

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Region: Southern Africa

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Summary of Report

Elections & Governance

ZIMBABWE: Freddie Matonhodze, "We fear there could be a blood bath"

Freddie Matonhodze, an official of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Muzarabani district, in Mashonaland Central Province, a rural stronghold of the ruling ZANU-PF party, lost his wife and relatives to political violence. His home has been razed and his livestock slaughtered, but he refuses to flee. And he is of the view that there could be blood shed.

Madagascar Leader Won't Contest in Election

Madagascar's President, Andry Rajoelina, surprised many by announcing on state television that he will not participate in the upcoming presidential elections he has scheduled for 26 November, said a political analyst in the capital, Antananarivo.

Tsvangirai Receives NDI Award

The National Democratic Institute, a pro-democracy group, gave one of its highest honors to Zimbabwean Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai on Monday. NDI's W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award recognizes individuals and groups who have demonstrated a commitment to democracy and human rights.

Madagascar's Rajoelina says will not run in election

Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina said on Wednesday he will not contest presidential elections slated for November this year in a bid to end the political crisis on the Indian Ocean island.

Comoros annuls law extending leader's term

Comoros' highest court has annulled a law which extended the mandate of the Indian Ocean islands' leader after weeks of heightened political tensions on the coup-prone archipelago.

Politics

Mauritius appoints new finance minister

The leader of Mauritius' Militant Socialist Movement, Pravind Jugnauth, has been sworn in as the Indian Ocean's finance minister following last week's parliamentary election. Jugnauth, who formed an alliance with Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam's ruling Labour Party ahead of the ballot, is expected by analysts to maintain reforms to diversify the island's economy while strengthening the welfare state.

Economy & Energy

UN Development Chief in South Africa to highlight the MDGs

Helen Clark, the Administrator of UNDP, arrives in Johannesburg on 12 May for a three-day official visit where she will meet with President Jacob Zuma and other senior government officials and host a discussion on gender in South Africa with women leaders from business, politics, academia and the media. During her visit, Miss Clark will launch the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) campaign song for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, "8 Goals for Africa".

AFRICA: Plugging the technology gap with help from India

Investment in information technology can help Africa to improve governance, overcome poverty and deal with critical infrastructure gaps, taking India as an example, the co-chair of the World Economic Forum on Africa 2010 (WEF) said.

South African Port, Rail Workers Go On Strike

Thousands of South African transport workers went on strike Monday, an action that could cripple port, freight rail, and pipeline operations across the country. The union called the strike after rejecting a proposed pay raise by the state-owned ports and rail company.

Human Rights, Social Issues & Developments

Prominent white South African anti-apartheid campaigner dies

Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, one of South Africa's most prominent white opponents of apartheid who initiated talks between Afrikaner businessmen and the then-banned ANC in 1987, died on Friday.

ZIMBABWE: New travel document gets you nowhere

A new Zimbabwean temporary travel document (TTD) is not being recognized by neighbouring South Africa's immigration authorities, preventing cross-border traders from sourcing goods for resale.

In Malawi, NGOs and Government Join Forces to End Forced Marriage

In Malawi, NGOs and the government are working together to end forced marriages and other traditional practices that violate the rights of girls. The effort follows reports that more and more girls are being forced into marriage with older men.

South Africa Ready for World Cup Kick-Off

With one month to go before the kick-off of the football (soccer) World Cup in South Africa, organizers say they are pleased with the preparations.

Environmental Issues

AFRICA: Changing technologies to keep up with climate change

Technological innovation is key to helping African farmers cope with the increasing challenges posed by climate change, say specialists.

Food Security & Health Issues

ANGOLA: Putting a dent in the maternal death rate

After more than a decade of volunteer work in Angola's rural Matala district in the southern province of Huila, a Finnish doctor is seeing maternal mortality rates gradually come down in a country where about one in every 70 women dies in childbirth.

SOUTH AFRICA: Children's healthcare missing the mark

South Africa has achieved near universal access to health services for pregnant women and their children, but maternal and infant mortality rates have continued to rise making the chances of reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on maternal and child health increasingly remote.

SOUTH AFRICA: Government is first to join major patent pool

A South African government agency has become the first to join the world's leading patent pool for neglected diseases, a move that could bolster home-grown innovations in the fight against diseases including tuberculosis (TB).

SWAZILAND: Mobile clinics in cash crunch

Mobile clinics for HIV patients have been benefiting entire communities in rural Swaziland, but tight budgets have scuppered plans to expand the project, or even sustain a fleet of just two vehicles.

China-Africa Relations**'Imaginary' Chinese Investment to Zambia Questioned**

The leader of Zambia's main opposition Patriotic Front (PF) party says the government's announcement of a \$1 billion Chinese investment to help build an electric power plant is a "cheaply conceived" ploy to garner votes ahead of next year's general elections.

Detailed Report

Elections & Governance

ZIMBABWE: Freddie Matonhodze, "We fear there could be a blood bath"

(IRIN)

10 May 2010

HARARE, 10 May 2010 (IRIN) - Freddie Matonhodze, an official of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Muzarabani district, in Mashonaland Central Province, a rural stronghold of the ruling ZANU-PF party, lost his wife and relatives to political violence. His home has been razed and his livestock slaughtered, but he refuses to flee.

"I have been an active member of the MDC since 2002. I am a former ZANU-PF supporter, but from 2000 [when the fast-track land reform programme was launched] I did not like the way the party used violence in its [political] campaigns, and it encouraged us to use violence against the then opposition supporters.

"In the March 2008 elections, because of violence and intimidation, the MDC candidate for the parliamentary seat in the harmonised [parliamentary and presidential] elections pulled out of the race at the last minute.

"I remained as the campaign manager for MDC president Morgan Tsvangirai, and the senate and council candidates. When President Robert Mugabe was defeated by Tsvangirai in the first round of voting, I was targeted by the militia and war veterans under the command of the military.

"When ZANU-PF militia laid siege to my homestead, I escaped with my wife, Nyadzisayi. She sustained a broken collar bone and spinal injuries; she died at the end of 2009 as a result of her injuries.

"The mob which attacked my homestead is known, and they are war veterans and traditional leaders - among them, Chief Chagarakasekete.

"I fled to live in relative safety near Harare [the capital] until the signing of the Global Political Agreement [(GPA) signed in September 2008, paving the way for the formation of a unity government in February 2009] and returned home to resume my life. I look after an extended family of 15 and have worked hard to ensure they are catered for.

"When I returned home, I found that my neighbours were hostile to me, and bragged that the GPA only applied in Harare and not in rural areas.

"What crushed me was that they had set my tractor on fire, set my homestead on fire and, even more cruelly, they set my pigs, which were in an enclosure, on fire.

"The ZANU-PF militia slaughtered some of my livestock and consumed it. I lost chickens, guinea fowls, goats and cattle.

"The violence has resumed and we have had to appeal to the JOMIC [the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee, which monitors compliance with the GPA] to come and help bring peace after ZANU-PF supporters set a building on fire used by MDC supporters.

"JOMIC says it will visit the area one of these days, but we fear that there could be a bloodbath if nothing is done soon."

Madagascar Leader Won't Contest in Election

[Voice of America]

12 May 2010

Madagascar's President, Andry Rajoelina, surprised many by announcing on state television that he will not participate in the upcoming presidential elections he has scheduled for 26 November, said a political analyst in the capital, Antananarivo.

Guilo Ramilison said President Rajoelina's announcement is a relief to most Malagasy who want a quick resolution to the ongoing political crisis.

"It is like a big relief to Malagasy citizens now... because that transitional period has been lengthened and it is becoming more than a trouble to us. Because the international community, which (includes) most of the donors, only said that, if (Mr.) Rajoelina, the president, keep on taking on decision only from his part, then there would be no solution for Madagascar," he said.

In his televised speech, Mr. Rajoelina said there would be a national convention from 27th to 29th May, aimed at drafting a new constitution ahead of the elections.

But, opponents say Mr. Rajoelina's decision not to contest the November elections is calculated to ease international pressure on him to resolve the ongoing political stalemate. Ramilison said Mr. Rajoelina might not win the elections if he changes his mind to contest in the elections.

"If he contests, then he will only get just above one percent because...he said... during the presidential announcement, that a real president is the one who sticks to his ideals...I am the president and I want to show to everyone that I am responsible. So, if he changes his mind, (just) like what happened to one of his mentors...in 1996, when he was the prime minister...and he won only three percent. So, I don't think (Mr.) Rajoelina will make the same mistake," he said.

Several peace talks, including President Rajoelina, former President Marc Ravalomanana, as well as all other political parties, that were mediated by the African Union, have failed to yield positive results.

The African Union imposed sanctions on Madagascar following the political crisis that analysts say keep deteriorating.

Tsvangirai Receives NDI Award

[Voice of America]

12 May 2010

The National Democratic Institute, a pro-democracy group, gave one of its highest honors to Zimbabwean Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai on Monday. NDI's W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award recognizes individuals and groups who have demonstrated a commitment to democracy and human rights.

Mr. Tsvangirai received a standing ovation. He was introduced to the audience by NDI chair Madeleine Albright, who told his story of a man working to overcome many obstacles.

"The essence of free government is that when one set of policies is not working, an alternative can be considered," she said. "But when democracy has been subverted, presenting that alternative requires courage, persistence and faith. Fortunately, Mr. Tsvangirai possesses each of these qualities. His character is steady and strong."

Echoing the praises by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton earlier in the day, Albright, also a former U.S. secretary of state, complimented Mr. Tsvangirai for overcoming the rivalrous history with longtime President Robert Mugabe. That history includes trumped up treason charges against Mr. Tsvangirai, arrests, and beatings of him and his supporters. But Mr. Tsvangirai defended his decision to form an inclusive government with President Mugabe.

"This was not an easy decision, nor is it a comfortable arrangement. However, it represents another step in Zimbabwe's difficult but certain transition to true democracy," he said.

Doubts linger in the international community about Mr. Mugabe's sincerity to bring change to Zimbabwe. This has been renewed sanctions on him and his close allies, and donors have withheld funds as they await results. Mr. Tsvangirai says this wait-and-see attitude is not helpful. But he thanked former presidential candidate, Senator John Kerry, for Kerry's recently introduced legislation to help Zimbabwe's political transition.

"This legislation represents the beginning of a new phase, designed to assist us in building new cooperation to receive much needed support in our efforts," he said. "As prime minister, I'm aware that the people of Zimbabwe demand the delivery of better

services, and more profound reforms at a faster rate. And the reengagement of the international community will assist us in this process."

The transitional arrangement is expected to end following the establishment of a new constitution that will pave the way for elections. Mr. Tsvangirai says that plan is on course.

"The president and prime minister will sit down and set the date for elections. Hopefully this process of constitution-making will lead to a referendum this side of the year, and next year we can have elections," he said.

Madagascar's Rajoelina says will not run in election

[Alert Net]

12 May 2010

ANTANANARIVO, May 12 (Reuters) - Madagascar President Andry Rajoelina said on Wednesday he will not contest presidential elections slated for November this year in a bid to end the political crisis on the Indian Ocean island.

"I declare in the name of the superior interest of the nation and of the people my decision not to stand as candidate in the presidential elections for a fourth republic," he said in a televised statement.

Rajoelina, who toppled former lead Marc Ravalomanana with the help of dissident troops in March last year, said that a referendum on constitutional reform would be held on Aug. 12.

The former disc jockey, whose power grab was branded a coup by regional neighbours and foreign donors, said parliamentary elections would follow on Sept. 30 before a presidential poll on Nov. 26.

International mediators brokered a string of power-sharing deals between Rajoelina, Ravalomanana and two other former presidents last year, but they all collapsed after the bitter rivals failed to agree on how to share out the top posts.

Rajoelina, Africa's youngest leader, has been under heavy pressure from the army to find a solution after the political turmoil slowed foreign investment and the African Union slapped sanctions on more than 100 of his key backers.

Comoros annuls law extending leader's term

[Alert Net]

09 May 2010

MORONI, May 9 (Reuters) - Comoros' highest court has annulled a law which extended the mandate of the Indian Ocean islands' leader after weeks of heightened political tensions on the coup-prone archipelago.

The Constitutional Court said President Mohamed Abdallah Sambi's term in office would end later this month, and not November 2011, and recommended an interim period to agree on when the next ballot should be held.

"On the May 26 the mandate of the Union's president and his two vice presidents will end," the court said in a statement on Saturday. "During this (interim) period the government does not have the right to dissolve parliament ... nor to change the members of the Constitutional Court."

Earlier this year, a newly elected parliament ratified a law aligning local and federal elections, effectively extending Sambi's term by 18 months.

Sambi's supporters argued the new legislation would cut bureaucracy and save costs in one of the world's poorest countries. But his critics accused him of trying to cling on to power.

Many on the opposition-stronghold island of Moheli, which had been due to take over the rotating presidency on May 27, felt the law was a deliberate attempt to rob them of the presidency.

The Indian Ocean archipelago, sandwiched between Mozambique and Madagascar, has a history of political turmoil and coups since it won independence from France in 1975. Growing anger on Moheli saw the government deploy extra security forces there to quell bouts of civil unrest and a ban on public rallies.

Politics

Mauritius appoints new finance minister

[Alert Net]

11 May 2010

PORT LOUIS, May 11 (Reuters) - The leader of Mauritius' Militant Socialist Movement, Pravind Jugnauth, has been sworn in as the Indian Ocean's finance minister following last week's parliamentary election. Jugnauth, who formed an alliance with Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam's ruling Labour Party ahead of the ballot, is expected by analysts to maintain reforms to diversify the island's economy while strengthening the welfare state.

Jugnauth was finance minister from 2003-2005 in a coalition government with the now opposition leader Paul Berenger. (Reporting by Jean Paul Arouff; editing by Richard Lough)

Economy & Energy

UN Development Chief in South Africa to highlight the MDGs

(UNDP)

12 May 2010

Helen Clark, the Administrator of UNDP, arrives in Johannesburg on 12 May for a three-day official visit where she will meet with President Jacob Zuma and other senior government officials and host a discussion on gender in South Africa with women leaders from business, politics, academia and the media.

During her visit, Miss Clark will launch the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) campaign song for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, "8 Goals for Africa". The song is performed by eight African artists including Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Angelique Kidjo and Oliver Mtukudzi. It encourages commitment to the achievement of the MDGs – eight internationally-agreed goals to alleviate poverty - and is part of the global UN MDGs campaign in preparation for the world leaders' MDGs summit in September, in New York. She will also kick off a football tournament for young boys and girls at the Alexander Football Club grounds in Alexander Township.

Miss Clark will be in South Africa as part of a four-country MDGs Africa trip which has already taken her to Mali, Burkina Faso and Tanzania.

AFRICA: Plugging the technology gap with help from India

(IRIN)

14 May 2010

DAR-ES-SALAAM, 14 May 2010 (IRIN) - Investment in information technology can help Africa to improve governance, overcome poverty and deal with critical infrastructure gaps, taking India as an example, the co-chair of the World Economic Forum on Africa 2010 (WEF) said.

“There is no need to reinvent the wheel,” Ajai Chowdhry, also chairman and chief executive officer of HCL Infosystems in India, told IRIN on the sidelines of a recent WEF conference in Tanzania. “India and Africa have similar problems so we can apply similar solutions. It’s all been tried and tested in India, and the software is readily available to transfer knowledge and experience.”

While mobile phone usage in Africa has ballooned – by almost 550 percent between 2003 and 2008, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) – and Kenya, for example, has led the way with the M-Pesa payment system and Ushahidi information-sharing platform, the continent has been lagging behind other developing regions in internet use and broadband connectivity, according to UNCTAD. Financing

fast broadband networks will require cooperation between national governments, donors and the private sector.

One example is Rwanda, which is working with donors, UN bodies and private companies to realize its "Vision 2020" with ICT at its heart. Ten years ago, only one school had a computer; by 2006 more than half of primary and secondary schools were equipped with computers, and over 2,000 teachers had been trained in ICT, according to a World Bank report.

Enabling computer use, especially in far-flung areas, requires creative financing, says Chowdhry; the government of India provided a subsidy of \$100 per computer from donor funding, thereby "taking computers to the village".

Catalyst for change

In the early 1990s, India's government had only US\$1 billion left in the kitty. The International Monetary Fund proposed deregulation and opening up the economy. On the plus side the country enjoyed a strong financial system, which took banking to the unbanked, building urban infrastructure in rural areas.

In addition, knowledge centres were created in the villages, focusing on health, agriculture and education, thereby creating inclusive growth and discouraging rural-urban migration. While there have been a few hiccups, notably the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, the country is on target for 10 percent growth in 2011, a rate that should eradicate absolute poverty.

At the same time, the government was focusing on building effective institutions, and improving transparency by harnessing the power of technology. The result is every person's fundamental right to information, whereby every citizen can question every facet of government. After initial, strong opposition, officialdom and government ministers alike are adapting to the scrutiny.

"Information is key to overcoming poverty," Chowdhry said. "Effective governance means electronic governance in India; our goal is internet access for all, we should make it as much a right as we now have the right to education for all."

Investing in the future

Broadband penetration is only 3 percent in Africa but recent investment in undersea cables should boost that, bringing easier access to information on agriculture, healthcare, education and banking. The challenge of increasing access in homes and businesses will require massive investment, says Chowdhry, but the \$5 billion low-interest rate credit line extended by the Indian government through the Export-Import Bank of India (EXIM) to Africa has hardly been tapped in the past 18 months.

Only large projects need apply, preferably for developing ICT in schools and universities to boost capacity, as tertiary education in particular is vital for the continent's development and stemming the brain drain. Given that almost half the continent's population is younger than 15, providing education and entrepreneurial opportunities is imperative.

"E-technology entrepreneurship will make as big a difference in Africa as in India," he told IRIN. All the investment coming from India was private, he added, and private-public partnerships were a key element to investment that India could bring to the continent. India already offers more scholarships to African students than any other country while the EXIM Bank runs several policy initiatives, including the Pan-African E-Network, India-Africa Partnership Conclaves and the annual India-Africa Summit, to encourage closer ties.

At this year's summit held in New Delhi in March, \$9 billion-worth of projects were under discussion, focusing on infrastructure development and IT.

South African Port, Rail Workers Go On Strike

[Voice of America]

10 May 2010

Thousands of South African transport workers went on strike Monday, an action that could cripple port, freight rail, and pipeline operations across the country.

A spokesperson for the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union, Jane Barrett, said Sunday that up to 18,000 members will participate in the job action.

The union called the strike after rejecting a proposed pay raise by the state-owned ports and rail company, Transnet.

The union is demanding a 15 percent wage increase. Transnet is offering 11 percent.

Another union, the United Transport and Allied Trade Union, said its leadership decided not to strike for two days while its 22,000 members consider Transnet's revised offer.

That union reports its members were being intimidated as they tried to come to work Monday.

The two unions represent 85 percent of Transnet's 50,000 employees.

The unions have said public transportation will not be affected by the strike. However, a new commuter bus service in Johannesburg was not operating Monday because of what its operator called a "union recognition dispute." It was not clear if the dispute was related to the transport workers' strike.

The strike could halt exports of coal, fruit and an ore used in the manufacture of stainless steel, as well as disrupt fuel distribution and shipping.

Transnet officials say they have contingency plans are in place and that the company is working with police to ensure the safety of non-striking workers as well as its assets.

The strike comes a month before South Africa hosts football's World Cup.

Human Rights, Social Issues & Developments

Prominent white South African anti-apartheid campaigner dies

(Reuters)

14 May, 2010

Tributes poured in from across South Africa's political spectrum, with President Jacob Zuma calling him a "true patriot."

The ruling ANC described his fight for equality as "a voice of reason amidst an ocean of ruthless repression."

The 70-year-old former leader of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), a liberal opposition party that also included Helen Suzman, angered the ruling National Party (NP) when he arranged for white businessmen to meet ANC leaders in exile, including Zuma.

The PFP was for years a lone voice challenging the white minority government in South Africa's parliament.

The 1987 meeting, organized a year after he resigned from the PFP after becoming frustrated by a lack of change, was a catalyst to dialogue that ultimately helped close the door on apartheid.

The African National Congress praised Van Zyl Slabbert for using his platform in parliament to fight apartheid.

"He was amongst the few white South Africans who resisted apartheid when it was not fashionable or personally rewarding to do so," the statement said.

The Democratic Alliance, a descendent of the PFP, said: "He devoted his life to the development of a just South Africa, and he left our country a far better place than before."

FW de Klerk, the last apartheid-era president who officially started moves to end decades of white rule, said although Van Zyl Slabbert was his political opponent, he was admired for his conviction for political reform.

"He understood at an early stage the need for fundamental reform and was a consistent supporter of liberal values and open political debate," said a statement issued by De Klerk.

Van Zyl Slabbert, who worked as an academic and political analyst after leaving active politics, died at his home in Johannesburg after being treated for a liver related complication.

ZIMBABWE: New travel document gets you nowhere

(IRIN)

13 May 2010

HARARE, 13 May 2010 (IRIN) - A new Zimbabwean temporary travel document (TTD) is not being recognized by neighbouring South Africa's immigration authorities, preventing cross-border traders from sourcing goods for resale.

"My passport expired two years ago and even though I made an application for a replacement, I am yet to get it. I have, instead, been using temporary travel documents to carry on with my business," said Mary Muzondo, 30, who imports electrical goods and blankets and sells them in the capital, Harare.

Like thousands of others, she was denied entry into South Africa. "I have two school-going children and I have failed to pay their school fees because of this confusion over TTDs. Cross-border trade is my only source of income, and if it were not that I have managed to collect some money from people who had not paid me for the goods I supplied to them, my family would be starving," Muzondo told IRIN.

Passports cost US\$170, making them too expensive for many people; they are also difficult to obtain because of the huge backlog that arose when hyperinflation made manufacturing them unaffordable. A new TTD, costing US\$37 and valid for six months, was introduced earlier this year.

The registrar-general's office said the new document would be more difficult to forge, and had been used successfully for entering Botswana, or by people flying into South Africa.

Joint home affairs minister Kembo Mohadi blamed the registrar general's office - which falls under his ministry - for failing to notify the relevant South African authorities about the travel document changes, although Tobaiwa Mudede, the registrar-general, claimed his department had followed the correct procedures.

"When we started, we brought all the stakeholders together and they agreed that [the TTD] met all international requirements," Mudede told a parliamentary committee, adding that the issue of the document was being dealt with "at government-to-government level".

The other co-minister of home affairs, Giles Mutsekwa, said resolution was expected soon, following a Zimbabwean delegation's visit to South Africa.

"The discussions we have had so far [with South African authorities] show that the TTD problem will soon be a thing of the past. They have promised to give us a response soon."

However, a government-supporting daily newspaper, The Herald, quoted Charles Gwede, the South African assistant regional immigration officer, as saying that "The situation has remained unchanged and we understand that it is not yet resolved."

Fragile economy

Innocent Makwiramiti, a Harare-based economist and former chief executive officer of the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC), said many people had to travel to South Africa to earn a living.

"Commodities might be back on the shelves and there is relative stability in the economy, but hundreds of Zimbabweans cross into South Africa on a daily basis to buy goods for sale here, or to sell commodities that are manufactured here and are in demand in the other country," Makwiramiti told IRIN.

Zimbabwe's economy is still very fragile, despite the formation of a unity government in 2009, and has been ravaged hyperinflation, extremely high unemployment, scarcity of commodities, a shrinking industry, and the collapse of social services.

In Malawi, NGOs and Government Join Forces to End Forced Marriage

[Voice of America]

11 May 2010

In Malawi, NGOs and the government are working together to end forced marriages and other traditional practices that violate the rights of girls. The effort follows reports that more and more girls are being forced into marriage with older men.

One of the practices under scrutiny is kupimbira, a tradition in northern Malawi where parents arrange for their young daughters to marry older men without the girls' consent. In return, the new husbands pay the parents a dowry or forgive a debt. Usually, this is done when the girl is still a child. Supporters say it allows parents to choose the best husbands for their daughters.

Thirteen-year-old Belita Simpokolwe was once forced to marry an old man: "My stepfather ordered me to quit school and get married to a 77-year-old man. He said I was too old for grade four. But I refused, and I told him that I want to continue with my education.

“Soon after that, my stepfather sent me to the market without money. Instead, he [told] me to collect some money from a certain gentleman ranging from \$5 to \$10, some of which I would use to buy some food, and return the change to him.”

Simpokolwe says she didn’t suspect anything unusual, because she thought the man was related to her stepfather.

But to her surprise, she says, three weeks later the man came to her house with a hoe – used sometimes in the north as a symbol of a dowry. If a woman agrees to take it, she has accepted his proposal.

“I was shocked when my stepfather asked me to [accept] it from the man. Confused, I objected. My mother tried to reason with him that I was too young for marriage.”

But my stepfather [attacked] my mother, saying he could divorce her if she continued opposing his wishes. He also said [we should not turn down his offer] because we had already [spent] the money from the gentleman.”

Seven-year-old Tumpe Mwambene says she was forced to marry a 40-year-old herbalist in the Karonga District. He had treated her illness, but her father had no money to pay. Mwambene says she did household chores and was beaten if she refused to have sex.

Mwambene and Simpokolwe have now returned to school, thanks in part to groups like the Chitipa Women’s Forum. It works with a project working to defend the rights of girls called Social Empowerment on Rights for Vulnerable and Excluded Women (SERVE). The project, which is funded by the NGO ActionAid, works to defeat any practice that prevents a girl from receiving an education.

The chairperson of the Forum, Ruth Mbale, says the group tries to convince parents to allow their daughters to go back to school, even if it means rescinding their decision to force her to marry:

“Since most women here did not go further in their education,” says Mbale, “it was good to discourage early marriages and urge young girls to proceed with education, taking advantage of government’s readmission policy which allows girls to go back to school.” But Mbale says parents and sometimes chiefs insist that they are too poor to pay girls’ school fees. So she says members of her group contribute to a fund that helps support girls who cannot pay for their education.

An impact assessment shows that the project has had some success reducing child marriage in Chitipa district, where 40 married girls between seven and 16 years old have gone back to school.

In some areas, village officials like senior chief Mwaumbia are trying to end the tradition, especially, he says, because it’s unconstitutional:

“We agree that kupimbira is a bad practice, especially today, when we are told to treat both girls and boys the same. In my area, I make sure that it is being suppressed very vividly. If someone is forcing a child into early marriage, we as chiefs have our own ways of punishing our people, or we may tell [parents they must give a chicken as a penalty]. If they object, we have the powers to evict them.”

The SERVE project is also working to end other cultural practices that can interfere with the education of women, like kulowa kufa, which requires a widow to cleanse the village of death by having sex with a man. Another is nhlazi, under which the wife’s sister or another relative is given to the husband, sometimes even if the child bride is too young to become pregnant.

Similar projects are also being implemented in three other districts; Rumphu, Salima and Chiradzulu.

South Africa Ready for World Cup Kick-Off

[Voice of America]

10 May 2010

With one month to go before the kick-off of the football (soccer) World Cup in South Africa, organizers say they are pleased with the preparations.

The head of South Africa's Organizing Committee, Danny Jordaan, took pride in noting Sunday that South Africa had completed all of the 10 stadiums that will host the World Cup's 64 matches.

"What we have created is wonderful infrastructure and the basis, really, to take South African football to a different level," said Jordaan.

Jordaan said he hoped the \$2 billion worth of physical improvements to South African football would have the same effect on the national team, which he acknowledged has experienced problems with its offense.

Football's governing body, FIFA, praised the organizers. Secretary-General Jerome Valke denied reports in some news media that FIFA had ever considered moving the event.

"There was never, never a single time where FIFA thought about moving or removing this World Cup from South Africa to another country," said Valke.

The South African government has also spent an estimated \$2 billion improving transportation.

President Jacob Zuma Saturday inaugurated the country's newest international airport, 35-kilometers north of Durban. He said it came as the country prepared to experience, what he called, the largest wave of aviation traffic in its history.

"We are thrilled by the fact that we are able to present the World Cup in a South Africa that is going through a huge building and reconstruction phase," said the president.

The billion-dollar facility can handle more than seven-million passengers and 50,000 tons of cargo a year. Mr. Zuma said it would support economic growth in the region for decades to come.

Capacity has also been nearly doubled at airports in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth.

The country's road network is also receiving extensive upgrades. And the government has spent more than \$100 million on improving security, including dedicating 40,000 police officers to World Cup events.

Officials say the expenditures, though criticized by some, have created tens of thousands of jobs and have shielded the economy from the worst effects of the global recession.

The events occurred as Durban hosted the country's annual tourism convention.

Some of the 15,000 exhibitors said their businesses had benefited from the World Cup, while others said they had not. But the majority said the tournament would have a positive long-term effect by boosting South Africa's image as a world-class tourist destination.

Environmental Issues

AFRICA: Changing technologies to keep up with climate change

(IRIN)

10 May 2010

NAIROBI, 10 May 2010 (IRIN) - Technological innovation is key to helping African farmers cope with the increasing challenges posed by climate change, say specialists.

"Temperatures have increased and the danger is that agriculture is the backbone of [Africa's] economies," Lindiwe Majele Sibanda, chief executive officer of the South-African based Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), told IRIN. "The increase in temperatures means we have less water in some places and we are already a drought-prone region."

"The technologies that we have on the shelf... like the seeds, may not be compatible with the increased temperatures," she added.

"Malawi recorded world renowned success in terms of food security because we have experienced a fairly stable climate regime over the last 100 years. The technologies that

were there [such as] the hybrid seeds... could be taken in, planted. As long they were accessible to the farmers, we could then register increases in yields.

“But the challenge we face now is that there will be new diseases, new vectors and pests that we have not known or seen before All these challenges are being superimposed on a system that has not been food-secure,” she said.

Africa spends at least US\$19 billion on food imports annually yet it has the capacity to be the global breadbasket, she said. “Most of our farmers are smallholders and they are in the business of subsidizing the urban population [but] for as long as we are not creating an environment where they can increase their income and step out of poverty, we will always have [more] poor people yet we have the potential to be food-secure.”

About one billion people worldwide were food insecure in 2009, according to estimates, with the food price crisis hitting millions. The UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, Achim Steiner, told the conference, organized by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and the Earth System Science Partnership, that the response to the crisis was similar to the cause of the problem. “We are reducing soil fertility, continuing to bank on water, increasing reliance on fertilizer... the emphasis cannot just be this both from an environmental and cost basis,” he said.

“We need to rethink agriculture as a platform from which the world will learn to ensure that 50 years from now we can produce food to feed nine billion,” he said.

“Clearly increasing yields is paramount, but we cannot look at the development of agriculture driven by the horizontal approach; slash-burn, moving to new frontiers ... this paradigm is deceptive. You only have so much for horizontal expansion.”

He proposed the “vertical expansion of agriculture” through methods such as plant breeding with perennial food crops, and improved farm management practices to increase soil fertility and moisture retention. Perennial crops are less disruptive to the soil structure as there is less tilling and they help trap nutrients.

“Farming in the future will not just be about food production but other services rendered captured in an economic model. If we can prove that a certain farming system is better at reducing carbon emissions, what is there to stop farmers from being paid for their efforts five to 10 years from now?” Steiner posited. “By all means let us have a green revolution but let us give it a capital 'G' this time.”

India’s experience

India saw food production rise from about 65 million tonnes in the 1960s to 230 million tonnes in 2008 due to higher yielding varieties, said Pramod Aggarwal of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute. But large yield gaps remain, with India accounting for 25 and 40 percent of the world's hungry and malnourished women and children, respectively.

Aggarwal said improved crop, pest and risk management as well as changes in sowing dates, improved crop varieties; irrigation and fertilizer efficiency could further mitigate climate effects while increasing production.

William Clark, professor of international science and public policy at Harvard University, called for more field-based experimentation. “The world is changing in timescales faster than programmes and feedback. There is a need for safe spaces [for researchers] that encourage innovation,” Clark said.

“We need to acknowledge that work like this will be inefficient. We don’t have the map; we are inventing it as we go along... we should agree on a target rate of failure in R&D [research and development].”

He added that research ownership was crucial. “What research we can do reflects the power structure. When knowledge influences decisions, knowledge is power. Who sets the research agenda, who says what evidence counts, whose interests are science programmes actually and appearing to serve? Those who feel that their interests have not been taken into research are unlikely to accept the findings ...”

Learning by doing

“We are at a stage where we need to learn quickly. Climate adaptation is a classic case of learning by doing,” Saleemul Huq, a senior fellow at the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), said. “We used to think of adaptation as localized. We are now thinking in-situ in the short term. Planned migration due to rising sea levels, where people may move further inland, may have to be considered in the long term. [We] need a new way although we don’t know what this new way is.”

He also urged climate and agriculture researchers to link up with universities to train practitioners. “Climate change is a vast area, no one can deal with it alone,” he said.

At present, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development under its Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme has prioritized agriculture in four themes: sustainable land and water use, markets and infrastructure, food security, research and technology adoption, with countries expected to commit at least 10 percent of national budgets to agriculture.

FANRPAN’s Sibanda said: “We are excited by the new commitment [to agriculture] but time will tell whether there will be[an] impact and the impact will be to reduce the number of people going to bed hungry.”

Food Security & Health Issues

ANGOLA: Putting a dent in the maternal death rate

(IRIN)

14 May 2010

MATALA, 14 May 2010 (IRIN) - After more than a decade of volunteer work in Angola's rural Matala district in the southern province of Huila, a Finnish doctor is seeing maternal mortality rates gradually come down in a country where about one in every 70 women dies in childbirth.

Since 1998 Birgitta Long has spent three months each year working as a volunteer in a run-down clinic handicapped by staff and skills shortages, and which battles to source emergency medicines, but she sees the growing queue of women coming for medical help as a step in the right direction.

The causes of maternal deaths - of which about 80 percent are preventable - range from haemorrhaging (25 percent), anaemia (13 percent) and tropical diseases like malaria (39 percent). Angola's three-decade civil war, which ended in 2002, established a routine of shunning clinics in favour of home births, but reversing this trend is seen as crucial.

When Long arrived 12 years ago, about 500 women delivered babies at the municipal clinics annually, but this has climbed to about 3,000 out of an estimated 9,000 to 10,000 births in the district each year. "It still means that more than two-thirds [of births] are taking place at home," she told IRIN.

The rehabilitation of road infrastructure by Chinese, Brazilian and Portuguese construction companies is making for a more comprehensive public transport system, and "takes the bumps out of the road", Long said, whereas before the rutted surfaces made the journey for a woman being transported with a ruptured uterus "horribly painful".

"Uterus ruptures are much more common [than fistula, when a hole develops between either the rectum and vagina or the bladder and the vagina] - women can die from it. They don't die from fistula, they just suffer."

Thin healthcare resources

Long pointed out that reproductive health in the continent's largest producer of oil remained at a low ebb. Although the need is great, a state-of-the-art, 77-bed Chinese-built hospital few kilometres from the clinic is yet to be opened, and is a bleak reminder that nurturing medical skills and personnel lags the development of health infrastructure.

Angola's oil and diamond wealth portrays it as a middle-income country with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of about US\$4,000, but in reality 63 percent of the 18 million people survive on \$1.75 or less day.

The country has one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates, life expectancy is 42 years, and 35 percent of children are chronically malnourished; it also has the dubious distinction of being the world's last stronghold of urban polio.

The hospital was scheduled to come into service in late 2009, but the access road has not been built, electricity and water supplies are not connected, and training courses for using the medical equipment have yet to begin, but the most pressing requirement is staff.

Eight Cuban doctors will work at the hospital - boosting to nine the number of doctors serving the 230,000 people in the area - but the hospital will draw heavily on the district's available staff, to the detriment of existing clinics. The hospital requires 248 personnel, including theatre nurses and laboratory technicians, but there are only 44 medical staff available in the district.

"I am very concerned with the situation - we will not be able to run the hospital adequately, as we don't have enough staff," Daniel Cambungula, the Matala municipality's director of health, told IRIN.

The hospital may be a glimpse of Angola's future and a grand gesture by one of the world's fastest growing economies - even during the oil-slump year of 2009 the national budget reached \$34 billion - but donors and the government are opening up a second front for the improvement of maternal health.

A second front

At a clinic in Lubango, capital of Huila Province, Katrine Jumba, 23, waits in line for a vaccination for her second child, a three month-old boy. She told IRIN that friends had died giving birth, so she was aware of the risks associated with childbirth but, "Thank God, everything was okay. I was a little bit afraid because of the pain [of labour], but that's normal."

Because her home is near the clinic, "friends and family members who are pregnant come and stay with me [in their final months of pregnancy]. Some come from more than 100 kilometres away [to give birth at the clinic]."

The Lubango clinic is part of a strategy led by the government and supported by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to revitalize the provision of basic healthcare at existing health facilities in 16 municipalities, covering 23 percent of Angola's 18 million people.

The initiative provides routine immunization, antenatal and childhood care, access to safe water, and the distribution of free insecticide-impregnated mosquito nets. One of the province's three nursing training colleges, which together produce 120 graduates each year, is adjacent to the clinic.

UNICEF's country representative, Koen Vanormelingen, described the revitalization of clinics as "leading from behind", and said the government was committed to replicating the revitalization projects in another 54 municipalities, bringing essential healthcare coverage to about 70 percent of the population.

Lubango, which was largely untouched by the civil war, was a "low-hanging fruit" for resuscitating health services said Joao Neves, of UNICEF's Huila project office, which covers the neighbouring municipalities of Matala, Kaluquembe and Caconda.

On average, Angolan women will have seven pregnancies; half of all births are by women younger than 18, and seven percent are by girls aged between 12 and 14 years, but no stigma is attached to teenage pregnancy.

SOUTH AFRICA: Children's healthcare missing the mark

[Alert Net]

13 May 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 13 May 2010 (IRIN) - South Africa has achieved near universal access to health services for pregnant women and their children, but maternal and infant mortality rates have continued to rise making the chances of reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on maternal and child health increasingly remote.

A new national study, Health of our Children in South Africa, confirms that HIV/AIDS is the biggest cause of maternal deaths, and accounts for 35 percent of deaths in children under five. But the study reveals that poor quality health care, low immunization rates and misguided infant feeding practices also contribute to the poor health of pregnant women and children in South Africa.

The study, released on 13 May, draws on data in a national HIV, behaviour and health survey conducted in 2008 by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and several partner organizations, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation (CADRE).

Similar studies were carried out in 2002 and 2005, but this is the first with data on children younger than two. Researchers surveyed 8,066 children under the age of 18 to determine their HIV and general health status, what HIV risk factors they had been exposed to, and their access to AIDS information.

Although the overwhelming majority of South African children were HIV negative and in good health, for the nearly 3 percent of children surveyed who were HIV-positive, "mortality during the first five years is high", and those living with HIV were three times more likely to be hospitalized than other children.

Sexual transmission was the main cause of HIV infection in children over the age of 12 - one in seven girls, and one in 10 boys aged between 12 and 14 had already had sex. More than a quarter of girls aged 12 to 18 had had sex with partners at least five years older,

putting them at an increased risk of HIV. However, 92 percent of young men and 84 percent of young women reported that they had used condoms the last time they had sex. Most of the 3.3 percent of children younger than four years who were HIV-positive had been infected by their mothers. A slightly lower HIV prevalence of 2.1 percent among infants under the age of 2 suggested that South Africa's prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission (PMTCT) programme was having an impact. Of the 97 percent of pregnant women who accessed antenatal care, 95 percent said they were offered an HIV test.

Poor quality care

Although most mothers reported using the available healthcare services for their children, the study found that the quality of services was often inadequate.

Dr Khangelani Zuma of the HSRC, a study investigator, described the low rates of immunization for preventable childhood illnesses like measles, diphtheria and polio as "missed opportunities", and suggested that the policies and guidelines governing immunization and other maternal and child health efforts were of little use without proper oversight to ensure implementation.

South Africa's new national treatment guidelines include antiretroviral (ARV) treatment for all HIV-positive infants under the age of one year, and for pregnant HIV-positive women with a CD4 count (which measures immune system strength) of 350 or less, which could significantly reduce maternal and infant mortality rates if fully implemented. "Based on our results, I'm concerned about implementation unless bigger efforts are put in place to make sure guidelines are followed," Zuma told IRIN/PlusNews. "The new guidelines could see an improvement if more is invested in an accreditation system to monitor the quality of care in our health facilities, and to hold health managers accountable." The study authors include such a system in their recommendations.

Mixed feeding raises HIV risk

Other recommendations address the finding that only a quarter of South African women surveyed exclusively breastfed their babies during their first six months; most relied on mixed feeding (a combination of breast milk and formula), which has been associated with a high risk of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in the first three months of life.

The authors propose revising the current feeding policies to take into account the 2009 World Health Organization guidelines, which recommend that HIV-positive women begin ARV treatment early in pregnancy and continue until they stop breastfeeding.

Zuma said better health outcomes for pregnant women and children would require addressing resource shortfalls, such as the inadequate supply of ARVs at some public health facilities, and staff shortages at others. "What we need to do is invest more in the overhaul of our health system."

SOUTH AFRICA: Government is first to join major patent pool

[Alert Net]

12 May 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 12 May 2010 (IRIN) - A South African government agency has become the first to join the world's leading patent pool for neglected diseases, a move that could bolster home-grown innovations in the fight against diseases including tuberculosis (TB).

The Technology Innovation Agency (TIA), a government body, recently announced that it had joined a patent pool established by pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) to spur research into 16 neglected tropical diseases.

The TIA's move means local researchers will have access to more than 2,300 existing patents as well as related knowledge on the diseases, including TB and malaria.

The patent pool - which aligns to US Food and Drug Administration definitions of neglected diseases and does not include antiretrovirals (ARVs), used to treat HIV - is a voluntary arrangement in which companies in the same sector, like pharmaceuticals, agree to share patented intellectual property and usually pay a royalty for access to drug formulations and research.

"If other companies in South Africa can come up with innovative ways in which they can use the information in the patent pool, then TIA will help them put plans together and implement [them]," said Dr Carl Montague, TIA's health portfolio manager.

iThemba Pharmaceuticals, a private South African drug company partly funded by TIA, signed on to the pool earlier this year to accelerate its own TB and malaria research, said company spokesperson Dr Chris Eldin.

Montague noted that there was a wealth of opportunity available to drug researchers, but "We have to ensure that the pool can be meaningfully exploited, and that we get access to the researchers who have the knowledge [of] the patents [that have been] generated," he told IRIN/PlusNews.

"Having access to hundreds of patents is a daunting prospect and we need help in evaluating patents and selecting the best targets for further work, so that we don't waste our meagre resources."

The World Health Organization (WHO) lists TB as the leading killer of people living with HIV, and has estimated that South Africa has an HIV prevalence rate of about 18 percent and one of the world's highest TB burdens.

Riding the wave

Katy Athersuch, a medical innovation and access advisor to Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF), the global medical charity, said South Africa's vote of confidence in patent pools

could be a boost to other patent pools, such as those proposed by UNITAID, the UN drug procurement facility, and UNAIDS.

UNITAID first proposed establishing a patent pool in July 2008, to increase access to newer ARVs, encourage generic production, and reduce drug prices. UNAIDS is in the process of setting up a patent pool to increase drug availability. Athersuch noted that these pools came at a crucial time.

"South Africa was one of the first countries to introduce ARVs, and treatment has been around since about 2000. While that's great, it means we are starting to see treatment failure," she said.

"First-line drugs in South Africa are cheap and affordable but there are problems, and a lot of the new drugs - the second- and third-line [regimens] - are significantly more expensive."

Athersuch noted that in 20 percent of ARV patients at MSF's clinic in Khayelitsha, a township outside of Cape Town, first-line treatment failed after five years, and second-line regimens would fail in 25 percent of patients within two years.

Questions remain

What the government's move will bring is a matter of speculation. Andy Gray, a senior lecturer in the Department of Therapeutics and Medicines Management at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, said the move could lead to more pressure on the local drug companies TIA funds to gear research towards diseases like TB and malaria.

HIV/AIDS activist Nathan Geffen, who works as a researcher at Section 27, a public interest legal centre, said he would have liked more details about how the GSK pool would work, and questioned whether it best addressed the needs of a country with a high HIV burden like South Africa.

"There are three promising new TB drugs in development; GSK has nothing to do with any of them," he told IRIN/PlusNews. "On the other hand, GSK has a new, very promising antiretroviral in development that is not part of this patent pool."

SWAZILAND: Mobile clinics in cash crunch

[Alert Net]

11 May 2010

MBABANE, 11 May 2010 (IRIN) - Mobile clinics for HIV patients have been benefiting entire communities in rural Swaziland, but tight budgets have scuppered plans to expand the project, or even sustain a fleet of just two vehicles.

"Whatever financial problems we have are temporary, I am sure, because the people have responded so well to the mobile clinics," said Siphwe Hlope, founder and director of

Swaziland Positive Living (SWAPOL), an NGO that supports those living with HIV, especially in rural communities, which started the project.

In theory, mobile clinics are unnecessary because the health ministry's goal of having a medical clinic within seven kilometres of every dwelling has been achieved for about 95 percent of the population.

But in mountainous Swaziland, seven kilometres can mean travelling for several hours, and is "an infinity if you are ill and you can't walk" said Maphangisa Dlamini, a male nurse and mobile clinic driver. "Many people also cannot afford the bus fare."

According to the United Nations Development Programme, 80 percent of rural Swazis live in chronic poverty and on average it takes them two hours to reach a clinic.

"The idea for a mobile clinic actually came from our members," said Hlope. "We asked [them] what they needed to make their lives with HIV easier. Many had problems getting to clinics - the distance by foot, the transportation costs - and these accounted for 'ARV defaulters' [people who stop taking antiretroviral medication], and also not getting children the medical attention they needed."

A minibus donated two years ago by the Stephen Lewis Foundation, which funds HIV/AIDS projects in many African countries, was converted into Swaziland's first mobile clinic, but had to be retired this year along with its nurse/driver when operating costs could no longer be met.

A new mobile clinic was donated by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), which also pays its operating cost of R1.5 million (US\$198,400) per annum, but additional sources of funding are needed to recommission the original mobile clinic and get two new vehicles on the road, so that remote locations in all four of Swaziland's regions can be reached.

"By now we were supposed to have two more nurses - one for the Manzini Region, in the middle of the country, and one for the Lubombo Region, in the east - I think it's just a matter of time before we meet our targets, because the people depend on the truck clinics now," Dlamini said.

Dlamini's mobile clinic stops at local government buildings and Neighbourhood Care Points, set up by UNICEF to assist orphans and vulnerable children left in the wake of Swaziland's devastating AIDS epidemic. These children now make up almost one-fifth of the 970,000 population, and meeting their medical needs is a national priority.

"We bought the second mobile clinic truck for SWAPOL as a way of treating the children," said Makhosini Mamba, Health and Nutrition Officer at UNICEF Swaziland. "SWAPOL has a network of support groups for people living with HIV and AIDS, and with this community network already in place, it was a good way for us to get to rural areas that are hard to reach."

In remote locations, where health services are otherwise only provided by traditional healers, the mobile clinics offer immunizations, micro-nutritional supplements, and treatment for minor ailments. "The entire community, as well as HIV-positive people, is served by the mobile clinics," Mamba said.

SWAPOL director Hlope said the clinics had also helped people rethink their prejudices about HIV. "Because we are a women's support group, our focus is on HIV-positive mothers and their HIV-positive children, but now all the people know our clinics ... they don't fear us. Instead, they come running when we arrive because they want our services." Monitoring HIV-positive people to ensure they take government-supplied antiretroviral (ARV) drugs is high on Mamba's agenda, but he also provides HIV counselling and testing, a popular service that has increased SWAPOL's membership.

"I am busy, but I like my work," said Mamba while fixing a punctured tyre that had put the truck out of commission for a few hours. The clinic on wheels treated 5,600 patients in 2009, including 1,635 children. He tested and counselled 300 people for HIV and referred 328 to hospitals to begin tuberculosis and ARV treatment.

China-Africa Relations

'Imaginary' Chinese Investment to Zambia Questioned

[Voice of America]

11 May 2010

The leader of Zambia's main opposition Patriotic Front (PF) party says the government's announcement of a \$1 billion Chinese investment to help build an electric power plant is a "cheaply conceived" ploy to garner votes ahead of next year's general elections.

Michael Sata questions the timing of the announcement saying it is "premature and presumptuous" for the government to make such claims when negotiations with a Chinese Bank to finance the project are still ongoing.

"The whole point is any investment of any magnitude is welcome in any developing country or even in a developed country. But, the reality is where are they building this plant? Because we (the) people in Zambia, we don't know and our electricity tariffs are the highest in the region. So, we don't know where they are building it. Probably, they are building it in heaven or in hell," he said.

President Rupiah Banda's government announced that China plans to spend \$1 billion to help build a power plant to boost Zambia's electricity supply by 600 megawatts.

An official said the China Development Bank will provide equity amounting to \$1 billion for the Kafue Gorge Lower power plant. The government says the Kafue Gorge Lower power plant will cost about \$1.5 billion.

But, opposition leader Sata said the government's plan is not pragmatic. "Those are wishful thinking, and what they are doing that is a political campaign. We have adequate facilities at the Zambezi River and the Kafue River. We don't need a need a new Chinese plant. If we wanted to expand our existing facilities...we could extend those, but they are using that for general elections next year. There is nothing realistic," Sata said.

Local media quoted Energy minister Kenneth Konga as saying the government is seeking to wrap up negotiations with a Chinese bank to ensure that the electricity project will begin as originally planned.

Opposition leader Sata has often been accused of showing hatred towards Chinese investors. He was recently quoted as saying Chinese and other Asian mining firms in Zambia are creating "slave labor" conditions in Africa's top copper producer with scant regard for safety or local culture - - charges Sata denies.

"The point is I have not condemned any investment worth talking about, but imaginary investment. And, we don't want human investment we have enough human beings in Zambia; artisans and ordinary laborers. We don't need Chinese laborers to come to Zambia and to call that investment...I have nothing against the Chinese, but they must the must be realistic and they must be honest and sincere," Sata said.

Analysts say construction of the electricity plant is scheduled to begin next year, and possibly completed in 2017.

But, opposition leader Sata dismissed the assessment.

"First of all, \$1 billion is a lot of money. If it is (a) \$1 billion project, where are they building this project? How do you build a project of \$1 billion without feasibility studies? How do you build a project of \$1 billion without showing the site where this thing is going to be?" Sata asked.