

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Region: Southern Africa

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Summary of Report

Economy & Energy

Sub-Saharan Africa resilient to global crisis: IMF

Sub-Saharan Africa is proving surprisingly resilient in emerging from the global financial crisis compared with previous downturns, the African Department Director at the International Monetary Fund said on Friday.

S. Africa committed to low inflation: c. bank economist

The South African Reserve Bank is committed to promoting financial stability and maintaining low inflation, its chief economist Monde Mnyande said on Thursday.

Foreigners to boost S.African economy during World Cup

Foreigners will inject 13 billion rand into South Africa's economy during the World Cup, helping the soccer spectacular boost economic growth by 0.5 percentage points.

Zimbabwe empowerment laws worry foreign investors

Controversial new policies to give black Zimbabweans majority stakes in foreign companies in the country have scared off investors from abroad, stock exchange Chief Executive Emmanuel Munyukwi said on Wednesday.

Zimbabwe says foreign firm takeovers start with mines

Zimbabwe's controversial policy of transferring majority control of foreign-owned firms to black Zimbabweans will begin in the key mining sector, a minister said on Tuesday.

S. Africa to face power crunch in 2011-13, 2018-24

South Africa will face a power supply crunch between 2011-13 and 2018-24 unless more power plants than are planned are built, state-owned power utility Eskom said on Monday.

S. Africa's land reform slows sugar sector investment

Uncertainty over South Africa's land reform programme meant to hand over 30 percent of farm land to the country's black majority by 2014 has slowed investment in its sugar sector, an industry official said.

ANGOLA: Oil wealth no benefit to farmers

Angola is a country, which rich in oil reserves. But this oil wealth does not benefit to the farmers. And it does not make any difference for them. Although the government has claimed that it provides free seeds and fertilizer benefiting three million people; but a food analyst says there was no assistance for the large majority of subsistence cultivators.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Competing for Limpopo water

Climate change will bring higher temperatures to Southern Africa while changing rainfall patterns will affect the amount of water available for food production.

Environmental Issues

MOZAMBIQUE: Co-existing With Floods

April signals the tail end of the flood season in Mozambique. The country's water managers will soon be able to appraise the effects of changing policies.

WATER-LESOTHO: Getting Community Consultation Right

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project will move into its second phase in 2010. The first phase has been praised as a shining example of transboundary water sharing in Africa, but community dissatisfaction may mean a rough ride for its extension.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Benefits of Working Together on Water

As a region, Southern Africa faces water scarcity which is expected to grow more acute as the effects of climate change manifest. Almost all of the fresh water in the region is found in shared water courses - across Africa, 93 percent of surface water is found in rivers that spill over national boundaries. The Fourth Regional Workshop on Strengthening River Basin Organisations, taking place in the Botswanan capital, Gaborone on Apr. 20-21, is part of a process of developing clear guidelines for the Southern African Development Community's strategy on transboundary waters. The annual workshops, supported by GTZ, InWent, UKAID and USAID, bring together researchers and water policy makers from across the region.

MOZAMBIQUE: Weather Service Key to Flood Disaster Management

Mozambique's government learned some tough lessons from the devastating floods that hit the country a decade ago. Experts say the disaster management plans drawn up since are a model for other African countries.

Human Rights & Social Issues

Zimbabwe: Empty Promises for Free Expression

Zimbabwe's power-sharing government has not carried out critical media reforms as promised under the country's September 2008 Global Political Agreement, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

SOUTH AFRICA: Poor people's movement draws government wrath

The rise of an organized poor people's movement in South Africa's most populous province, KwaZulu-Natal, is being met with increasing hostility by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) government, which claims to be the legitimate representative of the poorest of the poor.

South Africa Aims for 15 Million HIV Tests in 14 Months

Sunday President Jacob Zuma will launch a national campaign to test 15 million South Africans for HIV by June, 2011. The campaign will likely stress the country's already ailing health-care system. The HIV testing and counseling campaign will be launched at a single location in each of South Africa's nine provinces this month. The program will be expanded every two months until 52 health centers are offering the service.

HIV/AIDS Study says Death of a Mother More Detrimental to Children than Loss of the Father

It's estimated that 15 million children have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. But research shows the death of the mother to the disease can have a much greater and longer lasting effect on a child than the death of the father.

Women Farmers Can Play Big Role in Reducing World Hunger, says New Report

Women farmers hold the “key” to sharply reducing world hunger, according to a new report from the humanitarian organization Action Aid.

Zuma says South Africa Ready 50 Days Before World Cup Kick-Off

South African President Jacob Zuma says his country is ready for the football World Cup, and predicts a memorable event. He was speaking during ceremonies 50 days before the tournament kicks-off on June 11.

Human Rights Watch Criticizes Media Repression in Zimbabwe

A leading international human-rights group says Zimbabwe's unity government still has not implemented promised media reforms and that President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party still controls most levers of government despite a 14-month-old power-sharing accord.

South Africa probe into luxury Rovos Rail train crash

Brake failure is being investigated as the possible cause of a luxury train crash in South Africa which killed four people, a safety official says.

Politics

Zimbabwe's Mugabe backs Iran's nuclear programme

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe has backed Iran's controversial nuclear programme and accused the West of seeking to punish the two countries for asserting their independence.

Mugabe urges end to violence as Zimbabwe turns 30

President Robert Mugabe on Sunday urged Zimbabweans to end political violence and focus on rebuilding a devastated economy that critics say is a victim of his three decades in power.

Iran president on controversial visit to Zimbabwe

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad began a visit to Zimbabwe on Thursday condemned by President Robert Mugabe's opponents as a meeting of despots which could further isolate Harare.

Arrests in Madagascar after suspected coup plot

Security forces in Madagascar arrested 19 people on Sunday on suspicion of plotting a coup, the latest in a series of plot rumours to hit the Indian Ocean island's capital in the past few weeks.

Zimbabwe: Iran's leader spark tension

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad began a visit to Zimbabwe on Thursday condemned by President Robert Mugabe's opponents as a meeting of despots which could further isolate Harare. The Iranian leader is in the southern African country to open an annual trade fair.

Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad Visits Zimbabwe

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad arrived in Harare Thursday for a state visit and to open the annual international trade fair in Zimbabwe's second city Bulawayo.

Zambian President and Opposition Leader Trade Jabs Ahead of By-Elections

The political rhetoric in Zambia appears to be heating up as the country prepares to hold its parliamentary by-elections on April 29.

Zimbabwe's Mugabe Denounces Political Violence, Urges Tolerance

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe has denounced political violence and urged fellow citizens to unite in rebuilding the nation. He made the remarks during ceremonies marking the 30th anniversary of Zimbabwe's independence.

Discipline of Errant ANC Members Not New, Says Analyst

In South Africa, a political analyst says the ruling African National Congress (ANC) reserves the right to discipline any party member who undermines its principles. Professor Rok Ajulu says if the outspoken youth leader (Julius Malema) is punished over his remarks, it will not be the first time the ANC has taken a decisive disciplinary action against an errant partisan.

Zimbabwe's President Mugabe Calls for End to Inter-Party Violence

President Robert Mugabe has appealed for an end to political violence in Zimbabwe as the country marks 30 years of independence.

World out to get us: Ahmadinejad to Zim

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has accused world powers of trying to destroy the economies of Zimbabwe and his own nation, which faces the threat of toughened sanctions.

US and UK failed to impose sanctions on apartheid SA

"Where were the sanctions when the U.N. demanded that sanctions be leveled against the racist, most evil and vile rogue regime to ever exist - the apartheid regime?" A reader asks this question in relation to the mooted sanctions against Iran.

Pan Africa

Madagascar talks set for April 28 in South Africa

The protagonists in Madagascar's political crisis have agreed to attend talks in South Africa on April 28. The latest round of talks has been arranged by mediators from France, South Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Detailed Report

Economy & Energy

Sub-Saharan Africa resilient to global crisis: IMF

(Reuters)

24 April 2010

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Sub-Saharan Africa is proving surprisingly resilient in emerging from the global financial crisis compared with previous downturns, the African Department Director at the International Monetary Fund said on Friday.

Just a year ago the IMF warned that Africa was to face major setbacks as the fallout spread from the global economic downturn. But the poorest countries of the region rebounded with greater strength and speed than predicted, Antoinette Sayeh told Reuters. Some economies avoided contraction all together in 2009.

Just last year, IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn described the region's economies as "an innocent victim of this global financial tsunami."

Economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to double this year and further accelerate in 2011 as long as the global economy continues to improve.

Regional output is projected to expand by 4.75 percent in 2010 compared with 2 percent last year, stronger than Latin America, and Middle East and North Africa regions.

Sub-Saharan Africa's growth could reach 5.75 percent next year if global conditions advance.

"We see positive developments across the region and certainly in the context of what we have seen in response to the crisis and efforts made to sustain economic growth," Sayeh said. "We have seen good progress in most sub-Saharan African countries; that is encouraging to potential investors."

The stronger macroeconomic position and the limited integration of many countries in the region into the world economy shielded them from the global recession.

"On average, Africa did better but there were groups of countries that were hit by the crisis -- those were the most advanced, and oil exporting countries. These countries are recovering fast," she added.

The 29 smaller and more fragile countries, with a combined population of 750 million, did better than expected, "which is encouraging because those are the ones can least afford not to grow and make progress."

Africa is becoming one of the main destinations for frontier market investors looking for high growth while assuming the risk of small and sometimes volatile economies.

Sayeh said the region avoided much of the downward pressure from the crisis because of counter-cyclical economic policies pursued in many countries.

"Nearly two-thirds of countries experiencing a slowdown in 2009 were able to increase government spending to buttress economic activity. Policy interest rates were also reduced in most countries," except where this would have been harmful because of exchange rate regimes or inflationary pressures.

Republic of Congo is expected to growth the fastest, at 12.1 percent this year, while Madagascar is the only country in the region to post a contraction, with output expected to decline 1 percent.

Economic growth in middle-income and oil-exporting countries was hurt by the sharp fall in export volumes and a slump in oil prices in early 2009 as world demand collapsed.

Sayeh said there is a need to address the problems in the financial sector, mentioning Nigeria's \$4 billion bailout of nine weakly-capitalized financial institutions last year.

"There has been a big effort to restructure the banking sector, and the Fund has been very involved in supporting the good efforts on the part of the government to get the financial sector resolution underway," Sayeh said.

Nigeria, the second largest economy in the region, is in the process of passing the Asset Management Company legislation, which would soak up bad bank loans.

"We expect it to be put in place in May. There has been good progress starting to roll that out in May if possible," Sayeh said.

"Going forward, it will be critical that other development partners and international financial institutions continue to support sub-Saharan African countries during the recovery," Sayeh said.

S. Africa committed to low inflation: c. bank economist

(Reuters)

22 April 2010

JOHANNESBURG (Reuters) - The South African Reserve Bank is committed to promoting financial stability and maintaining low inflation, its chief economist Monde Mnyande said on Thursday.

Mnyande, advisor to Governor Gill Marcus, also said economic growth was expected to remain in low positive territory and below potential in 2010 and 2011.

"An environment of financial stability and low inflation reduces the uncertainty and inflation premia built into interest rates. It also counters volatility," he told a banking meeting.

An environment of stable interest rates was important for business, offering greater certainty for both savers and borrowers and helping companies plan.

Mnyande said lower nominal interest rates could only be sustained if inflation was kept in check.

"Negative real interest rates are damaging to the economy, not least since such rates cause savers to subsidise borrowers, thereby undermining saving."

South Africa's central bank unexpectedly cut its repo rate by 50 basis points to 6.5 percent last month, bringing the base rate to a 30-year low.

The decision follows faster-than-expected slowdown in targeted consumer inflation and a better outlook for prices, and still weak consumer spending that may constrain a recovery from last year's recession.

Consumer inflation stood at 5.7 percent year-on-year in February.

Mnyande said output growth was expected to remain below potential for the next two year.

"Growth in South Africa's output is accordingly projected to remain in the lower positive territory -- and most certainly below the potential output level, for both 2010 and 2011," he said.

Potential output growth has been estimated at about 4.5 percent.

He said economists should not read too much into a weak reading of a single indicator, such as retail sales, but take a wider view of economic activity before drawing conclusions on future monetary policy decisions.

An unexpected continuation in February of the contraction in retail sales sparked speculation that the Reserve Bank may cut rates again in May to help lift growth.

Foreigners to boost S.African economy during World Cup

(Reuters)

21 April 2010

JOHANNESBURG (Reuters) - Foreigners will inject 13 billion rand into South Africa's economy during the World Cup, helping the soccer spectacular boost economic growth by 0.5 percentage points.

The estimated gross economic impact for South Africa, including indirect spending and infrastructure built over the past four years, will be 93 billion rand, according to a study by the accounting firm Grant Thornton.

But the bulk of this is internal government spending.

Gillian Saunders, who led the study, told journalists and economists on Wednesday that less foreign fans were expected to come than previously thought, but those that did would spend more compared to other tournaments like Germany in 2006.

With 50 days to go before kick-off, football fever is growing in South Africa but the global economic crisis, the tournament's high cost as a long haul destination and fears of violent crime have reduced the numbers of foreign fans.

"We have revised the figures post the world-wide recession and major ticket sales phases, and some of the numbers are encouraging," Grant Thornton's Gillian Saunders said, presenting the study on the World Cup's economic effect.

Grant Thornton has conducted in-depth research into the impact of the World Cup for South Africa, and its reports are seen as authoritative by other analysts.

The month-long soccer spectacular, first in Africa, starts on June 11.

National and regional governments have spent about 40 billion rand on stadiums, transport and airports.

Foreign fans should spend about 8.8 billion rand in the country and together with spending by governing body FIFA, other officials and teams, the economy will receive a 13 billion rand cash injection.

The study showed 373,000 foreigners were expected to visit South Africa for the tournament, about 230,000 of them ticket holders. This is higher than the most recent estimate by the local organisers of 200,000 foreign fans, but down on earlier predictions of 450,000 overseas visitors.

STAY LONGER

Saunders said about 85,000 fans from the rest of Africa and 20,000 other overseas visitors would travel without tickets, to enjoy the atmosphere at urban fan parks, where games will be shown on big screens.

Ticket sales to Africans may fall to just over 11,000 from a previous forecast of almost 50,000, largely due to a complicated internet sales system and the high cost of travel from other parts of the continent.

However, Saunders said fans from outside Africa should stay longer, and spend more.

"We always thought people would come for more matches in South Africa, because it is a long-haul destination, but it seems to be a bit more than that," she said.

A tourist should stay on average 18.7 days, watch five matches and spend, excluding flights, 30,200 rand during their stay.

Tourists in 2006 host Germany, close to many participating team countries, watched on average 2.6 matches.

Saunders added the long term benefits of hosting the World Cup could be huge.

While government spending on the tournament has been criticised as excessive, much of the infrastructure will leave a legacy for South Africa, particularly in modernising transport.

Marketing the country through a massive global television audience could attract about 2 million extra tourists over the next three years, according to the study.

"The profiling of South Africa and future spin-offs have always been the real benefit of hosting an event of this magnitude," Saunders said.

"It's going to be a great event ... volcanic ash willing," she added in reference to the Icelandic plume that has disrupted global air travel.

Zimbabwe empowerment laws worry foreign investors

(Reuters)

21 April 2010

HARARE (Reuters) - Controversial new policies to give black Zimbabweans majority stakes in foreign companies in the country have scared off investors from abroad, stock exchange Chief Executive Emmanuel Munyukwi said on Wednesday.

Munyukwi said in an interview orders from foreign investors had dried up since the end of January when Zimbabwe moved to implement the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act that requires foreign firms sell a 51 percent stake to local blacks.

"Last year our market was being driven by foreigners, upwards of 40 percent were foreigners and net buyers. But from the end of January with the gazetting of the indigenisation regulations, there has been a lot of uncertainty and foreigners have put a hold on their transactions," Munyukwi said.

A minister said on Tuesday the transfer of control of foreign companies would begin in the key mining sector.

Under the rules, which took effect on March 1, foreign-owned firms must submit plans to show how they will sell 51 percent of their shares to black Zimbabweans within five years.

The Zimbabwe Stock Exchange (ZSE) has 79 listed companies and a market capitalisation of \$3.2 billion, down from around \$11 billion in 1997-1998.

The exchange re-opened in February 2009 after closing in November 2008 at the height of the country's hyperinflation which devastated the economy and made its currency worthless.

VOLUMES RECOVERING SLOWLY

During the economic crisis, many Zimbabweans used the stock exchange to invest as it was the only investment option which gave some measure of protection to savings.

"When you started seeing vendors in the street playing the the market, you knew something was wrong," Munyukwi said.

Since then, volumes have picked up and until the controversy about selling off stakes of foreign firms, foreign buyers -- including South Africa's Investec and investment bank and asset manager RMB -- were acquiring Zimbabwean equities and providing much of the exchange's liquidity.

Daily turnover, which averaged \$2 million in 2009, fell to about \$700,000 after the empowerment law was published, although there has been an improvement to \$1.3 million in recent days.

Munyukwi said although some foreign interest had returned, the uncertainty over the empowerment laws remained an obstacle to badly-needed foreign investment.

"We are hearing that the regulations are going to be reviewed but the unfortunate thing is, investors don't wait for you. They will go elsewhere."

The new laws have divided the fragile power-sharing government formed by President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai last year, with Tsvangirai saying they were issued without consulting the cabinet.

Munyukwi said new listings on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange (ZSE) all depended on the economy picking up further. He singled out tourism and mining as sectors for possible new listings.

The ZSE, which opened in 1896, was looking to modernise and set up a central securities depository as a precursor to moving to electronic trading from open outcry, Munyukwi said.

It may look at South African bourse operator JSE Ltd (Johannesburg Stock Exchange) for help, he said.

"We are looking at all the various options. If you look worldwide, people are trying to piggy-back on the big exchanges because technology is always moving. I see scope in linking up with the JSE," he said.

Zimbabwe says foreign firm takeovers start with mines

(Reuters)

21 April 2010

HARARE (Reuters) - Zimbabwe's controversial policy of transferring majority control of foreign-owned firms to black Zimbabweans will begin in the key mining sector, a minister said on Tuesday.

Under regulations which took effect on March 1, the companies must submit plans to show how they will sell 51 percent of their shares to black Zimbabweans within five years.

The laws have divided the fragile unity government formed last year by Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, who said they were issued without consulting the cabinet.

"I am happy to announce that government has unanimously decided that implementation of our indigenisation policy starts with the mining sector," Youth, Indigenisation and Empowerment Minister Saviour Kasukuwere said after a cabinet meeting.

The world's two largest platinum miners, Anglo Platinum and Impala Platinum, have multi-million dollar investments in Zimbabwe, while Rio Tinto has gold and diamond interests.

Kasukuwere said the government had taken note of proposals by Zimbabwe's Chamber of Mines for lower thresholds of local ownership.

"Government will now engage the mining sector so as to come up with a consensus position," he told journalists. "Sectoral discussions will decide issues of timeframes (for compliance) as well as thresholds."

COMPENSATION

The government was also aware of investor fears foreign firms would be forced to give up shares without payment.

"Some of the concerns raised relate to the interpretation of the word 'cede' in relation to shareholding, which was misconstrued to suggest compulsory takeover without compensation," Kasukuwere said.

"The indigenisation programme is based on fair transaction where full value is compensated for."

He said hundreds of foreign firms in Zimbabwe had submitted plans to sell majority stakes to local blacks, despite confusion over the law.

The minister, an ally of Mugabe, last month ordered firms to report details of ownership and plans to achieve majority local control. A spokesman for Tsvangirai said last week the regulations had been suspended, a statement quickly denied by both Mugabe and Kasukuwere.

Kasukuwere told the state-controlled Herald newspaper in a report earlier on Tuesday that foreign firms were complying.

"We have so far received more than 400 submissions from various companies and as government we are happy with such an overwhelming response," he said.

Units of British American Tobacco Plc, Unilever and Impala Platinum are among the companies that have submitted plans, the Herald said.

Firms that have not yet submitted plans will get a 30-day extension from the April 15 deadline, Kasukuwere told the paper, adding the government could terminate licences of companies that did not comply.

Mugabe's ZANU-PF government passed an indigenisation and economic empowerment law in 2007, before the formation of the unity government. Analysts have said the policy would discourage foreign investment and hurt efforts to fix a crippled economy.

S. Africa to face power crunch in 2011-13, 2018-24

(Reuters)

20 April 2010

JOHANNESBURG (Reuters) - South Africa will face a power supply crunch between 2011-13 and 2018-24 unless more power plants than are planned are built, state-owned power utility Eskom said on Monday.

Eskom has launched an extensive power generation expansion programme, but Head of Generation Brian Dames said that much more needed to be done to meet fast rising demand in Africa's biggest economy.

"We are confident for the World Cup and we must say that since 2008 we've had no interruptions," Dames told a National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) conference.

"But the period between 2011 and 2013 when there is no major additional capacity coming online and again in 2018 after we've had Kusile (plant) commissioned, then again we will have quite a capacity crunch in the country."

The power utility is under pressure to build new power plants after the national grid nearly collapsed in early 2008, forcing mines and smelters to shut for days and costing the country billions of dollars.

Dames said some 50 gigawatts (GW) of new capacity needed to be built by 2028 to meet demand. Eskom's own expansion programme for now plans for 18,000 MW of new capacity, out of which nearly 5,000 MW has been built since 2005.

He said Eskom was committed to completing the Medupi and Kusile power stations, each expected to supply 4,800 of MW, with Medupi's first unit due in 2012 and that for Kusile in 2013.

The new power needs to partially compensate for ageing power plants which must be decommissioned, Damas said, adding some plants, with a total capacity of 10 GW, are nearing the end of their life.

Finance Director Paul O'Flaherty said the company was considering 50 funding options for the utility to close an estimated gap of 190 billion rand, and there were plans under discussion to cover parts of that deficit.

"We have 50 options we are looking at. We haven't reached certainty on those and need another two months to finalise it. Seventy (billion rand) of it is pretty uncertain at the moment and 120 (billion rand) of it is more certain," he said.

O'Flaherty said the company was looking at international bonds, selling a stake in its planned Kusile power plant and refinancing of some of its existing plants.

Earlier this month the World Bank has awarded Eskom a \$3.75 billion loan, mainly to fund the 4,800 MW Medupi coal-fired plant.

S. Africa's land reform slows sugar sector investment

(Reuters)

19 April 2010

JOHANNESBURG (Reuters) - Uncertainty over South Africa's land reform programme meant to hand over 30 percent of farm land to the country's black majority by 2014 has slowed investment in its sugar sector, an industry official said.

Trix Trikam, executive director of the South African Sugar Association (SASA) said the industry supports the land reform initiative but so far just over half of the land has been transferred to black farmers, hindering investment.

The slow land reform programme in Africa's biggest economy has caused unease in the agricultural sector with white commercial farmers unsure of whether to reinvest in farms under claim by black farmers, he said.

"The finality of the land restitution programme is a necessity because the slow pace has meant that investment, and in particular capital expenditure on farms under claim, is sluggish due to the uncertainty that exists," Trikam told Reuters late on Friday.

After the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa's government set a target of handing over 30 percent of commercial farmland to blacks by 2014 as part of a plan to correct racial imbalances in land distribution caused by apartheid.

The government said earlier this year it would not meet the 2014 target of transferring commercial farmland to black farmers due to lack of funds to purchase land. So far only about 6 percent of agricultural land has been shifted to blacks since 1994.

The sugar industry set up a similar programme to run concurrently with the national plan and transfer 30 percent of commercial sugarcane farms to black farmers by the 2014 -- a deadline key to eliminating the unease and attract further investment.

Trikam said the sugar industry has so far given black growers 19 percent of its commercial farms.

"Should a further 10 percent of land claims be dealt with by 2014, the target of 30 percent will be met," Trikam said.

In addition to challenges around land reform, high input costs continue to weigh on production in the sugar industry.

Kathy Hurly, director of regional services at the South African Cane Growers Association said access to essential farm inputs like fertiliser, chemicals, as well as farming equipment was not easy for small-scale growers.

"This impacts negatively on cane production as all aspects of farming, rationing, planting and harvesting, are generally performed sub-optimally," Hurly said.

"The small-scale sector is currently operating below potential, yields have dropped sharply and the number of growers in this sector had declined by 20 percent over the past five years."

According to Hurly, about 10 percent of sugarcane in South Africa is produced by small-scale farmers who mainly farm on tribal land rather than commercial farms.

South Africa's 2009/10 sugar output fell to 2.18 million tonnes from 2.26 million tonnes a year earlier on the back of higher input costs, while sugarcane output declined to 18.7 million tonnes from 19.3 million tonnes.

The 2010/11 sugar output was estimated at 2.24 million tonnes in March, and sugarcane crush was forecast at 19.12 million tonnes in the same month.

ANGOLA: Oil wealth no benefit to farmers

(IRIN)

22 April 2010

HUAMBO, 22 April 2010 (IRIN) - Joaquina Chitala Jarviso, 40, a small-scale farmer in Huambo, in the central highlands of Angola, is running out of options. Despite careful management and clever innovation, the high cost of fertilizer and the acidity of the soil may defeat her efforts to get a good crop in the next planting season.

So far she has achieved relative success by using only a quarter of the required fertilizer, combined with crop rotation techniques, to produce a rain-fed harvest of Irish potatoes and maize on the same ground in one season - courtesy of a donation of fertilizer from an NGO that has since left the country.

The shelves of the informal shop established by a women's cooperative she belongs to in Kalanga, about 50km west of the city of Huambo, are barren. The shop was part of the NGO initiative that used the shop's profits to offset the crippling costs of fertilizer.

"The need is for chemical fertilizer, but it is very expensive - it costs about US\$70 for a 50kg bag, and I need four bags of fertilizer for one hectare each season. Without fertilizer, plants grow - but they don't grow well."

The government has claimed that it provides free seeds and fertilizer benefiting three million people; but a food analyst, who declined to be named, told IRIN the figure was difficult to authenticate because inputs risked being diverted to the commercial market, and there was no assistance for the large majority of subsistence cultivators like Jarviso.

Jarviso will use the cooperative's team of oxen to plough the maize stalks back into the soil to help balance its acidity before planting starts in October, but her future is stark.

The arithmetic for the mother of six school-going children remains the same, no matter which way she calculates it. Some of the food she produces, including vegetable crops, is used for the family's consumption; the rest is sold to pay for education fees, clothing, the other costs of living, and maintaining her home.

The monthly school fees for her children range from \$22 for the eldest to \$4 for her youngest, while she sells a 50kg sack of potatoes for \$50 to \$60. Jarviso produced 12 sacks of potatoes this year.

Her other cash crop, maize, could earn more in the capital, Luanda, but the variety that fares better in acidic soils produces a coloured product and consumers in Luanda reject it as "dirty", preferring brilliant white maize.

Angola's reputation as a breadbasket was forged during Portuguese colonial rule, but the almost fabled food production was a consequence of ready access to lime and fertilizer to optimize the acidic soils, and the financial credit lines available to commercial farmers.

Cassava, coffee and cotton were cultivated in the northern regions, in the south low rainfall suited cattle farming, while in the central highlands a temperate climate and a rainy season lasting more than six months favoured the production of maize and beans.

Palm oil, sugar cane, bananas and sisal were grown across the country on large plantations. At one time Angola was the world's fourth largest exporter of coffee and could feed itself.

Prof Joaquim Morais of Huambo's agricultural university told IRIN: "Most people [small-scale farmers] don't understand the relationship of high acidity and stunted growth, and even if they did recognize it, there is no available source of lime, so they can't do anything about it anyway."

There are lime pits in Angola, but they are not being worked. Morais said fertilizer costs had risen nearly threefold in recent years, "although the idea [by government] was to privatise distribution of fertilizers to stimulate competition, there is a strategy [by importers] to limit supply to keep prices high ... vested interests have an interest in maintaining the status quo."

Dutch Disease

A spokesperson for Sirius, one of three private companies importing fertilizer, refuted the notion of price-fixing and told IRIN that their profit margin on a 50kg bag of fertilizer, which sold for about \$45 in the cities, was less than 10 percent.

The high cost was attributed to logistics, taxes and import duties, and the price of doing business in Africa's largest oil-exporting country, an economic condition known as "Dutch Disease".

The term was coined in the 1960s by the British journal, *The Economist*, after the economic distortions created by the discovery of North Sea gas. In the Netherlands an almost immediate currency appreciation made domestically produced goods less competitive, which led to the subsequent deindustrialization of the domestic economy, making imports cheaper.

Angola's oil and diamond wealth, conspicuous in a country with infrastructure shattered by nearly three decades of civil war, has exaggerated the condition. Luanda is rated as the world's most expensive city, while two-thirds of the country's estimated 18 million people survive on less than \$2 a day; in rural areas this rises to 94 percent of inhabitants. The last census was conducted in 1973, two years before independence.

Sirius has fertilizer warehouses in Luanda and the two port cities of Lubango and Lobito; it spends about \$300,000 a month on renting them, and a further \$15,000 a month on a three-roomed head office in the capital.

The spokesperson said neither Sirius nor their competitors envisaged producing fertilizer locally, as the country did not have the necessary industrial capacity.

A sleeping land

More than half of Angola's people rely on subsistence farming, but less than 10 percent of the around 35 million hectares of arable land is under cultivation, and that being worked by small-scale farmers is being done inefficiently.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) Global Hunger Index, which combines the indicators for child malnutrition, child mortality, and the proportion of people who are calorie-deficient, has classified Angola as 'alarming'.

The WFP estimated that 31 percent of children under the age of five were underweight, while 35 percent of the population were undernourished.

orge Panguene, a UN Food and Agriculture Organization consultant in Angola, told IRIN the 2009/10 harvest produced about two million tons of cereal, root and tuber crops, but there was "no systematic way of collecting data".

The war brought huge population shifts, mainly from rural areas to the cities, but also from some rural areas to other parts of the country less ravaged by the war.

Panguene said an associated cost of small-scale agriculture was that people were renting a tract of land for about \$250 annually; they had adapted to their new homes and did not want to return to their place of origin.

Aurelio Angelino Viti, a project coordinator in Huambo for the Farmer-to-Farmer initiative by CNFA, formerly known as the Citizens Network for Foreign Affairs, told IRIN the war years had seen the loss of the man-to-land connection. He said "the land is sleeping", as few farmers understood the need to prepare their plots before planting.

The government has a National Food Security Strategy, which includes establishing a network of food collection points to enable produce to move from the farm to the market and creating a value chain of production, processing, marketing and finance for the agricultural sector.

Sergio Calundungo, general director of the National Association of Rural and Environmental Development (ADRA), lauded the strategy's focus on small-scale farming, but lamented that in practice the money was being directed to the "large-scale farming model".

In 2009 the government announced that it would invest \$2 billion in agriculture to reap a cereal harvest of 15 million tons within the next few years. The success of the initiative will depend in part on the rehabilitation of road and rail infrastructure.

The Benguela railway, which runs from the copper- and cobalt-rich city of Lubumbashi in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo in the north and bisects the central highlands, is on the verge of completion; the country's road network is rapidly being restored by foreign construction companies.

But Calundungo fears this may prove a double-edged sword. "The increased mobility will be good for the development of market agriculture and for the distribution of seeds and fertilizer, but it will also mean the well-connected city elite will have easy access to the land, at the expense of small-scale farmers, and that will increase land conflict."

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Competing for Limpopo water

(IRIN)

19 April 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 19 April 2010 (IRIN) - Climate change will bring higher temperatures to Southern Africa while changing rainfall patterns will affect the amount of water available for food production.

"Irrigation is often listed as an adaptation strategy for farmers, but no one has really looked at the impact of climate change on irrigation," said Claudia Ringler, a Senior Research Fellow at the US-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

Ringler and her colleague, Tingju Zhu, a senior scientist at IFPRI's Environment and Production Technology Division, have published a series of research papers on the effect of various scenarios - from a business-as-usual approach where greenhouse gas emissions continue, to having environment-friendly policies in place - on water sources available for irrigation, such as rivers, groundwater and rainwater runoff, in various parts of Africa.

To measure this they took into account the rate of evapo-transpiration - the release of water into the atmosphere from surfaces such as soil and plants -and changes in rainfall.

One of their papers looked at the Limpopo River Basin, which crosses four Southern African countries - Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique - and provides a living to hundreds of thousands of farmers, and found that water supply would start diminishing in another two decades.

Nearly a quarter of South Africa's population of 48 million and 60 percent of Botswana's people live in the basin, which has 2.9 million hectares of farmland, with 91 percent cropped under rain-fed conditions. According to the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) of South Africa, half the basin's water is consumed by big commercial farms in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Climate change will affect rainfall in the basin severely - it will receive between 10 and 25 percent less in the next two decades - so more and more farmers will turn to irrigation, the IFPRI scientists said.

Conflicts

At present the water in the Limpopo River basin supplies the irrigation needs of 97 farmers out of every 100 in every second year; in another two decades this number will drop to 91 out of every 100 farmers, Ringler said.

Rainfall in the basin is highly seasonal and unevenly distributed, already affecting food production in the region, and climate change projections indicate that floods and droughts will worsen.

Commercial farmers make up 20 percent of the farming population in the basin and own 60 percent of the land, while the remaining 80 percent are small-scale farmers with 40 percent of the land, and therein lies the problem.

"The commercial farmers ... are well prepared for the water-stressed scenario with drip irrigation systems in place and access to drought-tolerant seed varieties," said Ringler. Most of the small-scale farmers also depend on the river for irrigation but do not have access to drip irrigation systems, which use very little water.

The farmers also face stiff competition for water from the gold, platinum, coal and iron mines in South Africa's share of the basin, and half of South Africa's electricity is generated by the coal-fired plants located in the basin, according to ARC.

Most of the basin - 45 percent - falls within South Africa's borders and its needs dictate the share of water that other countries in the region receive, Ringler said. The escalating climate-related stresses and existing competition for water mean the potential to expand irrigation is limited.

"All the countries will have to work together to create an equal playing field in sharing the water," she pointed out. "South Africa could create a water reserve for the Mozambican farmers who live downstream."

Environmental Issues

MOZAMBIQUE: Co-existing With Floods

(IPS)

22 April 2010

GABORONE, Apr 22 (IPS) - April signals the tail end of the flood season in Mozambique. The country's water managers will soon be able to appraise the effects of changing policies.

Each year, the many major rivers that flow through Mozambique on their way to the Indian Ocean - the Pungwe, the Limpopo, the Zambezi - swell with rain and burst their banks during the November-April rainy season. In 2001, the flooding killed around 700 people and displaced up to 500,000 others.

Mozambican water and disaster management experts attending a workshop for river basin organisations in Gaborone on April 20-21, told IPS that they have begun shifting their approach to the annual flooding in terms of helping those in low-lying areas to find a profitable co-existence with the water.

"Floods will always be there and it is time we start living with them and looking for ways in which they can benefit us," said Olinda Costa Sousa, director of the government's water

management agency for the southern part of the country, ARA-SUL (Administração Regional de Águas do Sul).

Flood management has traditionally focused on reducing the occurrence or severity of floods in settled areas but Mozambique's regional water bodies are exploring alternatives. But the high waters also spread nutrients across flood plains, and recharge wetlands in which fish thrive. This attracts people to live near rivers where their homes may be in danger.

"Realising that floods are dangerous is important for the local inhabitants, but at the same time educating them on how to utilise the positive attributes such as good fertile soil and rich fishing resources are some of the things the government is trying to impart on the river basin inhabitants," said Sousa.

Sergio Siteo, from the Limpopo Basin Commission's Interim Secretariat explains further. "As a measure trying to balance between harnessing the positive effects of flooding and managing the effects of floods the Department of water in Mozambique is trying to initiate plans to allow local river basin inhabitants to co-exist with floods since the issue of flooding is perennial."

To ensure that people settled on floodplains the river basin are aware of the pros and cons of their location, the country has set up disaster management committees at local level to help educate people on how to protect themselves while taking advantage of the benefits.

Solutions

This includes encouraging villagers to have two homes - one near farms or fishing on the river's edge, and another settlement on higher ground that will remain above the water line even in wet years.

In other areas where the flooding is not as severe, the inhabitants are encouraged to build elevated houses which will allow water to flow beneath them without being swept away.

"If we encourage people to stay on flood plains we have to educate them on how to react to warning systems and to locate the escape routes in which they can use to evacuate to safe ground when the water levels rise in the rivers," said Helio Banze, director of Umbeluzi-Maputo basins.

There is no single recipe for organising effective community participation for flood management and it is also up to the inhabitants to realise that their safety is paramount and that the floods are very dangerous.

Although this might seem obvious, there are many people who refuse to move away from flood-prone areas due to cultural reasons and beliefs. "These are the people who are often killed by the floods because they completely ignore the warning systems," Siteo said.

"Another obstacle to effective flood management is that most of the settlers view their livestock as a symbol of economic wealth, and they will not move to higher ground because their animals will not be able climb the steep slopes," said Banze.

But the biggest challenge are the inhabitants who have lived in flood plains and have survived floods, explained Cacilda Machava, director of the water management agency for the Zambezi in Mozambique.

"These people believe that they have become resilient to floods and will not react to any warning systems and the biggest fear the disaster management teams have is that the next flood will be bigger and could destroy them."

WATER-LESOTHO: Getting Community Consultation Right

(IPS)

22 April 2010

GABORONE, Apr 22 (IPS) - The Lesotho Highlands Water Project will move into its second phase in 2010. The first phase has been praised as a shining example of transboundary water sharing in Africa, but community dissatisfaction may mean a rough ride for its extension.

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) is the largest on the continent, transferring water from the Malimatso, Mtsoku and Senqunyane rivers to South Africa's industrial heartland in Gauteng province.

Peter Makuta, acting chief executive of the managing utility, the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority, explains that a second phase is needed because of projected water shortages in South Africa.

"It's always been in the plans, now it is the time to realise it by actually implementing hardware on the ground, with a view to collect more water."

Makuta says the second phase will also allow Lesotho to secure its electricity supply through additional hydroelectric generation. "Although we've been able to produce much-needed power, it hasn't been enough. We've had to buy electricity from South Africa, even Mozambique at times, (in order) to meet our needs."

On paper the LHWP has been a success, winning many awards including the World Bank's Environmental Efficiency Award for a project of that magnitude. But Mampiti Matete, senior lecturer at the University of Lesotho, says there's simmering discontent amongst communities.

"My thinking is that it was the first project of its kind, and people did not understand the magnitude of the project and the impact it was going to have on them," says Matete.

"It's only now that the project has happened and people have been compensated that the majority of them realise that the compensation they received is not adequate or does not match the losses that they incurred."

The project's own documents say 321 households were relocated or resettled to make way for the LHWP. Households were offered yearly financial compensation in exchange for lost land, or "green compensation" which provided water and sanitation facilities to allow them to resume farming and herding livestock on new land. Matete says consultation will have to be much better this time around.

"Consultation processes in the next phase have to be intensified to empower local people, so they know what they are negotiating about."

There is every reason to think communities will be heard.

The waters of the LHWP are today part of the responsibility of the Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM), one of the river basin organisations participating in a workshop in Gaborone on Apr. 20-21. The workshop, the fourth in an annual series designed to strengthen transboundary water organisations in the region, saw the launch of guidelines on several topics, including one on stakeholder participation.

The focus of the workshop was the yet-to-be adopted guideline on benefit-sharing in river systems; during debate and discussion of this, the issue of participation at the grassroots level came up.

Nomathemba Neseni, director of the Institute for Water and Sanitation Development based in Zimbabwe, said that too often discussions of benefits and sharing proceed without an adequate social impact assessment that can qualify and quantify where the benefits - and burdens - fall.

"At what levels are we talking about benefits? At the regional level? At national level? At household level?"

She said she had listened to a full day of conceptualising and case studies without once hearing about gender. Using irrigation for agriculture as an example, she pointed out that failing to recognise that very few women in Southern Africa enjoy secure land tenure could result in unequal benefits within communities targeted for such development, as the profits from increased yields or value of the land would not be shared by all.

"If poverty reduction is Southern African Development Community strategy, we need to be able to qualify it (down to) the household level," says Neseni.

The guideline on stakeholder participation says community consultation is essential to decision-making. Proper consultation ensures that policy is based on shared knowledge, experience and evidence; is influenced by the experiences and opinions of those affected;

and that innovative and creative options are considered in designing and implementing water policy.

These would seem to be precisely the things that passed local villagers in Lesotho by during the planning of the LHWP's first phase.

The guideline offers planners concrete recommendations: starting with identifying stakeholders and classifying them in terms of interests, resources, perceptions, relationships and power. An enabling environment should be created, including clear responsibilities, budgets and deadlines, as well as an outline of the methods of consultation that will be used.

The use of surveys and questionnaires to get detailed knowledge of various users' experience is called for; as are interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders to get in-depth inputs on particular issues, priorities and preferences for what could be done.

Finally, the importance of communication is underlined, with media campaigns, billboards, and merchandise; making analysis and technical information available using fact sheets, newsletters and articles; and using art and entertainment along with posters, school curriculum and other educational materials to bring the information to the widest possible audience in a form that is readily understood.

At the end of this, the guideline says it is essential to act on the results of consultation. Representative advisory groups should map out solutions and a formal framework for implementing projects and addressing issues should be set up.

As the second phase of the LHWP gets under way, planners and communities should make full use of the guidelines to negotiate terms that will benefit everyone.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Benefits of Working Together on Water

(IPS)

20 April 2010

GABORONE, Apr 20 (IPS) - The river basin organisation people are gathered in Botswana again: the theme this year is "benefit-sharing", an approach to allocating water that, it is promised, will accomplish nothing less than to make more water.

As a region, Southern Africa faces water scarcity which is expected to grow more acute as the effects of climate change manifest. Almost all of the fresh water in the region is found in shared water courses - across Africa, 93 percent of surface water is found in rivers that spill over national boundaries.

The Fourth Regional Workshop on Strengthening River Basin Organisations, taking place in the Botswanan capital, Gaborone on Apr. 20-21, is part of a process of developing clear guidelines for the Southern African Development Community's strategy

on transboundary waters. The annual workshops, supported by GTZ, InWent, UKAID and USAID, bring together researchers and water policy makers from across the region.

Growing economies and populations mean growing pressure on water resources; competing demands for water are a potential source of conflict between - and within - states.

"Sharing freshwater resources equitably and reasonably is of the utmost importance in the African continent," says Namibia-based David Phillips, managing director of water consulting firm Phillips Robinson Associates.

Phillips is a leading exponent of the idea of benefit-sharing, which avoids deadlock over allocations of water to competing users in a river system. Instead of seeing it as a struggle over a fixed volume of water, benefit-sharing sets up negotiations over a broad range of direct and indirect benefits arising from water use.

A tidy example is found in West Africa, where in 1972 three countries along the Senegal River agreed that the best way to achieve common aims of economic growth, food self-sufficiency, and resilience against drought was to collaborate on a development programme.

Mauritania, Mali and Senegal split the costs of dams based on the benefits each could receive in terms of hydro power, irrigation and enhanced navigation of the river.

The formula was not simply bear half the cost, receive half the benefits. The agreement attempted to account for the different needs and characteristics of each country, its riverine populations, and the changing possibilities of the river itself as it flowed through the region.

Senegal put up 42 percent of the cost of the dams, but was assigned 33 percent of the hydropower benefit and 58 percent of the irrigation benefit. Mali contributed 35 percent of the cost of the dams, but received 52 percent of the benefit of the hydropower, 80 percent of the navigation benefit.

The disruption of seasonal flooding by the Manantali and Diama dams has severely undermined previous agricultural practice (and the costs of water from the new irrigation have proved too high for many) while increasing incidence of disease like schistosomiasis, but despite the flaws in design and implementation of the projects themselves, the basin-wide agreement still offers a promising model of how to approach negotiating shared water resources.

It can be contrasted with the situation on the Nile River, where a fifty-year old treaty rigidly defines the beginning and end of a closed argument over how many cubic metres per second of water the downstream countries are entitled to. The 1959 terms that guarantee Sudan and Egypt a set allocation of water are constricting water use by the eight other countries upstream.

The benefit-sharing approach adopted on the Senegal River allowed the parties additional room to negotiate mutually acceptable development of the river, in ways intended to serve the specific and various needs and interests of each. The construction of a dam in one location was not on the table simply as the deprivation of users elsewhere of water.

Dr Nicholas Azza, a water policy specialist with the Nile Basin Initiative, points out that benefit sharing has to be attractive in order to get off the ground. "The sum of benefits to be gained from cooperation needs to be greater than the sum of benefits available to countries acting unilaterally."

The Southern African Development Community's ongoing effort to establish and strengthen river basin organisations is already working along these lines, says Dr Kenneth Msibi, from SADC's Water Division.

Outlining how optimal, sustainable use of water might be achieved, he outlined several essential ingredients. These include expert study to provide a knowledge base for effective development; consultations with water users ranging from mining and industry to municipalities and small-scale farmers; basin-wide cooperation (shaped by recognition of common interests and the shared nature of the resource, as well as political will).

Assemble these, he suggested, with the "trigger" of the region's sharpening water scarcity to bind negotiations together and move them along, and Southern Africa may have the recipe for the effective and cooperative use of its shared water.

MOZAMBIQUE: Weather Service Key to Flood Disaster Management

(IPS)

20 April 2010

NAIROBI, Apr 20 (IPS) - Mozambique's government learned some tough lessons from the devastating floods that hit the country a decade ago. Experts say the disaster management plans drawn up since are a model for other African countries.

The flooding in 2000 killed 700 people and displaced 4.5 million more. Since then, the government has increased the budgetary allocation for disaster management, put in place early warning systems, and established community-driven rescue systems.

When heavy flooding occurred again in the 2007-2008 rainy season, an enhanced level of preparedness is credited with reducing the number of people affected.

"Only 100,000 people were displaced from their homes, and nine individuals lost their lives. Among the dead, seven were swept by the floods, while two were killed by crocodiles," said Dulce Chilundo, the director of the Emergency Operation Centre and the National Institute for Disaster Management in Mozambique.

"The meteorological services immediately embarked on a mapping program for all risk areas, where 10 to 15 individuals from every disaster risk areas were given proper training on rescue operations depending on the nature of natural disasters that usually affect that particular area," added Chilundo.

Now the country is actively developing villages that are better planned and constructed to withstand seasonal flooding.

"Every year that there are no major disasters, we use the budgetary allocation to purchase land and resettle families living in the risky areas. Since 2006, we have relocated 120,000 families to safer areas, and the intervention is still going on," said Chilundo.

"For relocation to succeed in Mozambique, the new homes on safer grounds are offered to the affected citizens as additional land," said Chilundo.

Villagers retain ownership of their original land and usually continue to farm it, while living in the new settlement.

"However, some people still resist the permanent relocation of their residence," said Chilundo.

The country has put in place early warning systems some of which are operated by community members. For example, a Non-Governmental Organisation called Munich Re Foundation is working in partnership with 'Mozambique flood warning' project to provide early warning services along Búzi River.

The 'Búzi Early Warning System' works by taking daily measurements of rain fall at strategic points in the river basin. This is done by people nominated from the affected areas, and usually given specialised training.

In case of heavy rainfall or if they observe a significant rise in water level, the information is passed on to a central coordination point and then quickly spread through community radio broadcasting in local languages.

Similarly, if the reports indicate there has been widespread heavy rainfall, then the alarm is raised, and a signal of coloured flags is used to warn people of possible flooding. At this point, people living in risky areas are evacuated before the flood waters rise.

Proper planning for disasters by laying down of preparedness strategies and early warning systems is an important way for the continent can build resilience to the climate change challenges.

"We have to make use of the meteorological predictions in order to develop these preparedness strategies," said Dr Abbas Gullet, the Secretary General – Kenya Red Cross Society.

The South African Weather Service (SAWS) has developed a proposal to set up a regional flash flood warning system that would cover all affected countries within the region.

According to the proposal, cyclones that make landfall, as well as torrential rain inland can trigger flooding across the whole subregion. It gives an example of the widespread flooding caused by tropical cyclone Eline in 2000 over Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana and even Namibia.

"Even though the South African Weather Service (SAWS) has a weather radar network, and can issue warnings of potential heavy rain, a proper flash flood warning system that can warn the disaster management authorities and the communities at risk does not exist in the region," reads the document.

In the wake of climate change due to global warming, areas over Mozambique's eastern plateau experienced almost three times the usual January rainfall, leading to extensive flooding and flash flooding in the region.

"We appreciate that some countries like Mozambique and a few others have developed a strong collaboration between the meteorological services, hydrological services and disaster management teams. This is the route we want all the affected countries to take," said Alhassane Adama Diallo, the Director General for the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development.

Human Rights, Social Issues & Social Developments

Zimbabwe: Empty Promises for Free Expression

(Human Rights Watch)

20 April 2010

(Johannesburg) - Zimbabwe's power-sharing government has not carried out critical media reforms as promised under the country's September 2008 Global Political Agreement, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

The 26-page report, "Sleight of Hand: Repression of the Media and the Illusion of Reform in Zimbabwe," says that the Zimbabwe Africa National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the former sole ruling party, still holds the balance of power in the coalition government forged with the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the former opposition movement, in February 2009. ZANU-PF promotes political propaganda and restricts independent reporting through repressive laws that remain unchanged, and it retains its control of security forces and key resources, Human Rights Watch said.

"The Global Political Agreement promised reforms that would guarantee transparency and promote free, fair, and credible elections," said Georgette Gagnon, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "But these have turned out to be empty promises. The power-sharing government is taking no serious steps toward reform."

The new government has not reformed media-related laws, as promised, and blocks free expression through senior officials aligned to ZANU-PF and partisan state security agents. In the past year, not one independent television or radio station has received a license to operate.

As a result, journalists are effectively unable to report on significant political and economic developments, depriving Zimbabweans of independent sources of information. State-controlled print and electronic media only dispense ZANU-PF-approved messages.

Under the new government, at least 15 journalists have been harassed, arbitrarily arrested, or assaulted by Zimbabwe's state security forces. For instance, Anderson Manyere, a freelance photojournalist, has been arbitrarily detained three times since early 2010. On January 18, police arrested and detained him for two hours for filming a protest march in Harare by Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA). He was released without charge. On another occasion, ZANU-PF youths unlawfully detained Manyere for filming their protest against international sanctions on the ZANU-PF leadership; the youths handed Manyere over to state security agents, who forced him to delete all footage in his camera before they released him.

Human Rights Watch also documented the case of Stanley Kwenda, a journalist who was forced to flee the country on January 16 following alleged death threats from a senior police officer. Kwenda had reported in *The Zimbabwean* newspaper that the officer had barred Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC from visiting police stations across the country.

Kwenda said:

The police officer hurled insults and threats at me over the phone, saying, 'Kwenda, you are to die, you will not last the weekend.' He said I would be dead before my fellow congregants at my church had said their prayers the following Sunday. I was so afraid that I was left trembling. I realized I had no protection in Zimbabwe and my only option was to flee the country.

President Robert Mugabe of ZANU-PF has begun to speak publicly about new elections in 2011. Without structural and institutional reforms, Zimbabweans risk a repeat of the horrific, state-sponsored violence of 2008, when more than 160 people were killed after ZANU-PF mobilized to prevent an MDC victory.

The new government has made a few superficial reforms, but these have resulted in little meaningful improvement for those who wish to express independent political views or to

criticize official policy, Human Rights Watch said. At least five major pieces of legislation remain on the books that are used to target and silence journalists.

For instance, the Broadcasting Services Act allows for private broadcasting and provides for the issuance of licenses, but the application procedures are so complex and stringent that no licenses have been issued other than to the government-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC).

The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act prohibits the full-time employment of unaccredited journalists by news agencies and the mass media. The Public Order and Security Act criminalizes "publishing or communicating statements prejudicial to the State" and prohibits "undermining authority of, or insulting the President." The phrase has been interpreted broadly to prosecute critics of the president, his government, and his policies.

Human Rights Watch urged President Jacob Zuma of South Africa and his team tasked with facilitating Zimbabwe's political process to call on parties to the Global Political Agreement, particularly ZANU-PF, to carry out the promised reforms, including constitutional, electoral, and security improvements, within a specific time frame. The transitional government should guarantee, protect, and promote fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, in accordance with its domestic and international legal obligations, Human Rights Watch said.

"The power-sharing government needs to do just that - share power," Gagnon said. "Any assessment of the power-sharing government that does not address its record on human rights reforms is at best shoddy, and at worst complicit, in the government's failed promises."

SOUTH AFRICA: Poor people's movement draws government wrath

(IRIN)

21 April 2010

DURBAN, 21 April 2010 (IRIN) - The rise of an organized poor people's movement in South Africa's most populous province, KwaZulu-Natal, is being met with increasing hostility by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) government, which claims to be the legitimate representative of the poorest of the poor.

South Africa has been rocked by increasingly frequent service delivery protests - a euphemism for communities taking to the streets to voice their frustration with the alleged slow pace of social service provision - but it is the formation of a militant non-aligned social movement, Abahlali Basemjondolo - shack-dwellers movement, in Zulu - that is causing greatest concern.

Municipal IQ, a research company that monitors South Africa's 283 municipalities, noted in a recent report that there were 54 such protests in the first quarter of 2010, compared with 105 protests in the whole of 2009.

"In fact, March's protests [about 25] equal last year's [2009] previously unprecedented July peak," Municipal IQ managing director Kevin Allan told the press.

Most service delivery protests are seen as spontaneous expressions of dissatisfaction, which sometimes degenerate into acts of arson and public violence, but Abahlali Basemjondolo has become organized and claims a membership of more than 20,000 people across 25 informal settlements in and around Durban, KwaZulu-Natal's largest city.

Abahlali Basemjondolo was started in February 2005, after a group of people from the local Kennedy Road informal settlement blockaded a road to protest the sale of land to a business, because a local municipal councillor had promised that houses for shack dwellers would be built on it.

The president of Abahlali Basemjondolo, Sbu Zikode, 37, who now lives in hiding with his family, told IRIN that the movement was formed for the purpose of working with the government and local authorities to improve the lives of shack-dwellers, but the response has been far from cordial.

"We have been called all sorts of names: Third Force, agent provocateurs and counter-revolutionaries," he said. In South Africa "Third Force" is a highly emotional term and refers to the apartheid government's sponsoring of covert operations designed to sow dissent and violence among the black population.

Suffering of the poor ignored

"Those in power are blind to our suffering because they don't understand what it is like to live in a shack. They must come with us while we look for work; they must chase away the rats and keep the children from knocking over the candles," Zikode said.

"They must care for the sick when there are long queues for the tap; they must be there when we bury our children who have died in shack fires, or from diarrhoea, or AIDS."

On 22 March 2010 Abahlali Basemjondolo organised a march through Durban, attended by thousands of people, to demand housing for the poor; it is promising similar action during the soccer World Cup finals, which will be played in South Africa in June this year. Although the march took place without incident, this has not always been the case.

The organization alleges that after receiving permission for a protest march in 2007, police charged and beat the marchers without provocation and arrested dozens.

Abahlali Basemjondolo also alleges that in September 2009 a group of ANC supporters torched and razed the Kennedy Road community hall, which was being used as an office, a crèche, and youth life skills training centre, as well as the shack of its president and others suspected of being members of the social movement.

During two days of violence, two of Abahlali Basemjondolo's members were killed, but none of the attackers has been arrested and no one has been charged with murder. In contrast, 13 members of Abahlali Basemjondolo were arrested on charges of public violence but only eight were granted bail. The 13 people are expected to appear in court again on 13 May.

'No house, no vote'

"We have applied for houses and have been on the waiting list for years. When new houses are built, people who are close to the councillors sell them. Without any money you can stay years on the housing waiting list," said Makhosi Mdlalose, a member of Abahlali Basemjondolo who lives with her two children in an informal settlement near Umlazi, south of Durban.

"When we march against these things the government sends the police to shoot at us and use their dogs. The same does not happen when trade unions aligned to the ANC marches," she told IRIN.

"They [ANC-aligned unions] even trash the town and break windows of buildings, but they are left alone because they are close to the ruling party. When we conduct peaceful marches all hell breaks loose."

The next municipal elections are scheduled for 2011 - only one of the country's six major cities are not controlled by the ANC. Abahlali Basemjondolo has begun an election boycott campaign, with the slogan: "No Land, No House, No Vote".

"This is because any councillor from a political party forgets about our situation soon after the election. That is why we have decided to stand on our own and fight our own battles - we have been betrayed so many times before," Zikode said.

Richard Pitthouse, a political science lecturer at Rhodes University in Eastern Cape Province, told IRIN that the rapid growth of the independent grassroots organization has been met with hostility by the central government and Durban's ANC-controlled municipality.

"When they [Abahlali Basemjondolo] realized that there was going to be no cooperation between itself and the government they decided to air their grievances directly to the local leaders and embarrass them [the ANC] in public," Pitthouse said.

"That is why it has attracted the wrath of the police. This violence is worrying, because Abahlali have been successful in highlighting the plight of the poor."

South Africa Aims for 15 Million HIV Tests in 14 Months

(Voice of America)

22 April 2010

Sunday President Jacob Zuma will launch a national campaign to test 15 million South Africans for HIV by June, 2011. The campaign will likely stress the country's already ailing health-care system.

The HIV testing and counseling campaign will be launched at a single location in each of South Africa's nine provinces this month. The program will be expanded every two months until 52 health centers are offering the service.

The campaign will be run under the auspices of the South African National Aids Counsel, which includes representatives from government across the spectrum to health activists.

Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has said the goals of the campaign include encouraging healthy life-styles and increasing access to treatment, care and support services.

The University of the Witwatersrand's Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit Senior Director of HIV Management, Francois Venter, tells VOA the plan is extremely ambitious. He says it is likely to severely stress the country's weak health care systems.

"Even if we do not make 15 million, if what we do is actually really severely stress the system and work out exactly where the bottlenecks are, and which areas of the health system are going to give us problems in the future, that will make it worthwhile," Venter said.

Health Minister Motsoaledi's plan is to also use the campaign to screen for other conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and TB. Venter says this has the potential to have broader long-term benefits for the health of South Africans.

"I think that you are going to get a lot more bang for your buck using the HIV testing program as a way of galvanizing people to actually screen them for other illnesses; and again, to see whether that translates into people being retained in the system," Venter said.

In addition to the highest number of HIV positive people in the world, South Africa also has very high rates of diabetes, hyper-tension, and tuberculosis, which is a particular problem because of the number of cases of multiple and extreme drug-resistant TB.

These problems are made worse by floundering health care systems, which despite receiving the highest financial input per person on the continent, have some of the worst health-care outcomes.

HIV/AIDS Study says Death of a Mother More Detrimental to Children than Loss of the Father

(Voice of America)

22 April 2010

It's estimated that 15 million children have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. But research shows the death of the mother to the disease can have a much greater and longer lasting effect on a child than the death of the father.

The study is based on the lives of over 700 children in Kagera, Tanzania from the early 1990s to 2004. Oxford University researchers say they found the role of the mother is "more essential" to the long-term well-being of a child.

Stefan Dercon, professor of development economics at Oxford, says, "Our interest was in trying to start to look at longer term impacts of what's been happening with the HIV/AIDS crisis."

Many had believed that the loss of the breadwinner father would have greater consequences because of the economic loss to a family. But that's not what Dercon and the Oxford team found.

"The impacts of losing a mother were substantially higher and statistically much more significant than anything we could pin down in losing the father in the family," he says.

Not just emotional effects

"We could establish that children who lost their mother before the age of 15 had typically a year less schooling compared to children who didn't experience these kind of events during their childhood. They similarly were two centimeters shorter than otherwise similar children," he says.

He describes these effects as significant. "Given that average schooling is only about five years or five and a half years, that's a substantially lower level of schooling on average for children who've lost their mothers," he says.

Dercon adds, "Similarly two centimeters is actually quite substantial. I was told not so long ago that's more or less equivalent to the height gain that was obtained in the U.S. over a 50 year period during the 20th Century. So these are quite big differences." And studies show that taller people often earn more money than shorter people and are often considered better at physical labor.

Central, crucial

The findings, he says, highlights the “central role that a mother plays in mediating what’s happening in the family.”

“Somehow they tend to know their children better, their nutritional needs, their other needs and so on. And the fact that she’s not present anymore may well have a big impact in the way a child gets the opportunities it gets within the family,” he says.

He calls the role of the mother “crucial in terms of translating resources into the well-being of children,” adding, “It’s just highlighting how important a mother would be in being able to respond much better to the needs of children.

The study also finds that the economic effects of the death of a breadwinner may not be as big as once thought.

“We probably overstated the economic impact of the HIV/AIDS crisis. And that the way the impacts have worked through families has been far more subtle. And in our case we can show it did work via maternal orphanhood, for example, as one of the possible mechanisms, rather than this kind of total dramatic, pure economic income related effects that people have highlighted,” he says.

The findings may lead to new programs to help families affected by the epidemic. “I would be cautious in saying let’s now not give any support to families where the father died and only give it to the families where mothers died. That would be quite wrong to actually conclude from this kind of work. But what we can say is that if we don’t take into account carefully the caring relationships within the family, we’re not really going necessarily to reach the children that are affected directly,” he says.

Dercon says HIV/AIDS has created a generation of children, who may be “disadvantaged for the rest of their lives.”

Women Farmers Can Play Big Role in Reducing World Hunger, says New Report

(Voice of America)

21 April 2010

Women farmers hold the “key” to sharply reducing world hunger, according to a new report from the humanitarian organization Action Aid.

The release of the report – Fertile Ground -- coincides with a European Union meeting Wednesday in Brussels to revive efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

It’s estimated there are about one-billion people who go hungry every day. A Millennium Development Goal is to reduce that number by half by 2015.

Food producers

Peter O’Driscoll, executive director of ActionAid USA, says there are a number of reasons to invest in women farmers.

“First and foremost, particularly in places like Africa where the hunger problem is most severe, women produce most of the food. In some countries 70, 80 even 90 percent of the food people consume is produced by women small farmers,” he says.

However, he says these women lack the necessary tools and resources.

“Investment in agriculture, investment in land, credit and so forth are simply not available for women farmers. So, what we’re trying to insist is that it’s crucial not only that governments increase the level of spending and investment in agriculture, but that they target it towards women,” says O’Driscoll, adding, “If you really want to address the problem of hunger, you have to invest in hungry people in helping them to grow their own food,” says O’Driscoll.

Farmers go hungry, too

The ActionAid USA head estimates there are 800-million smallholder farmers around the world, who produce most of the food consumed in their countries.

“But it’s also important to note that when we talk about a billion hungry people in the world, probably 60 percent of those are smallholder farmers and another 20 percent are landless rural workers. So, clearly, the folks who are growing the food are also those who are experiencing the most chronic hunger,” he says.

In Africa, women make up the majority of these smallholder farmers. But O’Driscoll says men and women often produce food for different reasons.

“Men, who have better access to credit and better access to extension services, tend to produce cash crops for market, whereas women actually grow the food that their families will be eating.”

Investing

O’Driscoll says it’s now generally accepted that it was a mistake to reduce investment in agriculture over the past 25 years or so.

“There was an idea that if we simply got the government out of agriculture, and allow the private sector to come in, we’d have a more efficient and effective food system. Unfortunately, the results are that number of hungry people has actually dramatically increased over that time,” he says.

Besides investing more money, the ActionAid official says it should also be more targeted.

“We should be targeting that aid on the kinds of inputs that are most useful to those women,” he says.

This includes access to credit and agricultural extension services, which aim to improve the economic, environmental and social conditions of the farmers.

“Even where extension services are available, they tend to focus on the richer farmers, who have access to markets. They’re not reaching the kind of women who are actually growing the food that people need to escape from hunger,” he says.

Tiny farms

Many women farmers grow food on small patches of land. But O’Driscoll says that land can be made more productive.

“For many years the conventional wisdom has been that these pieces of land are too small and too unproductive and, therefore, not worth farming at all,” he says.

That attitude contributed to a “dramatic exodus from rural areas to cities.” But things are changing.

“There’s a tremendous body of evidence that investment in sustainable agricultural techniques - in multi-cropping, diversified cropping, in agro-ecological composting and various other forms of low cost, low external input agriculture – can actually be extremely productive,” he says.

2015

Would investing in smallholder women farmers help achieve the Millennium Development Goal to halve hunger around the world by 2015.?

O’Driscoll says, “I think as a global community we simply have to take that as an imperative. I think it’s probably now almost...35 years that the international community has been promising to halve the number of hungry people,” he says.

He says the question is not whether it can be done, but how the world commits to doing it.

“As this report makes pretty clear, there is a number of dimensions. One is we do need to see a dramatic increase...in public investment in agriculture. And that means not only from African countries or developing countries themselves...but I think it’s clearly important for the donor community...to step up their giving,” he says.

The EU meeting in Brussels aims to come up with a “rescue” plan for the MDGs.

Zuma says South Africa Ready 50 Days Before World Cup Kick-Off

(Voice of America)

21 April 2010

South African President Jacob Zuma says his country is ready for the football World Cup, and predicts a memorable event. He was speaking during ceremonies 50 days before the tournament kicks-off on June 11.

President Jacob Zuma told a crowd of fans in the central city of Kimberly that the football World Cup will allow South Africa to tell the story of a continent alive with possibilities, whose population embraces people from other nations and cultures.

"This is the single, greatest opportunity we have ever had to showcase our diversity and potential to the world," said President Zuma.

Mr. Zuma said his government had spent nearly \$5 billion on bolstering infrastructure for the World Cup and this would benefit the country for years to come.

He said the preparations already have had a significant impact on the South African economy. Officials hope the World Cup will create 60,000 permanent new jobs and add nearly one billion dollars to economic production.

Mr. Zuma said now is the time for all South Africans to take ownership of the event and create the conditions for its success.

"We are ready in every respect and I believe that our warmth, our South African-ness is going to be displayed," said Mr. Zuma. "We are going to be a nation that will behave, that will show the world that we are ready to host and that Africa is ready."

With seven weeks to go until kick-off, construction has been completed on all of the 10 stadiums that will host World Cup matches.

The new terminal at Johannesburg's international airport was inaugurated Tuesday and a new airport at the southeastern city of Durban, is to be inaugurated in two weeks.

South African security forces say they have been carrying out crowd control and anti-terrorism training and measures have been put in place to protect visiting teams, foreign dignitaries and fans.

Police officials have assigned 40,000 officers specifically to World Cup events and say they have spent \$180 million on new equipment.

The football world governing body, FIFA, says 180,000 of the remaining 500,000 match tickets have been sold since the last phase of ticket sales began last week. Nearly half of the 64 matches are sold out.

Tourist groups say the world economic recession and the long-haul-destination status of South Africa may affect the number of foreign visitors during the event and have downgraded their original projections of 450,000 by as much as one-third.

As a result, 85 percent of the fans at the games will be South African residents. United States residents have purchased the greatest number of tickets from abroad, more than 100,000, followed by fans in Britain and Germany.

Human Rights Watch Criticizes Media Repression in Zimbabwe

(Voice of America)

20 April 2010

A leading international human-rights group says Zimbabwe's unity government still has not implemented promised media reforms and that President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party still controls most levers of government despite a 14-month-old power-sharing accord.

Human Rights Watch says ZANU-PF continues to restrict independent reporting through its control of the country's security forces.

The coordinator of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe, Abigail Gamanya, says there have been some improvements in freedom of expression since Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his Movement for Democratic Change joined Zimbabwe's government more than one year ago.

"It is not as rampant as it used to be. However, the characteristics are still the same, where you find journalists being harassed, intimidated, fleeing the country. And the same instruments that were used for this repression are still in place," Gamanya said.

The Human Rights Watch report says media laws that criminalize any criticism of the government are still in place. Credentials for international journalists are heavily restricted. It says at least 15 journalists have been harassed, arbitrarily arrested or assaulted by security forces under the unity government.

A spokesman for the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, Nixon Nyikadzino, says the government continues to block new independent media outlets through complicated licensing regulations.

"We still operate within the context of a [single] state broadcaster, a state radio station, state-run newspapers and only a minimum number of independent newspapers. So those factors point to an environment that is still muzzling freedom of expression whereby the

media is not yet able to play its role critically, with the freedom it deserves," Nyikadzino said.

The Zimbabwean government recently announced a new media commission to oversee the promised reforms. But critics have blasted the commission, saying it is comprised of many of the same individuals who put together the current web of media restrictions.

The unity government has stabilized the economy and eased some political tensions. But the partners in the government remain deadlocked over certain senior political appointments.

In addition, ZANU-PF insists ending foreign broadcasts to Zimbabwe by stations such as SWRadio, the BBC and VOA.

Zimbabwean media analyst Rasweat Mukundu says this position is counter-productive.

"[The] call for these radio stations to be banned is contradictory to the principles that we are trying to push [in the area of] media freedoms. What the Zimbabwean government simply needs to do is open up the broadcasting sector and let the public choose which station they want to listen to," Mukundu said.

Human Rights Watch called for parties to the unity government to guarantee and promote freedom of expression and the media. They say such reforms are vital as they work to draft a new constitution and prepare for elections.

South Africa probe into luxury Rovos Rail train crash

(BBC News)

22 April 2010

The train derailed near the capital, Pretoria, on Wednesday with 55 tourists on board and 30 members of staff.

The victims were all female employees, one of whom was four months pregnant and went into labour at the scene, losing her baby.

According to train owners Rovos Rail, seven people remain in hospital. Rovos Rail's Rohan Vos said one person is in a critical condition, the South African Press Association reports.

There were about 40 US tourists, along with French, German and British citizens, on board the Pride of Africa when it derailed.

Mr Vos told Associated Press news agency that the passengers had been relatively safe in wood-panelled carriages - some dating back to the 1920s - but the staff had been in a kitchen area that was less protected.

Emergency worker Chris Botha at the scene said the railway coaches were lying on top of each other.

"It's absolute carnage," he told AFP news agency. Rail Safety Regulator spokesman Carvel Webb said a full report into the causes of the accident would take two weeks.

"It appears from the initial measurement and assessment that were done that there was not adequate braking left on the train during the coupling and uncoupling process," AFP quotes him telling South Africa's Radio 702.

Rovos Rail offers "unique train safaris" and some of its coaches have hot showers and air conditioning.

The two-day Cape Town-Pretoria trip can cost from about \$1,500 (£974) to nearly \$3,000 per passenger, AP reports.

Politics

Zimbabwe's Mugabe backs Iran's nuclear programme

(Reuters)

23 April 2010

Iran faces a possible new round of United Nations sanctions over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment. The West accuses Tehran of trying to build nuclear weapons. Iran says it aims only to generate electricity.

"Be also assured, comrade president, of Zimbabwe's continuous support of Iran's just cause on the nuclear issue," Mugabe said at a banquet he hosted for Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who arrived in Harare on Thursday for a two-day visit.

There was no official indication of any link between Ahmadinejad's visit and Iran's nuclear programme but Zimbabwe does hold uranium deposits which have yet to be exploited.

Zimbabwean state media quoted the Iranian president as saying the West was using the U.N. Security Council to exert pressure on his country to abandon its nuclear programme.

"Unfortunately, the United Nations Security Council, which is supposed to serve the whole world, has been used by the powerful to increase pressure on our countries," Ahmadinejad is quoted as saying.

Zimbabwe itself escaped U.N sanctions in 2008 after Mugabe's re-election in a second round poll marred by political violence, which forced his rival, Morgan Tsvangirai to pull out despite outpolling Mugabe in the first round voting.

Mugabe eventually bowed to international pressure and agreed to form a power-sharing government with Tsvangirai, now prime minister, in February 2009.

TSVANGIRAI BOYCOTTS RECEPTION

The Iranian president's visit has widened rifts within the coalition government, with Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party describing Mugabe's decision to invite Ahmadinejad as a "colossal political scandal."

Tsvangirai and officials from his MDC boycotted a welcoming ceremony for the Iranian president. Quoting unnamed government sources, the state-controlled Herald newspaper said the boycott was in solidarity with Western nations opposed to Ahmadinejad's government.

MDC national chairman and speaker of parliament Lovemore Moyo was the only high-ranking official from Tsvangirai's party who attended a trade show opened by Ahmadinejad in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, on Friday.

Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara and Industry and Commerce Minister Welshman Ncube, both from a splinter MDC faction, also attended.

Ahmadinejad made no reference to Iran's nuclear programme in a speech to open the fair, but called for closer economic ties between Harare and Tehran.

"The cooperation between the two peoples should improve," he said, speaking through an interpreter. "The levels of trade and economic cooperation are not at our (potential) capacity."

Mugabe urges end to violence as Zimbabwe turns 30

(Reuters)

18 April 2010

Addressing a rally to mark 30 years of independence from Britain, Mugabe said Zimbabwe would pursue its controversial land seizure policy and plans to transfer control of foreign firms to locals as part of a black empowerment drive.

In a fairly mild speech by his strident standards, Mugabe, now 86, denounced Britain, the United States and other Western countries for imposing sanctions on Zimbabwean leaders over charges of vote rigging and rights abuses.

But there was none of the usual name-calling in what has become a traditional attack on what he sees as imperialist forces.

In a conciliatory message to his domestic political opponents, Mugabe urged Zimbabweans to stop inter-party violence which local rights groups invariably blame on militant supporters of the president's ZANU-PF party bent on destroying the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) of rival Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai.

"Your leadership in the inclusive government urges you to desist from any acts of violence that will cause harm to others and become a blight on our society," he said at a rally attended by about 30,000 people.

BICKERING

Mugabe -- who spearheaded a guerrilla war against white minority rule in the then Rhodesia -- denies accusations that he has hung onto power over the last 10 years through violence and vote rigging.

On Sunday, the veteran leader called on people to support a constitutional reform program intended to lead to free and fair elections by 2013. But critics say his ZANU-PF is stalling the process to buy time to reorganize the party.

Mugabe was last year forced into a power-sharing government with Tsvangirai after a political crisis sparked by the disputed general election in 2008.

Although ZANU-PF and Tsvangirai's MDC continue to bicker over the pace of reforms and appointments of senior state officials, Mugabe said on Sunday the power-sharing deal was working and the country was focused on the economy.

"Many of the key provisions of the global political agreement which is the maker of our inclusive government, have been and continue to be in the process of being fulfilled."

Despite criticism that the move will damage the economy and discourage foreign investment, Mugabe said he was pressing on with plans to transfer 51 percent of shareholdings in foreign companies over the next five years to black Zimbabweans after a decade of seizing and transferring white-owned farms to blacks.

"The economic empowerment policies are chiefly designed to redress the historic imbalances in the ownership of the economy," he said.

Tsvangirai and members of his MDC executive -- who have criticized the new policy -- attended the rally and his MDC supporters in the crowd cheered when Mugabe acknowledged the presence of his arch rival.

The aging president, who says he will run again for office if his party nominates him, said although the national economy was in a bad shape, Zimbabweans should celebrate their freedom and remain vigilant against incorrigible racism.

"No challenge or hardship can overcome our sense of freedom, independence and sovereignty," he said.

Iran president on controversial visit to Zimbabwe

(Reuters)

22 April 2010

Ahmadinejad, whose government is pursuing a nuclear programme despite threats of more United Nations sanctions, was invited by Mugabe to open Zimbabwe's annual trade fair.

There was no official indication of any link between the two-day visit and Iran's nuclear programme, but Zimbabwe does hold uranium deposits which have yet to be exploited.

Zimbabwean state media said Ahmadinejad's visit was part of a drive to strengthen ties between countries at odds with the West.

Ahmadinejad was met at Harare's international airport by Mugabe, cabinet ministers and diplomats, amid singing and chants from hundreds of Zimbabwean Muslims waving Iranian flags.

Mugabe's old foe, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, and ministers from his Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) did not attend the welcoming ceremony.

The MDC has called the visit a "colossal political scandal" and it could increase tensions in the power-sharing government set up last year to try to end a decade of political crisis.

The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) attacked Ahmadinejad over his record on human rights and other issues.

"He has made his reputation as a warmonger, a trampler of human rights, an executioner of those with dissenting voices and leader of questionable legitimacy," it said in a statement.

The party said Ahmadinejad's visit would send the wrong message about Zimbabwe at a time it was trying to show the world it was working to restore democracy. Elections won by Mugabe in 2008 were condemned around the world.

"Inviting the Iranian strongman to an investment forum is like inviting a mosquito to cure malaria," it said.

"PARIAH STATE"

Government media said Ahmadinejad's visit was part of a drive to strengthen relations between countries targeted by Western powers.

"These countries have declared Zimbabwe a pariah state and Iran an 'axis of evil' for daring to defend the interests of the citizens and scuttling the West's bid to plunder the resources of our two nations," said the official Herald newspaper.

"The West's neo-colonial agenda should only make us stronger," it added.

Mugabe and his top officials face Western travel restrictions aimed at trying to force change.

Iran faces a possible new round of U.N. sanctions over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment. The West accuses Tehran of trying to build nuclear weapons. Iran says it aims only to generate electricity.

Zimbabwean and Iranian ministers discussed cooperation ahead of Ahmadinejad's visit, including on energy, but the focus was on coal and hydroelectric power rather than nuclear energy.

Northern Zimbabwe has uranium deposits, but no exploration contracts have been awarded so far and the size of the deposits has not been made public. The state mining company has formed a joint venture with a Chinese firm to explore for uranium.

Mugabe and Ahmadinejad are expected to witness the signing of agreements, including one for a tractor assembling plant.

"While we understand Mr Mugabe's shared values with Ahmadinejad ... we call upon the inclusive government to desist from associating our peace-loving country with despots," the MDC said.

Arrests in Madagascar after suspected coup plot

(Reuters)

19 April 2010

ANTANANARIVO (Reuters) - Security forces in Madagascar arrested 19 people on Sunday on suspicion of plotting a coup, the latest in a series of plot rumours to hit the Indian Ocean island's capital in the past few weeks.

Lieutenant Colonel Rene Lylison, the head of the security unit that carried out the arrests, told reporters the plan was to attack the prime minister's residence in the early hours of Monday morning.

"It was serious. Some officers had prepared a coup d'etat, to kill Malagasies ... fortunately, we were able to prevent the attempt," he said. "Their goal was to kill, and divide the military."

There is growing disquiet in Madagascar over the rule of President Andry Rajoelina, a former mayor of the capital who seized power with the help of dissident soldiers in March 2009.

The African Union imposed sanctions on Rajoelina and 108 of his backers in March this year for failing to install a unity government with the country's three main opposition groups.

Analysts say some high-level military officials are frustrated at Rajoelina's failure to end the crisis and restore constitutional order.

On April 12, the army gave the president until the end of April to offer an acceptable way out of the political crisis and end the uncertainty that has hit foreign investment and left the economy struggling.

While some analysts said the army ultimatum might be just what is needed to bring the political groups to the negotiating table, there have been rifts within the army ever since dissident troops backed Rajoelina's power-grab.

Divisions within Rajoelina's government have also emerged. In early April, Rajoelina's prime minister sacked Armed Forces Minister General Noel Rakotonandrasana in a show of no confidence. But Rakotonandrasana has refused to leave his post.

It was not immediately clear who was behind the suspected coup plot, although some army officers and a number of civilians were arrested. Lylison said more arrests were likely to follow.

Zimbabwe: Iran's leader spark tension

(Africa News)

23 April 2010

Ahmadinejad, whose government is pursuing a nuclear programme despite threats of more United Nations sanctions, was described by the opposition as a "war-monger, a trampler of human rights [and] an executioner".

There was no official indication of any link between the two-day visit and Iran's nuclear programme, but Zimbabwe does hold uranium deposits which have yet to be exploited.

Reports out of Harare said Ahmadinejad's visit was part of a drive to strengthen ties between countries at odds with the West.

The outspoken Iran leader is expected to visit Uganda among other unknown African countries where the country has extensive dealings.

Ahmadinejad was met at Harare's international airport by Mugabe, cabinet ministers and diplomats, amid singing and chants from hundreds of Zimbabwean Muslims waving Iranian flags.

Mugabe's old foe, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, and ministers from his Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) did not attend the welcoming ceremony. The MDC has called the visit a "colossal political scandal" and it could increase tensions in the power-sharing government set up last year to try to end a decade of political crisis.

They attacked Ahmadinejad over his record on human rights and other issues.

The MDC said Ahmadinejad's visit would send the wrong message about Zimbabwe at a time it was trying to show the world it was working to restore democracy. Elections won by Mugabe in 2008 were condemned around the world.

"Inviting the Iranian strongman to an investment forum is like inviting a mosquito to cure malaria," it said.

Mugabe and his top officials face Western travel restrictions aimed at trying to force change.

Iran faces a possible new round of U.N. sanctions over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment.

Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad Visits Zimbabwe

(Voice of America)

22 April 2010

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad arrived in Harare Thursday for a state visit and to open the annual international trade fair in Zimbabwe's second city Bulawayo.

Zimbabwe and Iran have close diplomatic ties, and President Ahmadinejad is getting a hero's welcome in Zimbabwe. Posters of him are plastered across poles and trees around the center of Harare.

It has been rare for Zimbabwe to receive international leaders in the last ten years and President Ahmadinejad is the first non-African person to open the annual trade fair since 1980 independence.

Shortly after his arrival Mr. Ahmadinejad was visiting an Iranian textile factory and other factories in Harare's depleted industrial sector.

The trade fair which he opens Friday is now largely a flea market, as most international exhibitors shun the event since Zimbabwe's economy began collapsing ten years ago.

President Robert Mugabe decided to invite the Iranian leader unilaterally, without consulting his political partner in the unity government, Movement for Democratic Change Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai.

The MDC described the Iranian leaders visit as a 'colossal political scandal'. The MDC also said that Mr. Ahmadinejad was in power with questionable legitimacy after his controversial election victory last June and that nine people who questioned the election results faced the death sentence in Iran.

The MDC said Mr. Mugabe "shared values" with the Iranian leader. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights said it was worried that Zimbabwe was "still interested in making friendships with repressive regimes when Zimbabwe should be closing ranks with progressive governments."

Harare's only daily newspaper, the Herald, which supports Mr. Mugabe's ZANU-PF party, said Thursday the West tried to bully both Iran and Zimbabwe with "the might of its weapons of mass destruction."

The Herald also said the Iranian leader would strengthen trade and investment ties with Zimbabwe.

Zambian President and Opposition Leader Trade Jabs Ahead of By-Elections

(Voice of America)

20 April 2010

The political rhetoric in Zambia appears to be heating up as the country prepares to hold its parliamentary by-election April 29.

President Rupiah Banda has reportedly accused main opposition leader Michael Sata of promising to improve the welfare of the electorate if elected president when he Sata failed to build even a toilet while he was national secretary of the ruling Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD).

Sata said President Banda is hallucinating because he's feeling the impact of the opposition and the wind of change in Zambia.

"It is not the responsibility of the opposition to do any development, but it is the responsibility of the opposition all over the world to draw the attention of the government in power, because the government in power that's the one which is overseeing the spending of tax payers' money. And therefore it is not for me to build the toilets; it is Rupiah Banda who is supposed to build the toilets where there are no toilets," he said.

Sata rejected President Banda's criticism that he Sata did nothing about development when he held many government portfolios.

"The point is I was in government but not as a president. To start with today he (Banda) is president of MMD because I built that party to the strength it is today. If I would have not been national secretary of that party, Rupiah Banda would never be president of that party because Rupiah Banda spent all his time, especially in Eastern Province telling people not to join MMD," Sata said.

He accused President Banda of making more foreign trips in the one year since becoming president than his three predecessors.

"Rupiah Banda in one year he has been president, he has traveled more extensively than Kenneth Kaunda's 27 years in office, Frederick Chiluba's 10 years in office, Mwanawasa's seven years in office," Sata said.

With just a week to go before the parliamentary by-election, Sata said President Banda was beginning to fear the opposition's strength.

"Well, if you see the president start hallucinating the way he's hallucinating, he's feeling the impact of the thrust of the opposition. When I was national secretary of the MMD, there was no opposition. It's when I left in 2001 then the first opposition party had 49 seats. And now the opposition it has got more than 60 seats in parliament. So he's feeling the weight that's why he's hallucinating," Sata said.

In preparation for the 2011 presidential election, Sata's Patriotic Front party has entered into a pact with the United Party for National Development (UPND) of Hakainde Hichilema.

Sata denied claims the PF-UPND pact was not performing enough to be funded by the government.

"The government does not finance the opposition in Zambia. He's so scared of the pact; he's scared of everything. He's scared of the wind of change," Sata said.

Sata said it was not fair to ask who would be the presidential candidate of the PF-UPND pact in 2011.

"Are you in Washington? Now if somebody asks you how are you going to cross River Mississippi at any particular point, can you give him an answer when you have not reached River Mississippi? When you get there that's how you would know how to cross it. So even in politics you can't be hatching eggs or counting chicks before the eggs hatch," Sata said.

Zimbabwe's Mugabe Denounces Political Violence, Urges Tolerance

(Voice of America)

19 April 2010

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe has denounced political violence and urged fellow citizens to unite in rebuilding the nation. He made the remarks during ceremonies marking the 30th anniversary of Zimbabwe's independence.

President Robert Mugabe Sunday told a packed sports stadium in Harare that Zimbabweans need to foster an environment of tolerance and treat each other with dignity and respect.

"The leadership of the inclusive government urges you to desist from any acts of violence that will cause harm to others and become a blight on our society," he said. He was speaking at festivities commemorating the 30th anniversary of Zimbabwe's independence.

The partner in his power sharing government, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, also attended the ceremony, but did not speak. Human-rights organizations have accused Mr. Mugabe's ZANU-PF party of using violence and intimidation in elections two years ago in order to retain its 30-year-long hold on power.

Mr. Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change won a majority of parliamentary seats in the elections and he won the first round of the presidential vote. But Mr. Mugabe won the run-off election after Mr. Tsvangirai withdrew, citing a campaign of violence against his supporters. After months of negotiations, a power-sharing government was formed. It has stabilized the economy and reduced political tensions.

But the government has been troubled by disputes over political appointments, and efforts to draft a new constitution leading to new elections have been slowed by political in-fighting and a lack of funds. Mr. Mugabe said the constitutional process was back on course and urged his countrymen to support it.

"I wish to encourage all of you to support this program so that at the end of the day you will have the constitution that will always speak for you and genuinely protect your rights and heritage," said Mr. Mugabe.

The power-sharing government has also been divided over a ZANU-PF plan to transfer majority ownership of large companies to black Zimbabweans. The Indigenization plan, as it is called, is opposed by the MDC and has been postponed for discussion. Mr. Mugabe said the program would redress the historic economic imbalances.

"The Indigenization and Empowerment policy, for example, will broaden ownership and participation in the economy in a manner that recognizes the sovereign right of ownership of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe," he said.

Mr. Mugabe reiterated his long-standing call for an end to Western sanctions imposed on senior leaders of his party and companies owned by them. Mr. Tsvangirai and southern African leaders have also called for an end to the sanctions.

Discipline of Errant ANC Members Not New, Says Analyst

(Voice of America)

18 April 2010

In South Africa, a political analyst says the ruling African National Congress (ANC) reserves the right to discipline any party member who undermines its principles.

Professor Rok Ajulu says if the outspoken youth leader (Julius Malema) is punished over his remarks, it will not be the first time the ANC has taken a decisive disciplinary action against an errant partisan.

“We know for certain that the president at a press conference drew a line and intimated that the line is not supposed to be crossed and that is where it is. There are allegations of Malema having crossed the line and in character with the ANC tradition if that happens, the procedure is disciplinary action,” he said.

At a recent news conference, President Jacob Zuma who is also the president of the ruling ANC rebuked the outspoken Malema for deviating from official policy on Zimbabwe and failing to halt inflammatory comments after the murder of white supremacist Eugene Terre'blanche.

But youth leader Malema rejected the rebuke, saying he had done nothing wrong to undermine the principles of the ANC.

He was quoted at a news conference in Limpopo region as saying "even President Thabo Mbeki, when he differed with the youth league, and the youth league had taken firm radical positions against him, he never did that," he said.

Professor Ajulu said disciplinary action against errant members of the ruling party is not new.

“The disciplinary action against ANC members who have transgressed is a normal procedure within the ANC. There is nothing untoward about it. It won't be anything unique within the ANC tradition. He (Malema) wouldn't be the first to have gone through that. More recently you had the chief whip...having been taken to the disciplinary action and appropriate actions were taken against him,” Ajulu said.”

The outspoken Malema was recently found guilty of hate speech by a South African court after he made comments about a woman who had accused President Zuma of rape.

Professor Ajulu said despite the rebuke, the outspoken Malema enjoys support from the ANC youth league.

“People are divided about that, (but) members of the youth league continue to support Malema. Some other sections, including the opposition parties, are saying appropriate actions are finally being taken against some of the comments. Even within the ANC there is a lot of widespread support for the president (Zuma) for having to take that action because some people argue that this kind of action is long overdue,” Ajulu said.

Meanwhile, the ANC’s National Working Committee (NWC) is scheduled to meet Monday to discuss alleged tensions within the ruling party.

Zimbabwe's President Mugabe Calls for End to Inter-Party Violence

(Voice of America)

18 April 2010

President Robert Mugabe has appealed for an end to political violence in Zimbabwe as the country marks 30 years of independence.

Addressing a ceremony in Harare Sunday, Mr. Mugabe said Zimbabwe's government wants people to "desist from any acts of violence that will cause harm to others and become a blight on our society."

Mr. Mugabe did not mention any names or parties, but human rights groups have long accused his ZANU-PF party of beating, torturing, and killing supporters of the longtime opposition Movement for Democratic Change.

The parties are now in a unity government formed after the disputed and violence-plagued 2008 elections.

The sides remain at odds over multiple issues, including a law that would require all businesses in Zimbabwe to hand over a majority stake to local blacks.

Mr. Mugabe said Sunday that the program would remain in place. He said the program and the controversial land seizures of the past decade are examples of "empowerment" designed to fix historic imbalances in the economy.

Mr. Mugabe was a leader in the guerilla war that resulted in Zimbabwe winning independence from Britain on April 18, 1980.

He was once hailed as one of Africa's most progressive leaders, but has seen his popularity wane since 2000 when his government began a land-redistribution campaign. Mr. Mugabe's widely-condemned seizures of land from white farmers triggered a sharp drop in food production and severely damaged the country's economy.

The 86-year-old president is Africa's oldest head of state. Despite his age and political setbacks, Mr. Mugabe has said he will seek re-election in 2013 if he has his party's support.

World out to get us: Ahmadinejad to Zim

(Times Live)

23 April 2010

"Our nations have a bitter experience of intervention by those big powers. They want to seize the markets of the countries (Iran and Zimbabwe) and destroy their economies," Ahmadinejad said, opening an international trade fair in Zimbabwe's second city of Bulawayo.

"Some of those oppressive and arrogant states don't obey these rules. They have very bad behaviour. And today, they are trying to possess world resources. They don't want the world to achieve peace and prosperity," he said.

"But the world of nations, including Iran and Zimbabwe, has decided to stand firm. We believe in common principles."

The trade fair was once an important showcase for investment in Zimbabwe, but has greatly diminished after a decade of economic freefall.

Ahmadinejad on Thursday visited two factories in the capital Harare where Iran wants to invest, one for car parts and one for carpets.

At a dinner with Mugabe late Thursday, he denounced "satanic pressures" on their countries, which are both targets of sanctions.

Both Ahmadinejad and Mugabe are known for their controversial policies and anti-Western rhetoric.

Both men have also clung to power through elections marred by violence and allegations of fraud - Ahmadinejad after a bloody presidential election last year and Mugabe after sharply criticised polls in 2002 and 2008.

Ahmadinejad currently faces the threat of new United Nations sanctions over Iran's nuclear programme, while Mugabe is accused of not honouring a power-sharing agreement reached last year after the controversial elections.

Mugabe backed Iran's nuclear programme and joined Ahmadinejad in denouncing the sanctions.

"Be also assured, comrade president, of Zimbabwe's continuous support of Iran's just cause on the nuclear issue," Mugabe told Ahmadinejad on Thursday.

"Because of the principled positions we have taken at both the domestic and international level, Zimbabwe and Iran have been unjustly vilified and punished by Western countries," Mugabe said.

Ahmadinejad arrived in Zimbabwe Thursday for trade talks with Mugabe, a visit denounced as a "colossal political scandal" by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Mugabe's partner in a fractious unity government.

"Inviting the Iranian strongman to an investment forum is like inviting a mosquito to cure malaria," the party said in a statement.

Ahmadinejad heads to Uganda later Friday, where he will discuss Iran's nuclear programme, according to Iranian state television.

Uganda currently holds one of the rotating seats on the Security Council, which is considering tougher sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme.

Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has said Tehran plans to open talks with all 15 Security Council members in an effort to break a deadlock on a nuclear fuel supply deal that has put it at odds with Western powers.

Zimbabwe enjoys good relations with Iran as well as several east Asian countries after Mugabe launched a "Look East" policy in response to isolation by the West following Harare's controversial land reforms and disputed 2002 elections.

US and UK failed to impose sanctions on apartheid SA

(Times Live)

23 April 2010

Thatcher claimed "constructive agreement" or something like that when she was vetoing sanctions against her cousins in the apartheid regime wasn't she?

And that bigot (former US president Ronald) Reagan was doing the same thing. then after sanctions were finally put in place what did thatcher and Reagan allow the companys from their countrys to violate them.

(Zimbabwe presidet Robert) Mugabe and (Iran president Mahmoud) Amadinejad are both correct for saying up yours to the west and the United Nations. Where were the sanctions against Israel for selling nuclear weapons to the apartheid regime?

Where were the sanctions against the US for selling nukes to Israel?

Israel, a country that was created as being the victims of racism and Nazism sold nuclear weapons to this planet's last remaining remnants of Nazism. And remember they sold apartheid weapons after the U.N. had demanded that sanctions be placed on the National Party government.

Pan Africa

Madagascar talks set for April 28 in South Africa

(Reuters)

21 April 2010

ANTANANARIVO (Reuters) - The protagonists in Madagascar's political crisis have agreed to attend talks in South Africa on April 28.

President Andry Rajoelina, ousted Marc Ravalomanana with the help of dissident soldiers in March last year after weeks of popular protests. The two have been at loggerheads ever since as international mediators work to install a unity government.

Rajoelina's office said late on Tuesday he would go to the talks in the interests of the nation. A spokesman for Ravalomanana said on Wednesday he planned to attend to try to return democracy to Madagascar, the world's fourth largest island and the biggest producer of vanilla.

The crisis has hit foreign investment into the Indian Ocean island with potentially substantial oil and mineral reserves and battered the tourism industry.

The army said last month Rajoelina had until the end of April to come up with an acceptable way out of the political impasse.

The latest round of talks has been arranged by mediators from France, South Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Since the crisis erupted, there has been a diplomatic divide among African nations with Anglophones largely seen favouring Ravalomanana and Francophones tending to side with Rajoelina, according to African Union sources and analysts.

Ravalomanana had a rocky relationship with France and has accused the island's former colonial power of supporting Rajoelina's rise to power.

Rajoelina has been suspicious of SADC since Ravalomanana fled to exile in South Africa and an economic bloc of eastern and southern African nations (COMESA) said it was mulling military intervention to restore constitutional order.

France and the United Nations then warned against military intervention and urged further dialogue.

Tension in Madagascar has grown in recent weeks. There have been rumours of coup plots and the security forces have arrested 21 people since Sunday on suspicion of plotting attacks.

The military police in the capital Antananarivo told Reuters a grenade was thrown at the home of the justice minister on Tuesday evening but no one was hurt.