fishing industry and energy resources.

The last El Nino episode left a trail of destruction in the infrastructure and the economy in general. This time, we have been fore-

warned. Unlike in the West, the poor in Africa do not have insurance policies to compensate them for damage caused by bad weather and natural disasters.

In the UK, the Thames Barrier has been built to protect London from flooding. In Tokyo, millions of dollars have been spent on technology to predict when earthquakes will strike. Communities without adequate money suffer most from natural disasters and take longer time to recover. Because the exact timing and impact of El Nino is dif-

ferent each time, planning is made all the more difficult.

In 2000, the Office of the President set up the El Nino Emergency Project that works jointly with donors to fund projects that were severely affected by the last disaster.

Rural Kenya was hardest hit. Images of women and children fleeing their homes are still fresh on our minds. At least 86 people lost their lives, large numbers of livestock perished and electricity and telephone lines were destroyed. Many

parts of the country were completely cut off. Families were forced to take refuge in schools and churches; some experienced disease outbreaks as a result of congestion and malnutrition.

Women, who traditionally grow the food crops that sustain their families, paid a high price for the displacement resulting from the last El Nino. The alert has been sounded early this time. The key question is whether they can expect better preparation from their government this time round.

## UGANDA

# Get the land ... the rest will follow

By Alice Emasu

Three years ago, Ethics and Integrity Minister Miria Matembe said the law should be amended to include co-ownership of land. But her colleagues in the Cabinet suggested that it should be incorporated in the Domestic Relations Bill instead.

Last month, Matembe was singing a different song. In a keynote address at the Women's World Congress, she said: "Women in Uganda should forget about the co-ownership land clause being incorporated in the 1997 Land Act."

The 200 or so delegates from all over the world barely had time to absorb this bombshell before she added that although women are not adequately covered by the law, the matter would not be resolved any time soon – given the pace at which the Cabinet was considering the co-ownership clause and the Bill.

Matembe argued that legal discrimination and inadequacy of Uganda's laws limits women's participation in national development. The country's law on domestic relations was enacted in 1902 and is based on English law.

The new development was not entirely unexpected, however. Not after President Yoweri Museveni told women's rights activists that co-ownership of land would encourage some greedy women to grab their husband's property, including land.

*"Women's ownership of land is crucial in fighting poverty and will also bring about sustainable development."*

Vice-President Specioza Kazibwe has a slightly different take on the matter. What Ugandan women need for sustainable development is not so much ownership and control of land as skills for modernising agriculture. During the Congress, held at Makerere University, she said there was no reason why African women should not buy land for themselves. And this on a continent where the majority of people live on less than a dollar a day!

According to Ruth Mubiru, director of the International Network on Women and Desertification, the solution to poverty in Africa is to involve women in the proper use and management of natural resources, including land.

Although women comprise 80 percent of Uganda's agricultural producers, only three percent of them own land.

"Women's ownership of land is crucial in fighting poverty and will also bring about sustainable development," says Mubiru, who is also the director of the Uganda Tree Planting Movement. "Women are the majority of squatters in most parts of Uganda."

She adds that most rural folk lack the skills to effectively use land. "Since women are mostly squatters, men take advantage to dictate how much and what food they should grow. Women on the continent can-

not embark on large-scale agriculture, which would enable them to improve their livelihood."

Skills for modernising agriculture would not only enhance land fertility but also boost productivity and sustainability of agriculture, the main employer for African women.

Though Uganda's 1995 constitution appears to be gender-sensitive, the reality on the ground is different, says the Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative's report *Who Depends on Who*. The 20-page report notes that legal provisions are not enough.

"The challenge on gender equity pressure groups is to lobby for laws that can meaningfully operationalise the constitution," the researchers point out.

The Cabinet's decision to place the co-ownership clause in the Domestic Relations Bill is cited as evidence of the government's lack of seriousness on issues to do with gender relations.

Though the clause could be incorporated in both the Bill and the Land Act, there are those who argue that it is of greater benefit to women in the Act since the Bill can only be a subsidiary law.

Though the Land Act states that land belongs to all citizens, the reality is that men

own land and women have user rights only. In an environment in which traditions and customs exist side by side with the law, the imbalances in land ownership only serve to deepen poverty.

The study shows that women in many developing countries are in practice barred from inheriting property, even where there are no males left in the immediate family, since customs dictate that land is passed on to a male relative.

The neglect of women farmers has contributed to what has been described as the "feminisation of poverty".

Where new technologies have been introduced, men have taken the jobs. Over the past 20 years, the number of rural women living in absolute poverty increased by 50 percent—from 370 million to 565 million. Over the same period, the percentage of men in absolute poverty increased by 30 percent.

Uganda's Country Document to be presented at the World Summit for Social Development says over 90 percent of the population directly depends on natural resources for a livelihood.

The document, prepared by the Ministry of Lands and Environment, argues for the involvement of women in the management and control of these resources in order to raise standards of living at the household level. This is unlikely to happen unless the issues surrounding land ownership are resolved.

## GHANA

# Fair trade runs into trouble

By Charity Binka, Ghana

**MERCY SABLAH** smiles a great deal these days. The 40-year-old is one of about 100 women working at Volta River Estate, the only Ghanaian company that exports bananas.

Before she came here, she made a living selling tomatoes. Nine years later, she has no regrets about joining the company. Though the salary is low—less than US\$100 a month—she is assured of the next meal. Because the company practices fair trade, she is also certain that she will not be sacked without good reason. "I will work here till God calls me," she declares.

She may not know it, but market developments in the European Union pose a threat to the job security she values so much. But for such trade restrictions, fair trade would have been the answer to poverty in the developing nations.

The Fair Trade movement was born in 1995 out of a growing awareness in the industrialised countries that the international trade was unfair to producers. This is especially true for small-scale farmers and rural workers in developing countries, which produce food crops for export to the richer countries.

Fair Trade aims at paying producer groups a decent price and giving them stable markets for their produce. Fair Trade has three main aims: Market access for disadvantaged producers and workers, a long-term stable trade relationship and stable, fair prices that cover the real costs of production and includes a premium for investing in business development as well as social and environmental improvements.

In the long run, Fair Trade is expected to boost the capacity of developing countries to help themselves rather than depend on aid. Moreover, farmers gain control over industries in which they have had virtually no say. Bananas are exported each year under the Fair Trade label from Latin America and Africa to nine European countries.

## 95 workers retrenched

Now the European Union has reduced Ghana's quota of bananas from 6,400 cartons a week to an all-time low of 600. For the first time since it was established in 1998, Volta River Estate was compelled in January this year to retrench 95 workers due to the crisis. Production cannot stop overnight, howev-

er, and the company finds itself literally swamped with excess bananas. Unlike crops such as coffee, tea and cocoa, bananas have a short shelf life.

According to Anthony Blay, general manager of Volta River Estate, Ghana's venture into the non-traditional banana crop was doing well until the European Union quota regime began in 1983. More trouble came in 1988, when an outbreak of the Black Sigatoka devastated the plantation.

With a new set of investors, the company re-opened in 1992. By the time the first container was ready for export, however, the European Union had created a distinction between the various producers in the African, Caribbean and Pacific grouping. The traditional producers of bananas were granted specific quotas. Since Ghana had suspended production at the time of the allocations, Volta River Estate had no quota. The country ended up with about 5,000 tonnes, which restricted the company's potential for expansion.

In 2001, Volta River Estate entered into a deal with a European firm, Agrofair. But while the Ghanaian firm can export its bananas, Agrofair does not have the

licence to take the container loads into the market.

According to Blay, Volta River Estate exports about 4,000 boxes of banana every week. But only 2,000 are allowed under Fair Trade. The amount was as low as 1,500 a few months ago. The rest of the bananas are sold in the open market at very low prices.

Fair Trade is not an initiative of the EU, operating more like a non-governmental organisation bringing together the various nations that are pushing for their rights and fairness in the market place.

## Partners unfairly treated

Says Blay: "We filed a case in the European Union fast track court. It is not only Volta River Estate that is suffering. Our partners in Europe were also unfairly treated under the new regime. If the European Union is doing this, it means that at the end of the day they are trying to defeat the purpose of the Fair Trade altogether."

What does the future hold? To a large extent, Ghana's budding banana export trade depends on possible change in the European Union system. "If what they have promised now continues, it will be a big relief," says Blay. "Besides, we

want to remain in the niche market instead of focusing on the traditional market, which we would get nothing for."

Volta River Estate proposes to go into organic farming, which is a growth area in consumer trends. "By going organic and concentrating on the niche market, which not too many countries can do because of the disease pressure, we have a bigger advantage," says the general manager.

Fair Trade has other advantages, including respect for workers. The rights of workers are often abused in multi-national plantations since they are not allowed to form unions. Even where the unions exist, management controls them.

Fair Trade also demands that hazardous chemicals are not used, and Volta River Estate has reduced their use by 80 percent. Says Blay: "Plantations in countries such as Costa Rica have to use helicopters or other planes to spray chemicals as often as 50 times a year. We do this only eight times a year. Even if we have nematodes in our soils, we have scattered our plantations on four different sites. So we can allow one site to lie fallow. We return in about two years, and we don't have to apply the nematicides."

## ZIMBABWE

# Powering the lives of rural women

By Sibongile Ncube

**DUE** to historical circumstances and tradition, women are the majority of the rural population in most developing countries. Zimbabwe, with a 70 percent rural population, is no exception.

The implication is that an energy crisis in the rural areas will mostly affect women by virtue of their role as household managers. But the rural economy is rarely depicted in national statistics, an indication of the invisibility of women's labour and their contribution to the Gross Domestic Product.

Energy in Zimbabwe has largely been defined as commercial or non-commercial for the urban areas and productive or non-productive for the rural areas. The result is that rural energy receives less capital investment and is the least developed.

National energy plans are biased towards commercial fuels, which involve foreign exchange and regional and world politics, at the expense of cheap and environmentally friendly energy sources.

Energy plays a pivotal role in development and must be understood in the context of agriculture, income-generating activities, social gatherings for which food and drinks are essential, water lifting, transportation and food processing and preparation as well as lighting. It is necessary to assess the role of women within the development context in which the different ener-

gy needs are to be addressed.

Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority Chairman Sidney Gata says his organisation has set aside \$24 billion for an electrification programme targeting rural service centres and schools that will see thousands of rural households able to draw energy.

## Regular energy supply

Hundreds of women in Ntabazinduna communal lands in Matabeleland North Province have been empowered by a regular energy supply. Rural homes in the area now resemble houses in towns and the new programme has helped scores of women start business ventures.

Zodwa Nkala, a mother of three, says access to energy sources has enabled her start a juice-making business, which has cushioned her family from the worst effects of the economic downturn.

Nkala, 34, recently acquired an electric juice-making machine from a non-governmental organisation to help her in her business. "Now we are able to even do more agricultural projects like market gardening since it is now easy to draw water from the nearby dam using pumps," she says.

Another group of local women have since embarked on a sewing project and are set to receive five industrial machines from an NGO working with women on self-help projects. Schoolchildren in the area can now study until late. The benefits are almost endless.

Under the Rural Electrification Programme, community initiated projects are eligible for a 60 percent capital subsidy.

The communities pay 40 percent of the cost of electrification work while 10 percent of the percentage is paid as deposit. More than 41 projects have been completed in Matabeleland region and more are in the pipeline. Gata says the power company is set to establish multimillion-dollar power supply facilities in Lupane, a district in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland North province, to make it possible to expand electrification to other districts in the neighbourhood.

"The integrated customer services centre will be the first of its kind in the country and we are using Lupane as a demonstration before establishing similar facilities elsewhere," says Gata. "We want to be able to support agricultural development and recognise Lupane as the provincial capital."

The substation, which would boost power in the provincial capital from 11 kilovolts to 33 kilovolts, is expected to be the backbone of agricultural development programmes.

Women, being the majority farmers in the communal areas, need appropriate energy-related technologies for agricultural use in order to lessen their burden as they are often overloaded with domestic chores as well.

In developing these technologies, however, consideration must be



Energy crises in Africa's rural areas affect women worst.

given to the end-user. They have to be simple, requiring little maintenance, affordable and capable of being operated by women so that they do not have to hire additional labour or rely on male members of the household.

Being capital intensive and usually dependent on foreign funding, the energy sector needs support from donors and other multilateral financing institutions. A local environmental research organisation, ZERO, commissioned a case study of two villages in Masvingo with the aim of getting a better understanding of rural women's energy needs at the micro-level.

## Rural energy needs

The study sought to contribute towards the development of a framework that would provide a basis for in-depth understanding of perceptions of rural energy needs and preferences.

According to the study, rural women's energy needs fell in three categories: the household, income

generating and agricultural activities.

Also realising the need to protect the environment for sustainable development, organisations such as ZERO have been in the forefront in the promotion of renewable energy technologies that are environmentally friendly, such as solar and wind energy.

The NGO, together with the department of energy and Powervision Ltd has set up 10 sites around the country where wind has generated energy for hundreds of communities. The ZERO initiative is the result of the dogged persistence and belief in the ability of wind energy meeting some of the power needs of rural communities.

The wind turbine is likely to find a ready market both in Zimbabwe and the region, as the technology is competitive and relatively easy to use.

Other renewable sources of energy that have been promoted in Zimbabwe include the use of wood stoves, solar and hydro-energy.

## UGANDA

# Children come at a high price in rural Africa

By Anne Mugisa, Uganda

**E**nid Bahara gets up in the wee hours each morning and walks 10 kilometres to her two-acre farm, where she grows food for her family. But the 38-year-old mother of eight has barely enough land to cultivate. Her homestead, on one-and-a-half acres, and the distant farm do not yield enough.

Apart from Bwindi impenetrable forest and Mgahinga forest, land in Kabale district in southwest Uganda has been severely degraded. According to the National State of the Environment report, Kabale has had an annual temperature rise of 0.39 degrees per decade, which is way too high. The report says the micro-climatic warming could be due to massive land and swamp reclamation.

The major culprit in the degradation in this region is high fertility. The population explosion has exerted immense pressure on the land as the people, most of them peasant farmers, struggle to provide for their large families.

The rich vegetation in Bwindi once covered Kabale and the neighbouring districts of Kisoro and Rukungiri. But huge chunks of land have been depleted by the daily quest for water, fuel, cultivation and general land use, according to the environment report.

Bwindi, which was turned into a national park a few years ago for its own protection, is one of the richest forests in the world in plant and animal species. Bwindi is now home to a number of rare and endangered species not found elsewhere in East Africa. It is a storehouse of genetic wealth and a po-

tential source of new foods, fibres, drugs and knowledge.

Kabale's population is growing at average 7.4 children per woman, compared with the national average of 6.9. The small holdings are constantly under cultivation in order to meet the needs of families. The continuous cropping is carried out without appropriate soil and water conservation measures, according to the National Environment Management Authority.

Families often have to walk a minimum of five kilometres to till the numerous small fragments of land scattered in the locality. Overgrazing on both the high and gentle slopes of the hilly district complicates matters further.

Like Kabale, several districts of Uganda face serious degradation due to the pressure on land from galloping population growth rates.

They include Kotido and Moroto in the northeast and some parts of Mbarara in the west. Parts of Nebbi, Rakai, Masaka, Iganga and Bushenyi are also heavily utilised.

Uganda's rich biodiversity has declined since the 1960s and the problems are bound to continue unless steps are taken to address the population growth. Children in large families have fewer chances of education and suffer a higher incidence of ill health. They are constantly struggling to survive.

Women are often the worst affected by these circumstances, because their ideas may not carry weight within the family. Besides, they are the bulk of the least educated in society. In the largely patrilineal Ugandan communities, men make most of the decisions at the family level - ranging from land to women's sexuality. The frequent

pregnancies severely affect women's health.

Where women are educated, the conditions change dramatically. The population and census report indicates that women with no education had a fertility rate of 7.8 children while those with a secondary level education had 3.9.

Studies have shown that men insist on large families for prestige, power, wealth, labour and security, says Ssentumbwe Mugisa, the World Health Organisation family health and population adviser in Uganda.

"Those clamouring for more children are unaware that numbers per se are counter-productive because they become an expense in the final analysis," she says. In a situation of poverty, high numbers of children consume more than they can produce in terms of labour."

## ZIMBABWE

# Dying for gold, however elusive

By Sifanele Ndlovu, Zimbabwe

**FACED** with starvation due to drought, controversial land reforms and a free-falling economy, many Zimbabweans are heading for the nearest river in the hope that they will pan their way into a meaningful amount of gold.

The more daring ones risk venturing into disused mine shafts to collect soil in the often fruitless search. It is a strenuous process that involves washing off the loose soil, pounding the ore and trying to separate whatever gold particles are available from the rubble. Many have lost their lives after the mine shafts collapsed on them. But this has not deterred the desperate people, who continue flocking the various panning sites.

In July, 15 miners were killed when the walls of a shaft they were working on collapsed and buried them alive. The miners had connived with a security guard to allow them to sneak into the shaft in the night and dig up ore.

Despite the potential for tragedy,

*Rising unemployment rates drive workers into dangerous work*

the number of Zimbabweans panning for gold has risen dramatically in the past year. With unemployment at around 60 percent and subsistence agriculture ruled out as an option because of drought, people have very few options for survival. Over six million Zimbabweans have been affected by the drought.

Women are found in large numbers at panning sites. The speculators have set up haphazard settlements along riverbanks, from where they ply their trade. In some of these settlements, entire families – including women with babies – can be found digging incessantly all day in the hope of getting gold. Not only is their work a health threat, it also leads to environmental degradation and desertification



Unemployment has driven women into the strenuous exercise of collecting soil from disused mineshafts

and threatens water sources through pollution and siltation.

The situation is so serious that Zimbabwe's second largest city, Bulawayo, has been forced to take measures to curb the panning activities in the catchment areas of its dams. The Bulawayo City Council resolved at a meeting in July to employ more rangers to police the catchment area and thwart panning activities, which are threatening the quality of water in the dams, particularly Umzingwane Dam. "The presence of large numbers of humans in the catchment areas without proper sanitary facilities will cause excessive quantities of nitrates in the water, which leads to algae growth," says Job Jika Ndebele, acting chair of the environmental management and engineering services committee.

The city will be forced to spend more on chemicals to purify water to levels that comply with standards for human consumption if the pollution continues, he said.

The speculators pollute the water not just because of their lack of

sanitary facilities, but through the introduction of chemicals such as mercury and cyanide that are used to purify or separate gold from other chemical residue found in ore.

Although gold panning is not new in Zimbabwe, it was not until recently that Bulawayo began to feel the pinch. "In the past, gold panning activities were concentrated downstream of the dams, thus posing little danger to council water supplies," says Ndebele. "This has since changed and gold panning is taking place both upstream and downstream."

The government relaxed mining laws three years ago and granted rural district councils the powers to obtain mining concessions, which they would then sub-divide among small-scale miners.

The councils would be responsible for ensuring that environmentally friendly methods of mining were used, thus addressing both poverty and environmental protection. In return, they would boost their revenue coffers by charging fees for permits.

## Alluvial system

The university devised an alluvial mining system that was mindful of the impact of mining activities on the environment and recommended that the council help permit holders obtain tools like wheelbarrows, sluice boxes and pumps to use in their activities. The pumps are used to draw water to the panning site, which ideally should be at least 30 metres off the riverbank to avoid siltation.

Some brick making enterprises have sprung up in Insiza, using soil from the panning process and ensuring that the soil does not silt the rivers. Water is an essential part of the panning process, which explains the concentration of panning activities along rivers. The projects officer for the Insiza Rural District Council, Pardon Moyo, says the council controlled the speculators' activities by not renewing permits

for people who damage the environment. "Our alluvial mining controller inspects all the sites and orders permit holders to cover up any pits they may have left open before their permits can be renewed each year," he adds.

## Revolving loans

As part of the package to encourage environmentally friendly mining methods, the council established a revolving loan fund to enable miners to buy equipment like pumps and wheelbarrows and sluice boxes that ensure efficiency in trapping gold particles. Although the funds were not enough to cover everyone, those who received them improved their scale of production and created jobs.

One of those that benefited from this scheme is Fanuel Dube, who now employs 10 people on his site and produces an average of five grams of gold a day. He says: "The new method of panning is very efficient. In the old days, we had no sluice boxes. We made makeshift boxes using sand and sacks but these were not very efficient in trapping gold."

Very few women have benefited from the legalised mining, however, as they cannot raise the funds to buy equipment and pay for permits. The council charges a fee of \$5,000 per year for a mining permit. As a result, women are counted among the illegal speculators whose activities have wreaked havoc on the environment.

The penalty for those convicted of illegal panning is a \$500 (US\$5 at the official exchange rate) and authorities have admitted that this is not deterrent enough. When they do strike gold, the speculators can sell it on the black market for up to \$5,000 per gram.

Many miners are arrested, only to pay the fine and resume their activities. "The heavy handed police approach has not worked so far and we do not see it working," says Moyo.

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