

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Region: Southern Africa

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Summary of Report

Elections & Governance

Former South Africa Police Chief Convicted of Corruption

The former head of South Africa's national police force and former president of Interpol has been convicted of corruption.

Calls for Equality to be Written into New Constitution

Madagascan female activists are asking that the right of women to participate directly in politics be included in a new draft of the country's Constitution, so that there can be 30 percent of female politicians in parliament by 2012 and 50 percent by 2015.

Politics

ZANU-PF Justice Minister in Europe for 'Sanctions' Talks

One of Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe's closest lieutenants is at the European Union to discuss lifting travel and financial restrictions on the ZANU-PF Party and some of its companies.

US Designates Mugabe as Financier of Terrorism

The U.S. Treasury Department has placed Zimbabwe's president, his wife, and his nephew on its list of people believed to have funded terrorist groups.

Zimbabwe Mines Minister Says Human Rights Groups Tried to Bribe Him

Zimbabwe's mines minister says two international human-rights groups tried to bribe him over Zimbabwe's controversial diamonds in the Marange area in south Eastern Zimbabwe.

Economy & Energy

A development breakthrough for Africa

Just sixty days before the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Summit, UNDP's Regional Bureau for Africa will host its annual Regional Management Team Meeting in Ghana (14-17 July), examining the region's economic and development gains over the past decade and looking into ways of achieving a development breakthrough for Africa.

AFRICA: Help out small farmers, report urges

Small-holder farmers, who make up almost all of Africa's agriculture sector, need more support to reduce over-dependence on increasingly costly food imports, states a new report.

ZIMBABWE: Conflict over diamonds

A statement by Zimbabwe's mining minister, Obert Mpofu, that the Cabinet had approved the sale of diamonds from the controversial Marange fields has been dismissed by another minister as "lies".

Human Rights, Social Issues & Developments

Women's Empowerment in Africa: Access to Land, Credit, and Markets

In his introductory remarks at the Ministerial Breakfast on Economic Opportunities for the Empowerment of Women in Africa and the Least Developed Countries Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator, was of the view that efforts to support women's economic empowerment in Africa, and across the LDCs, must help overcome the legal and other barriers which women face. Those barriers include lack of access to credit, land, and markets, and the many other forms of exclusion and discrimination which women often experience in their daily lives. Ultimately, these solutions need to be reflected in gender-responsive national development strategies, policies, and budgets.

South Africa Flea Market Vendors Always Willing to Bargain

While the World Cup football festival continues, vendors at the Bruma Flea Market in suburban Johannesburg try to capitalize on World Cup fever. But prices are always negotiable.

Local Trains a New Experience for Longtime Johannesburg Residents

With thousands of fans making their way to stadiums for World Cup matches, organizers in South Africa continue to encourage fans to use public transportation to avoid traffic problems and lengthy delays.

Spirited American Fans Impressed at Football World Cup

As the drama of the later rounds of the World Cup in South Africa unfolds, hundreds of thousands of football fans continue to enjoy the host nation's hospitality. Prominent among the hordes of overseas visitors in South Africa for the soccer spectacle have been supporters from the United States. Even when their team hasn't been playing, they've packed stadiums to watch others in action – always highly visible in their shiny, striped red, white and blue suits, star-spangled top hats and long, snow-white Uncle Sam beards.

Need to Mainstream Gender Equality into all Policies

Despite the adoption almost a decade ago of a national gender policy that aims to ensure fair participation of men and women in the development process, most of the Zambian government's policies still remain gender blind, say civil society and women's rights associations.

Food Security & Health Issues

In Brief: Sleeping sickness hits new low

For the first time in half a century, the number of new diagnosed cases of human African trypanosomiasis -also known as sleeping sickness - has dropped below 10,000 thanks to partnerships with drug companies and improved screening, according to the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

AFRICA: Diabetes cases to double by 2030

Without a major breakthrough in preventing and treating diabetes, the number of cases in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to double, reaching 24 million by 2030, according to the Brussels-based International Diabetes Federation (IDF).

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Measles back with a vengeance

The outbreak of measles has so far claimed 758 lives, mostly in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Namibia, Lesotho and South Africa. Ahmadu Yakubu, Regional Immunization Adviser at the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) told IRIN there had been lapses in the measles immunization programme because "countries were not seeing cases anymore".

South Africa Tackles Prevention of Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission

Around 70,000 babies are born with HIV in South Africa every year. It is one of the main contributors to the country's high infant mortality rate. In a hopeful sign, programs aimed at preventing the transmission of HIV from mother-to-child are meeting with success. One such program is part of a community-based project called Total Control of the Epidemic (TCE).

SWAZILAND: Poor health services hamper PMTCT progress

Swaziland has made remarkable progress in reducing HIV transmission from infected mothers to their babies, but health activists worry that this may be stalled or even reversed if lapses in basic health services are not addressed.

Detailed Report

Elections & Governance

Former South Africa Police Chief Convicted of Corruption

(Voice of America)

02 July 2010

The former head of South Africa's national police force and former president of Interpol has been convicted of corruption.

Judge Meyer Joffe Friday delivered the guilty verdict against former National Police Chief Jackie Selebi before a packed courtroom in Johannesburg.

"The accused is found guilty of corruption in contravening Section 4 [one] of the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 12 of 2004," he said.

The judge found Selebi not guilty of a separate charge of defeating the ends of justice.

The former top cop and president of the international police organization Interpol was accused of taking bribes totaling more than \$160,000 during a five-year period beginning in 2000.

These included payments and gifts from convicted South African drug smuggler Glenn Agliotti, who turned state's evidence against his former friend.

The judge called both Selebi and Agliotti liars and unreliable witnesses.

He ordered Selebi to appear for sentencing in two weeks (July 14). He faces a minimum sentence of 15 years in prison.

Under South African law, Selebi may then ask for permission from the judge to appeal, which legal experts say he is likely to do.

The head of the Institute for Accountability, human rights lawyer Paul Hoffman, said on E-News television that the conviction was a positive step in a country where corruption by public officials is a growing problem.

"It is one [case] that indicates that the rule of law is intact and that corruption does not pay and cannot be allowed to pay," he said.

Selebi is one of the highest ranking officials in South Africa to be convicted of misuse of office.

He is a former anti-apartheid activist who is well connected in the ruling African National Congress. His lengthy case frequently irritated the political hierarchy.

Selebi said the charges were brought against him by political enemies after he opposed an elite corruption-busting police unit called the Scorpions.

The head of the National Prosecuting Authority that brought the charges against Selebi was dismissed for not advising his superiors of his intent to prosecute Selebi.

The National Prosecuting Authority also tried to prosecute ANC President Jacob Zuma on corruption charges but was prevented from doing so weeks before he was elected president of the country.

The Scorpions were disbanded last year after President Zuma came to power.

Calls for Equality to be Written into New Constitution

(IPS)

02 July 2010

JOHANNESBURG, Jul 2 (IPS) - Madagascan female activists are asking that the right of women to participate directly in politics be included in a new draft of the country's Constitution, so that there can be 30 percent of female politicians in parliament by 2012 and 50 percent by 2015.

Women's rights organisation Vondrona Miralenta ho an'ny Fampanandrosoana (VMLF- 'group of women in politics'), say this constitutional requirement is needed to change the disproportion number of men and women represented in economics and politics. According to a study conducted by the Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa in 2009, there are less than eight percent of Madagascan women in political decision-making bodies.

VMLF says it is necessary to clarify laws and legal texts such as the Constitution, the Electoral Code and even laws governing political parties to establish real equity between men and women.

"Without coercive action, there will be no change. For instance, no political party will present women on its list. Maybe there will be one or two women, but they will never be on the top of the list," Noroarisoa Ravaozanany, a member of VMLF, told IPS.

The VMLF has submitted its proposal to the Constitutional Consultative Committee (CCC) requesting that some legislative texts dealing with gender issues to be reviewed and new texts added, so that gender parity can be achieved in decision-making bodies.

The CCC, set up by the transition government, is in charge of writing a Constitutional draft, originally meant to be completed before the Aug. 12 Constitutional referendum. However, the referendum has been postponed to an unknown date because the CCC is behind schedule drafting the new Constitution.

The drafting of a new Constitution is seen by many as the first step toward the end of the March 2009 political crisis, which saw the army oust President Marc Ravalomanana and install the opposition leader Andry Rajoelina as the head of the state.

In November 2010 a new elected government should succeed the transition government currently in place, which has, like the former governments, a very low representation of female politicians. There are only five female ministers compared to 31 male ministers.

Although the principle of "non-discrimination based on sex" has been written in the different Madagascan Constitutions and international agreements signed by the Madagascan authorities, such as the South African Development Community agreements, compelling signatory states to gender equity, the principle of parity has never been respected on the island. One of the reasons may be the burden of tradition.

"We use the expression "adilahy politika", which means "politics is a men fight". The way children are educated also plays a major role in the public perception of women, who are supposed to stay home," said Hanta Andrianasy, a member of the women's rights association Simiralenta.

According to her, the perception of women is changing: "Women are starting to understand the necessity of having the power to change things. Men, as well, are seeing that they need women to participate in politics. And they won't be able to refrain women from lobbying for power."

Andrianasy added that there are women leaders in rural areas who have attempted to become involved in politics but have been sidelined.

"They have been pre-selected to be candidates for local or legislative elections, but elbowing inside political parties is expelling them out of the game. In the past some of them used to run for the elections as independent candidates, to have a chance to be elected," Andrianasy said.

But a new law, submitted to parliament in December 2008 but which is yet to be promulgated, has since banned the participation of independent candidates.

As a response, a female political party, Ampela Mano Politika (AMP – "women who are doing politics") was formed in February.

"I have founded this party to enable all women, who are willing to enter politics, to be in the foreground, on an equal footing with men," explained Dr. Brigitte Rasamoelina Rabemanantsoa, founding President of the AMP. With nearly 5,000 members, the party

plans to participate in the next elections. The party also allows men to join and participate.

"Given the low representation of women in politics in Madagascar, we want to use positive discrimination: we will give priority to women candidates in the elections," Rasamoelina Rabemanantsoa said.

However, some critics doubt whether submissions presented for the drafting of the new constitution will be included. The CCC, formed by the ruling party, is seen as being non-representative of all political movements.

But for Andrianasy, the Constitutional referendum is a chance for women's voices to be heard.

"The political crisis we have been through since March 2009, pushed women to take action. The political crisis has also shown the incapacity of men to govern by themselves. The equity principle is in the interest of the whole population, not only of the women."

Politics

ZANU-PF Justice Minister in Europe for 'Sanctions' Talks

(Voice of America)

01 July 2010

One of Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe's closest lieutenants is at the European Union to discuss lifting travel and financial restrictions on the ZANU-PF Party and some of its companies.

Zimbabwe Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa, of the ZANU-PF Party, along with members of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change, and a smaller MDC faction, are meeting with European Union officials in Brussels. They are discussing eight-year-old travel and financial restrictions against Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF Party and some government institutions judged to have financially supported ZANU-PF.

The meeting follows months of negotiations to have the European Union travel ban waived for Chinamasa. During the past decade, the European Union, the United States and other Western nations have imposed restrictions against Mr. Mugabe and his close allies for alleged political repression and human-rights abuses.

Mr. Mugabe says the restrictions, which he calls sanctions, have caused the collapse of Zimbabwe's economy. Most financial analysts in the private sector in Harare say the economy collapsed because Zimbabwe's main foreign currency earner, agricultural

exports, ended when Mr. Mugabe began seizing productive white-owned farms that grew most of the valuable crops.

South Africa, the Southern African Development Community and the African Union have called for an end to the restrictions imposed by the E.U. and the U.S.

One of the restricted companies is the state's Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation, which is in joint ventures with two mining companies extracting rough stones from controversial diamond fields in southeastern Zimbabwe. According to Israeli diamond analyst, Chaim Even-Zohar, even if the international regulator certifies those rough stones for export, few international banks would be able to authorize payment for them, because of the E.U. and U.S. restrictions.

The visit by the Zimbabwe delegation to the European Union is part of the outstanding issues of the political agreement that underpins the 16-month old unity government. The agreement committed the three political parties to ensure the E.U. and U.S. restrictions were lifted.

European Union diplomats in southern Africa say there are differing views on retaining the Zimbabwe restrictions among its 35 member states.

US Designates Mugabe as Financier of Terrorism

(Voice of America)

29 June 2010

The U.S. Treasury Department has placed Zimbabwe's president, his wife, and his nephew on its list of people believed to have funded terrorist groups.

Robert, Grace and Leo Mugabe were added to the "Specially Designated Nationals" list, which is run by the Treasury office that enforces economic sanctions against those listed.

Businessmen Billy Rautenbach and John Bredenkamp, who have close ties to President Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party, also were added.

The Treasury Department did not give a reason for its moves.

In an interview with VOA's Zimbabwe Service Tuesday, Leo Mugabe said he was not aware that he was on the list.

Over the past decade, the U.S. and other Western nations have imposed travel and financial sanctions against Mr. Mugabe and his close allies for alleged political repression and human rights abuses.

Critics of the Zimbabwean president blame him for ruining his country's economy with his policies, especially the seizure of white-owned commercial farms.

Mr. Mugabe blames Zimbabwe's economic decline on Western sanctions.

Zimbabwe Mines Minister Says Human Rights Groups Tried to Bribe Him

(Voice of America)

28 June 2010

Zimbabwe's mines minister says two international human-rights groups tried to bribe him over Zimbabwe's controversial diamonds in the Marange area in south Eastern Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe Mines Minister Obert Mpofu claimed in the pro-ZANU-PF Sunday Mail in Harare that two international rights organizations, Human Rights Watch and Partnership Africa Canada, tried to "bribe" him at the Kimberley Process Certification conference in Tel Aviv to financially support their work. Mpofu, who is a top member of President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF, is trying to persuade the international regulator, the Kimberley Process, to certify its stockpile of diamonds for export. Mpofu made his 'bribe' allegation after returning to Zimbabwe from a Kimberley Process conference in Tel Aviv that deadlocked on certification of Zimbabwe's diamonds from the Marange area.

Alan Martin, from Partnership Africa Canada, denied Sunday any bribe was offered to Mpofu. Martin said civil-rights groups oppose certification of diamonds from the Marange area because they are not compliant with the Kimberley Process, which tries to stop sales of so-called 'blood diamonds.' He said the Kimberley Process monitor, South African Abbey Chikane, who cleared Zimbabwe to export the rough stones from Marange, had ignored smuggling of diamonds from Zimbabwe.

Human-rights groups monitoring the Marange diamonds say they were astonished when respected Israeli diamond analyst Chaim Even-Zohar last week backed Zimbabwe's bid for its diamonds to be certified by the Kimberley Process. Even-Zohar said if the Zimbabwe diamonds were not exported legally they would all be smuggled out and would upset the prices of diamonds on the international market during a world wide recession.

Even-Zohar said the Kimberley Process is not a human-rights organization and its mandates assumed sovereign and legitimate governments were, as he put it, "OK." He said the Kimberley Process only has mechanisms to deal with rebel groups using diamonds to oppose or undermine sovereign governments. Even-Zohar said the Kimberley Process has no mechanism to deal with a country like Zimbabwe, which is itself what he called a "rogue actor."

De Beers diamond group executive director Jonathan Oppenheimer said Sunday there is "concern" over diamond mining in Zimbabwe, but there is no "blood diamond conflict"

and there is a legitimate government in place in Harare. He said the Kimberley Process is therefore in a difficult position.

Human Rights Watch claims harassment is continuing in Marange and that some informal miners are forced to hand over any rough stones they find to members of Mr. Mugabe's army. Its recent report says those stones are then sold on the black market.

Civil rights groups say many miners have been killed by Mr. Mugabe's security forces in the Marange diamond fields.

Economy & Energy

A development breakthrough for Africa

(UNDP)

29 June 2010

Just sixty days before the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Summit, UNDP's Regional Bureau for Africa will host its annual Regional Management Team Meeting in Ghana (14-17 July), examining the region's economic and development gains over the past decade and looking into ways of achieving a development breakthrough for Africa.

Africa on the move

Over the past decade, Africa has achieved significant economic and development gains, spurred by a favorable global economic situation, but also sound macro-economic policies and improvements in governance. Although Africa remains the region with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty, poverty rates have dropped rapidly since 1990, hovering around an estimated 46 percent in 2008.

Sub-Saharan Africa has also succeeded in reducing by 17.4 per cent between 2001 and 2008 the number of adults and children newly infected by HIV/AIDS, and access to Anti-Retroviral Therapy has been expanded in many countries.

The region continues to show overall progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender parity in primary education will be achieved in most countries in Africa in 2015. The number of seats held by women in parliament has increased in at least 31 countries.

Today, Africa remains vulnerable to major risks. The global economic downturn, coming on the heels of the food and fuel crises, has put economic and social progress on hold. Together with global economic volatility and external shocks, political crises and conflict, demographic pressure and climate change pose serious threats to the region's development prospects. Accessing development finance, creating employment, investing

in human capital and promoting inclusive growth that favors the most vulnerable will continue to remain important challenges.

Seizing the opportunity for "transformational change"

The Regional Management Team Meeting will examine both the advances and the challenges that lie ahead for African countries. UNDP and a host of representatives from regional institutions, African governments and UN agencies will identify opportunities for putting Africa on a sustainable, equitable and high-growth development path in the context of these new and existing challenges.

The conference will assess the prospects and realities of MDG progress in Africa, with an emphasis on lessons learned and practical actions to accelerate progress toward the MDGs. In a series of expert panels, the participants will also discuss new perspectives to create jobs and income growth; IT and connectivity in Africa; climate change; and the fight against AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. A series of roundtable discussions will examine climate adaptation and mitigation opportunities, as well as managing risks in the realm of crisis prevention and recovery.

UN reform, UNDP's effectiveness at the country-level and the potential of emerging partnerships will constitute additional topics of discussion.

The UNDP Administrator Helen Clark will attend the conference, two months after a visit of the continent that took her to Mali, Burkina Faso, Tanzania and South Africa, where she was able to witness the progress made on some of the MDGs such as tackling poverty, fighting HIV and promoting women's empowerment and gender equality.

Keynote speakers and panelists

Tegegnetwork Gettu, the Director of UNDP in Africa, will also attend the event, in addition to more than thirty Resident Coordinators from across the region. A selection of keynote speakers will bring their expertise to the panel discussions, including Benno Ndulu, the Governor of the Central Bank of Tanzania; Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Development Bank; Hamadoun Touré, Secretary-General, International Telecommunication Union.

AFRICA: Help out small farmers, report urges

(IRIN)

2 July 2010

NAIROBI, 2 July 2010 (IRIN) - Small-holder farmers, who make up almost all of Africa's agriculture sector, need more support to reduce over-dependence on increasingly costly food imports, states a new report.

Policymakers should “strengthen the competitiveness of small-holder farmers, thus avoiding a rural exodus that would put pressure on the cities and lead to more food imports”, according to the 2010 technology and innovation report by the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

Developing countries’ net cereal imports rose from 39 million tonnes in the mid-1970s to 103 million in 1997-1999 and are expected to rise to 265 million tonnes by 2030, states the report. Countries also have to pay more for food: the price of Thai export rice almost tripled from US\$362 per tonne in December 2007 to \$1,000 in April 2008. Meanwhile, per capita food production in least developed countries (among which African countries are over-represented) has declined such that in 2003-2005 it was one-fifth lower than in 1970-1972.

Cost barriers

“When farmers are paying almost all their money in transaction costs there is no incentive to produce. There is a need to lower the barriers of cost for smallholder farmers,” Banji Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, director of the monitoring and research division at UN-HABITAT, the UN Human Settlements Programme, said during the report’s launch on 1 July.

Lack of organization is also a problem. “A small producer does not suffer due to size but due to isolation... If a hundred of you put your produce together you are much more likely to get a bigger market and better prices,” said Oyelaran-Oyeyinka. Ethiopia recently launched a crop commodity exchange market to help farmers negotiate prices.

“One of the reasons [African] agriculture has not moved is we don’t have the surplus for value addition. We eat all [that] we produce,” he said. “We simply just produce the raw material and ship it out to somebody. What remains is about 20 percent of the value.

“The bulk of the profit is at the end of the chain; the farmers who produce get the least [returns],” he said, adding that farmers require a supportive physical infrastructure, a regulated environment, training and improved farming and soil conditions. “Unless you have all these in place, the farmer will just work for nothing.”

He called for pro-poor public policy, including price stabilization, modern input availability, a ready credit and market supply and land policies guaranteeing property rights. “Volatility in prices creates uncertainty in the minds of producers. If you are expecting 20,000 shillings [\$250] for your harvest [and] suddenly mid-year the harvesting price drops to 5,000 [\$62.50] the farmer is crippled,” he said.

Challenges

Land under irrigation remains low yet irrigation increases cropping intensity. “The 885 million hectares of currently available arable land in developing countries is as good as 1,770 million hectares, for instance, if it is used twice a year,” notes the report, adding

that only one-fifth of such land was under irrigation in 1997-1999, of which 2 percent was in sub-Saharan Africa, compared with 40 percent in South Asia.

“It is a very dangerous thing to [just] depend on nature for your livelihood,” Oyelaran-Oyeyinka warned of rainfall dependence.

Guaranteed land tenure could be vital to helping farmers access credit and invest in the medium- and long-term productivity of the land, said the report.

Among other challenges is the growing switch to biofuels and its effects on food security, diversion of cereals from humans to feeding livestock – conversion of grain to meat – and rural-urban migration.

Oyelaran-Oyeyinka said: “There is no silver bullet – no quick fixes. There is a need to create an enabling environment for technology and innovation to decrease imports – through farmer support.”

Knowledge transfer and sharing is also important, he said. “We need to bring research out of the pilot stages and make it a business adapting it to Africa’s conditions.”

“A country that does not feed its people is in very big danger of losing its sovereignty.”

ZIMBABWE: Conflict over diamonds

(IRIN)

01 July 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 1 July 2010 (IRIN) - A statement by Zimbabwe's mining minister, Obert Mpofu, that the Cabinet had approved the sale of diamonds from the controversial Marange fields has been dismissed by another minister as "lies".

"It was clear from the meeting that Cabinet agrees with the immediate sale of our diamonds," Mpofu told The Herald daily newspaper in an interview. He had just returned from a gathering of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) - an international initiative designed to stem the flow of conflict diamonds - in Tel Aviv, Israel.

A cabinet minister and member of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), who declined to be identified as protocol prevented him from discussing cabinet meetings with the media, told IRIN: "The issue of selling the diamonds was never discussed [in Cabinet]."

The MDC formed a unity government with President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF in 2009 after violent elections that saw ZANU-PF lose its majority in parliament for the first time since independence from Britain in 1980.

The MDC minister commented: "He [Mpofu] has taken to misleading Zimbabweans and the world on the diamond issues. First, he lied that the recent meeting in Israel had resolved that Zimbabwe could sell its diamonds, when no such decision had been reached. Now, he is telling the world that the Cabinet has resolved to sell the diamonds, when no such decision has been taken."

The KPCS meeting in Tel Aviv was dominated by the issue of Zimbabwe, but failed to find any resolution to the sale of diamonds from Marange, which has been the scene of alleged human rights abuses, including the military using adults and children as forced labourers. In 2008 hundreds of "illegal" miners were reportedly killed and many others beaten and raped in an operation to clear the 66,000 hectare area of diggers.

The KPCS, formed in 2002, meets twice a year, bringing together governments, the diamond industry and NGOs to police the trade in "blood diamonds". Its 49 members represent 75 countries, covering about 99.8 percent of global production.

The World Federation of Diamond Bourses (WFDB) said in a statement after the Tel Aviv meeting that "diamonds originating from Marange should not be purchased until approved by the Kimberley Process Working Group on Monitoring. As no approval has yet been given, any member found doing so will be subject to WFDB disciplinary procedures."

The World diamond Council will hold an unprecedented mini-summit at its July 2010 annual meeting in St Petersburg, Russia, to try to break the impasse over Zimbabwe.

Andy Bone, director of international relations at the De Beers diamond company, told IRIN that should Zimbabwe go ahead and sell Marange diamonds, it would have "very serious consequences for the KP and Zimbabwe", and urged all sides to continue engaging in dialogue, "which is vitally important to millions of people around the world [in the diamond industry]."

The Marange diamond fields are said to be some of the richest finds in a century; Zimbabwe has reputedly amassed a stockpile of four million carats of diamonds worth about US\$1.7 billion, which they have been unable to sell on the international market because of the KPCS ban.

Annie Dunnebacke, a campaigner for Global Witness, a UK-based NGO that was among the prime movers in the creation of the KPCS, and now monitors international trade in conflict diamonds, told IRIN that the Zimbabwe question had led to civil society "constantly assessing [the KPCS] ... And if we step away, it's pretty much the end of it [the KPCS]."

"The fact that Zimbabwe did not walk away from the KP, and that Mpofu sat in a room [in Tel Aviv] in discussions for more than 10 hours until six in the morning seems to suggest Zimbabwe has a lot to lose as well," she said.

Human Rights, Social Issues & Developments

Women's Empowerment in Africa: Access to Land, Credit, and Markets

(UNDP)

02 July 2010

Introductory remarks by Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator, at the Ministerial Breakfast on Economic Opportunities for the Empowerment of Women in Africa and the Least Developed Countries: Access to Land, Credit, and Markets

United Nations, New York
2 July 2010

Check Against Delivery

Thank you for inviting me to take part in this ministerial discussion on issues related to women's economic empowerment in Africa and the Least Developed Countries.

Women's economic empowerment, accompanied by women's political empowerment and access to equal legal rights and status, is a critical driver of progress on the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals.

In the lead up to the MDG +Ten Summit in September, UNDP has a clear message - the Goals can be met.

There is a range of tried and tested policies which ensure MDG progress. If they are backed by strong global partnerships, the world can achieve the MDGs. In that range of policies are many which support women's economic empowerment.

Just over two weeks ago, UNDP released an International Assessment of what it will take to achieve the MDGs by 2015. That assessment also affirms how important it will be to invest in opportunities for women and girls, and to advance their economic, legal, and political empowerment.

The focus of our discussion today is on women's economic empowerment through access to credit, land, and markets.

Land is the most important asset for many households in developing countries, and that is particularly so for poor households. Land ownership confers direct economic benefits as a source of production and income, and as collateral for financial and credit services – and this in return has multiplier effects across all the MDGs.

The right of women to own property, including land, is recognized under international human rights law. Yet, in many countries, women's property rights are limited by social

norms and customs, and at times by legislation. As a result, women do not enjoy equal opportunity and status in their families and communities.

Therefore, ensuring that women do enjoy full legal rights to own property and to inherit is critical for economic empowerment.

UNDP works with programme countries to strengthen women's legal rights, with a view to making them consistent with international norms and standards. In Liberia, Mozambique, and Uganda, for example, UNDP is supporting community land titling initiatives with special measures to protect the land claims of vulnerable populations and women.

Where women cannot inherit land, they and their children may be evicted upon the death of their husbands and fathers. The HIV/Aids epidemic has contributed to an increase in such evictions, and further dis-empowers women.

Access to credit - and to financial services more generally - needs to accompany the right to own and to inherit property in order for women to have economic opportunity.

In Africa, women comprise a majority of those working in agriculture, but it is estimated that they receive under ten per cent of all the credit going to small farmers - and only one per cent of the total credit for the agricultural sector.

Issues of land ownership and access to credit for women are issues of equality and opportunity. Reforms in these areas help women move out of poverty and strengthen their position generally in their homes, communities, and countries.

It is important overall to unleash the tremendous potential women have as entrepreneurs, and to address the obstacles they face to establishing their businesses. Microcredit has a role to play - and women are known as very reliable borrowers who will repay their loans.

Improving women's ability to be in the formal labour market is also critical to their economic empowerment. Apart from the real benefits of earning income, decent work offers the prospect of dignity and self respect. It enables people to realize their potential and live fulfilling lives, reducing their susceptibility to poverty, hunger, and disease.

Societies which narrow the gender gap in employment will also boost their economic development and their rate of poverty reduction.

Employment guarantee programmes can be geared to supporting women's entry into the formal labour market, and are identified in UNDP's International Assessment as important for MDG progress. The world's largest job creation scheme in India benefits 46 million households, and a minimum of thirty per cent of those employed must be women. The results have far exceeded that quota - around 51 per cent of those accessing the 100 days work a year are women.

A significant constraint on women being in paid work is the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work they carry. UNDP is working with partners to have this addressed in national policy making. Until that happens, women will continue to have limited choices and opportunities in the labour market.

In summary, efforts to support women's economic empowerment in Africa, and across the LDCs, must help overcome the legal and other barriers which women face. Those barriers include lack of access to credit, land, and markets, and the many other forms of exclusion and discrimination which women often experience in their daily lives. Ultimately, these solutions need to be reflected in gender-responsive national development strategies, policies, and budgets.

Today's meeting is a good opportunity for sharing experiences of what has worked, and what hasn't, in overcoming these obstacles, and I look forward to hearing about the national experiences of all those present.

South Africa Flea Market Vendors Always Willing to Bargain

(Voice of America)

02 July 2010

While the World Cup football festival continues, vendors at the Bruma Flea Market in suburban Johannesburg try to capitalize on World Cup fever.

The Bruma Flea Market is located in a suburb of Johannesburg, on the site of a former drainage basin. Now, six days a week, locals and tourists alike come looking for bargains.

Local artists sell traditional African arts and crafts. But like most of South Africa, the market these days is in the midst of World Cup fever. Prices are always negotiable, so I decided to give it a try.

VENDOR: "This one here is going down because South Africa is not going through that's why the price [is so low]."

REPORTER: "So you'll give me a good deal on it?"

VENDOR: "No problem as long as you talk nicely your going to get a better price."

REPORTER: "Well I'm very nice."

VENDOR: "I can see. I can see. I can see."

REPORTER: "How much do you think I should pay for this?"

VENDOR: "For this jersey I'm selling for 200 [Rand], but I'm going to give you a good price. I'm going to sell for [this] 150 [Rand]."

The currency conversion of 150 Rand is approximately \$20. Some seasoned shoppers might have been able to get a better price but it seemed good to me.

REPORTER: "And that's your best price?"

VENDOR: "That's the best price. That price you can't find in the market. That's the best price. I'm [basically] going to give it to you."

With the afternoon Johannesburg sun beating down, I decided I needed to shop for a cap

REPORTER: "So the special Voice of America price for these hats is what?"

VENDOR: "Ah, the special Voice of America for this hat, OK, I'm gonna give you a 10 Rand discount I'll give you for 90 Rand each. This is original FIFA 2010 World Cup hat."

REPORTER: "And you've paid the license fee to FIFA?"

VENDOR: "Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. I did pay the license if I didn't pay the license they [would] to take it from me, confiscate it but I paid the license yes."

Expert shoppers might have been able to get better prices, but I'm satisfied with my deals.

Local Trains a New Experience for Longtime Johannesburg Residents

(Voice of America)

29 June 2010

With thousands of fans making their way to stadiums for World Cup matches, organizers in South Africa continue to encourage fans to use public transportation to avoid traffic problems and lengthy delays.

Johannesburg is unique at the 2010 World Cup in that it is the only one of the nine host cities that is staging games in two different stadiums. It is the largest city in South Africa, with a population of about 7 million, including its suburbs.

The older downtown stadium, Ellis Park, seats about 62,000, while the new Soccer City Stadium in the suburbs, where the final will be played, is much larger, holding about 90,000 fans. Like any big sporting event, it is always a challenge to get fans in and out of the stadiums in an orderly and efficient manner.

South African World Cup organizers have been asking everyone to allow plenty of time and, if possible, take public transportation to prevent huge traffic jams and avoid the missing kick-offs.

Johannesburg resident Guy Williams said it has taken a different mindset for the locals.

"I think people have gotten the message now; 'Leave early, get there early.' As South Africans we're used to going very, very late and arriving basically at kick-off time," said Williams. "And this going early is a bit alien to what we're used to, so I think the message has gotten through."

Williams is from Liverpool, England, but has lived and worked in Johannesburg for 33 years. Neither he nor his South African wife Sheryl, had ever ridden a local train until this World Cup. They decided to ride it to Soccer City Stadium.

"We were advised by lots of people that the only way to go to the event was to go by train, because the parking facilities close to the stadium were a bit of a mess," added Williams. "And the park-and-ride facilities and the buses were busy, and the train was going to be the easiest, most convenient route. And so it's worked out so far."

His wife Sheryl agreed.

"It's great! It's fantastic! It's got a vibe and it's great to do," she said.

And so why haven't Guy and Sheryl ridden the locals rails before now? He says they are like nearly all citizens in the country who own cars.

"Security issues. We are very concerned about public transport in South Africa. Public transport is not the norm. People don't think in terms of public transport. It's your motorcar first, your motorcar second, and public transport is not something we ever consider using," he explained.

Guy Williams said it is not a black and white issue. He attended a match in Pretoria with a friend who is black. Williams suggested they drive to the park-and-ride facility and take the bus to the stadium.

"And he said, 'Absolutely not. I've got a motorcar, and I will use my motorcar,'" he said. "'The poor people of South Africa can use public transport. I will not!'" he said, "We have motorcars, we use them. If we don't have motorcars, we use public transport,'" recalled Williams.

Williams has enjoyed the matches he has attended and shared some of his thoughts on how things might be in South Africa once the World Cup is over and all the visitors have left.

"I think most of us, in the back of our mind, have got this issue about what is the legacy going to be and what it's going to cost us and how we're going to pay for it over time," he said. "But certainly in the short term, we're prepared to forget all about that and have a good time and make sure our visitors have got unbelievable hospitality, looking after our visitors, making sure they have a great experience. And certainly in terms of nation-building, this is crucially important."

Williams added that from all his fellow South Africans he has spoken to, the World Cup has been a bonding experience, and they all hope the foreigners who have come to take in the games and the culture will be glad they traveled here.

"It's real people who are spending their own money. And have they had a good time? And what are they going to go and say when they meet their friends and family and workmates when they go home? What are they going to say about South Africa? And it's a common theme for all of us - black, whites, colored, Indian in South Africa - that we want everybody to go back and tell them we're actually okay, and it's a great place to visit, and they've enjoyed themselves," he added.

And Guy Williams might even suggest they try riding the local trains.

Spirited American Fans Impressed at Football World Cup

(Voice of America)

29 June 2010

As the drama of the later rounds of the World Cup in South Africa unfolds, hundreds of thousands of football fans continue to enjoy the host nation's hospitality.

Prominent among the hordes of overseas visitors in South Africa for the soccer spectacle have been supporters from the United States. Even when their team hasn't been playing, they've packed stadiums to watch others in action – always highly visible in their shiny, striped red, white and blue suits, star-spangled top hats and long, snow-white Uncle Sam beards.

The US team's exit from the tournament after last week's defeat by Ghana has done little to dampen the enthusiasm of many American fans in South Africa, who are determined to remain here to soak up the atmosphere.

"Plenty of Americans have not just gone to US games but have attended as many games as possible and will continue to do so," says Catherine McMahon, a member of Sam's Army, as the vociferous American fans are collectively known.

She says some American fans bought tickets for as many as 10 World Cup matches, including the semifinals and final. Many – including McMahon - attended the competition's opening game on June 11 between South Africa and Mexico at Soccer City stadium near Johannesburg.

"At first I thought (the ticket) was a little too expensive, and then I just said, 'How can I not go to that?' Everybody was just so excited; it was so fun," McMahon recalls.

Americans ‘brighten’ World Cup with ‘passion’

World Cup organizers say US football supporters have so far bought more than 160,000 tickets - more than the combined totals of traditional soccer powerhouses England and Germany, and second only to South Africans.

McMahon herself is “somewhat surprised” – given that the US is still recovering from a deep recession – that so many American football lovers made the long, expensive journey here and spent so much money on match tickets.

“Maybe it’s just because it’s such a long trip, and once you’ve invested that much time and money, you just figure – what’s another few hundred dollars (for more tickets) as long as you’re already here?” she ponders.

But, whatever the reasons behind the large American presence at South Africa’s World Cup, the country’s people are grateful for it. “Americans are the best tippers. They even tip when I know the service hasn’t been so good!” says Johannesburg sports bar waitress, Glorious Motaung.

US fans have also packed South African memorabilia stores to buy local soccer paraphernalia, including the jerseys of the host country’s national squad.

Yet the Americans have impressed their hosts with far more than their willingness to spend dollars.

“I love their attitude,” says Joe Pinheiro, a South African football fan who attended two matches involving the US. “When unfair calls were made against them, they moaned and swore for a few seconds but then immediately carried on singing and backing their team. They’ve just brightened up this event with their passion and goodwill.”

Thozamile Nkosi, who attended the Ghana versus US game, also praised the American visitors. “Their attitude was, ‘We are going to celebrate no matter what’ and nothing got them down; they even partied with Ghana fans after they lost.”

South Africa, a land of contrasts

McMahon says US fans feel “privileged” to be at Africa’s first ever football World Cup, and weren’t put off by media reports of rampant violent crime in South Africa ahead of the tournament.

The Washington DC-based first-time visitor to the country said she’d “noted” stories of “street crime and carjackings and robberies” before the competition, but that they didn’t concern her.

“I’ve traveled around a lot (as an aid worker) so I sort of know that that stuff gets exaggerated,” she said. “I haven’t seen anything (in terms of crime) since I have been here.”

McMahon, though, has come to realize the problem is real. “That you can see just by looking at people’s houses in Johannesburg,” she says. “High walls, and you see the electrified (security) wire everywhere ...”

McMahon remains “amazed” though by the “level of development” in the host nation’s big cities, such as Johannesburg. “There’s six-lane highways, and there’s a huge downtown of high-rise buildings, and it looks like almost a European city,” she explains.

But the contrast between this “sophistication” and Johannesburg’s sprawling squatter camps, McMahon says, is “stark ... The income disparity (between South Africans) definitely seems dramatic. The suburbs in Johannesburg are very nice, but then just close by you see all these tin shacks.”

‘I’ll never forget South Africa’

McMahon says there’s “plenty” she’ll remember from her “first but hopefully not last” visit to South Africa

On her second day in the country, in the city of Pretoria, she found herself caught up in the host nation’s mass euphoria ahead of the World Cup’s opening match. South Africans hit the streets at noon, screaming, dancing and blowing their vuvuzela trumpets in a show of support for their team.

“It was thousands of people, and completely spontaneous ... I have never seen such a spontaneous outpouring of joy!” McMahon exclaims. “I will never forget South Africa and its people.”

In particular, she says, she’ll “always remember” South Africans’ concern for the well-being of foreign football fans. “I’ve – unsolicited – been asked by half a dozen people – ‘Are you having a good time; are you having any problems; is anyone ripping you off; we really want you to have a good time!’”

McMahon will also remember South Africa’s “fantastic” World Cup stadiums. “I heard some people say Ellis Park (in Johannesburg) was really old and rundown, but I thought it was a really nice stadium, and well designed ... Soccer City was a great stadium – really beautiful.”

McMahon says another memorable event for her was her first taste of South African boerewors, or ‘farmer’s sausage.’ “A little gamey; but I liked it; a little spicy,” she laughs.

Wish for soccer to be ‘major’ sport in US

Besides the opening game, McMahon attended all the US’s group matches and was “ecstatic” when her team topped Group C ahead of more favored England.

Her happiness has, however, been tempered by US’s loss to Ghana, thus eliminating it from the tournament ... But not curbing McMahon’s enthusiasm and belief that soccer will someday soon gain its “rightful place” as a “major” sport in the US.

“My friends are writing me and telling me the World Cup is playing in more (US) bars ,and people are skipping work to watch the games, and everybody’s talking about it,” McMahon says. “Soccer is getting bigger and bigger in the US, and you can see that by the very many American fans that have made the effort to get to South Africa.”

Need to Mainstream Gender Equality into all Policies

(IPS)

29 June 2010

LUSAKA, Jun 29 (IPS) - Despite the adoption almost a decade ago of a national gender policy that aims to ensure fair participation of men and women in the development process, most of the Zambian government’s policies still remain gender blind, say civil society and women's rights associations.

Critics say the most glaring of these policies is the country’s national budget that fails to disaggregate resource allocation and incentives by gender. Gender is also not one of the considerations in setting targets for various programmes like access to land and credit by government.

"Gender equity cannot be achieved in the absence of pro-active policies, and such policies have to be mainstreamed into every sector and programme, the various impediments that prevent women from participating fully and equitably in development have to be removed," Sheeba Zulu, a Lusaka-based women's rights activist says.

Government adopted the National Gender Policy in March 2000 to be used as a major yardstick for measuring government commitment to gender mainstreaming. Also, through the policy, government committed itself to changing many stereotypes that impinge on women’s participation in national development by taking appropriate legal and administrative measures to eliminate discrimination.

But this has not happened, Zulu says: "Impediments, such as lack of access to land and credit, unequal opportunities for employment, wage disparities and marginalisation in decision-making processes have to be redressed."

Zulu also criticised the current Land Act which for not being gender sensitive as it does not recognise that women have been long-disadvantaged when it comes to access to land.

However, most civil society organisations say women are unable to contribute effectively towards national development because of inequalities in resource allocation and access to resources. The Zambia Federation of Women in Business (ZFAWIB) say women still face challenges in accessing money from financial institutions because of the conditions that are attached there.

"Most of these financial institutions have insisted on difficult requirements and complex documentation including collateral, which most women don't have. Most women have difficulties completing documentation to get funds from the Citizens Economic Empowerment Commission (CEEC) and other lending institutions," Susan Kawandani, the ZFAWIB Ndola district co-ordinator, says.

"There is also a feeling that lending to women to enable start business or recapitalise their business is a risk. These financial institutions need to review their lending requirements to enable as many women as possible to borrow money."

But the CEEC says 40 percent of its funds have been set aside for women entrepreneurs but women have failed to come up with workable business plans that would allow them to obtain funding from the commission.

Michael Kaingu, minister of community development and social services, says government has, in this year's budget, set aside about one million dollars for his ministry for the empowerment of women throughout the country. Another million dollars has been set aside in the ministry of gender.

Kaingu says he is waiting for women to form groups or associations, according to his department's deliberate policy, so that the money can be released as it "is meant for boosting their economic status."

He added that the Women Empowerment Programme, one of the funds under the CEEC, has now been reverted to his ministry because of the sometimes stringent conditions, almost similar to that of a commercial bank, that women were required to meet.

Sara Sayifwanda, the minister of gender, says government has now simplified the application process for obtaining loans under the CEEC and has tasked the district commissioners to handle loan applications to enable women to access the funds.

However, Queen Mumba, who chairs a women's self-help programme in Lusaka's Mtendere township, says the involvement of district commissioners, whom many perceive to be ruling party members, does not inspire confidence.

"The fact that most of us think and believe that district commissioners are stooges of the ruling party makes it even worse," she says. Mumba cited the 8 million dollars set aside for youths in the ministry of sport, youth and child development before the 2006 elections, saying that not many youths benefited from it.

But Sayifwanda says her ministry is currently building capacity for women to enable them to develop their business ventures through the provision of access to investment funds. "The policy calls for targeted actions to facilitate the increased involvement of women in leadership positions in all the sectors of the economy," she says.

But Sly Mbewe, executive director at Action for Development (AfD) says gender equity cannot be achieved in the absence of pro-active policies.

"Such policies have to be mainstreamed into every sector and programme. The various impediments that prevent women from participating fully and equitably in development have to be removed," he says.

Mbewe added that such impediments such as lack of access to land and credit, unequal opportunities for employment, wage disparities and marginalisation in decision making processes have to be redressed.

"And there can be no complete poverty reduction agenda without mainstreaming gender into it. Unless this is done Zambia's poverty reduction agenda will be undermined and compromised."

Food Security & Health Issues

In Brief: Sleeping sickness hits new low

(IRIN)

29 June 2010

DAKAR, 29 June 2010 (IRIN) - For the first time in half a century, the number of new diagnosed cases of human African trypanosomiasis -also known as sleeping sickness - has dropped below 10,000 thanks to partnerships with drug companies and improved screening, according to the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

The parasite, spread by infected tsetse flies mostly found in rural sub-Saharan Africa, can invade a person's central nervous system and lead to psychiatric and sleep disorders, and if untreated, death. Because of under-reporting, estimates of the actual number of infections range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands.

In 2009, there were 9,877 new reported cases compared with 17,600 in 2004 and 38,000 in 1998. "The historic drop in cases is the result of improved and persistent field activities and of active systematic screening," Pere Simarro, head of WHO's Human African Trypanosomiasis Programme, told IRIN. More health centres in 36 endemic sub-Saharan countries are diagnosing the disease.

Though 72 percent more people were tested from 2000-2009 than during the previous decade, scientists say lack of low-tech, rapid testing and safe drugs has prevented the

elimination of the disease. The highest number of cases were reported in Democratic Republic of Congo (80 percent), followed by Central African Republic (11 percent).

AFRICA: Diabetes cases to double by 2030

(IRIN)

28 June 2010

DAKAR, 28 June 2010 (IRIN) - Without a major breakthrough in preventing and treating diabetes, the number of cases in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to double, reaching 24 million by 2030, according to the Brussels-based International Diabetes Federation (IDF).

A recent study, Diabetes in sub-Saharan Africa, led by the University of Yaoundé in Cameroon and published in the British medical journal, The Lancet, said inadequate donor attention and national prevention programmes were creating a global "public health and socioeconomic time bomb".

Diabetes is caused by inherited genetic factors and lifestyle choices, and manifests when the body does not produce enough insulin, or cannot break down sugar in the blood, according to the World Health Organization. The disease usually requires long-term treatment and can lead to costly and serious health complications, including heart failure.

In the 34 poorest African countries, the cost of diabetes per person is more than double their average income. In 2010 an estimated 6 percent of total mortality in sub-Saharan Africa will probably be caused by diabetes - a three-fold increase in the past 10 years, the IDF noted.

Jean Claude Mbanya, IDF president and the study's lead researcher, told IRIN that diabetes had been misunderstood as a rich country problem, despite medical data compiled by IDF showing that 70 percent of cases were reported in low- and middle-income countries.

"There is also the perception that when diabetes does affect people in low-income countries, it only affects those who are the wealthy elite. This is absolutely not the case - diabetes is devastating for the poor, affecting breadwinners," he told IRIN.

Researchers acknowledged that data was scarce in Africa and estimates were based on a limited number of studies. "More studies would increase our confidence in the numbers, but this does not mean they are wrong ... Most people in Africa who have diabetes are undiagnosed and, therefore, even when statistics are available from health systems, they will always underestimate the size of the problem."

Insulin

Sophie Sar, 29, was diagnosed with diabetes in Dakar, capital of Senegal, when she was nine years old. Doctors prescribed insulin, the main anti-diabetic drug, three times a day,

costing her almost US\$3 per dose. "Every penny I earn as a hairdresser goes to insulin," she told IRIN.

She earns around \$6 a day if she has three clients; when she falls short, an uncle lends her money. Her medically approved diet is unaffordable: "We eat mostly rice here in Senegal, but I can only have a few cups of it a day. I am supposed to eat more vegetables but they are so much more expensive."

The authors call for diabetes treatment to be funded in the same way as HIV/AIDS drugs are, along with "support for delivery mechanisms and chronic disease education and care models".

Also needed are "socio-culturally appropriate health promotion campaigns" to address health beliefs in African, mostly rural, settings, that raise the risk of diabetes – such as obesity being a sign of "good living", and a preference for foods with a high saturated fat content, as well as improved access to care and affordable treatment.

"Late diagnosis of diabetes, coupled with inequalities in access to major anti-diabetes drugs ... leads to early presentation of diabetic complications and premature deaths," the study noted.

"HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are important conditions, but they are not the only conditions," IDF's Mbanya told IRIN, questioning donor spending priorities that appeared to overlook "chronic non-communicable diseases", or non-infectious diseases requiring long-term treatment.

According to UNAIDS, 6 percent of patients infected with HIV died in 2008 - roughly the same percentage of global patient deaths IDF estimates will be caused by diabetes in 2010.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Measles back with a vengeance

(IRIN)

28 June 2010

JOHANNESBURG, 28 June 2010 (IRIN) - "Out of sight, out of mind" explains why Southern Africa has been grappling with one of the biggest outbreaks of measles, a highly contagious viral disease, since 2009.

The outbreak has so far claimed 758 lives, mostly in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Namibia, Lesotho and South Africa. Ahmadu Yakubu, Regional Immunization Adviser at the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) told IRIN there had been lapses in the measles immunization programme because "countries were not seeing cases anymore".

Oladapo Walker, the Inter Country Support Coordinator for Eastern and Southern Africa at the World Health Organisation (WHO), told IRIN that at least 95 percent of all eligible children had not been vaccinated against the disease.

Walker said the outbreaks were "most likely the result of a build-up of susceptible children and adolescents who have missed immunization and escaped natural infection during the years of reduced transmission".

In developing countries, vaccination programmes are jointly funded by donors, but Yakubu said countries in the region had failed to raise adequate financial commitments because "there were no cases to report over the years", so they were unable to motivate funds.

The Measles Initiative, founded in 2001 to stem a rising number of cases, reported that a funding gap of US\$59 million for 2010 had to be met to prevent a resurgence of measles deaths globally.

UNICEF noted in a statement in 2009 that more than 2.4 million children in eastern and southern Africa - about 20 percent of all children younger than one year - were not being reached by routine immunization.

WHO recommends two doses of vaccine to ensure immunity, with the first to be given by the child's first birthday, but about 15 percent of vaccinated children fail to develop immunity from the first dose.

Global slump

Southern Africa is not the only region grappling with the after-effects of a slump in measles vaccinations. Yakubu cited a recent article in *Eurosurveillance*, a scientific journal published by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, which said measles was spreading in Europe because immunization had dropped well below the recommended levels.

To ensure protection from outbreaks, WHO recommends that at least 90 percent of all children in each district and at national level be vaccinated in routine immunization.

Global vaccination levels dropped to 72 percent in 2000 but coverage returned to around 83 percent in 2008. According to WHO, in 2008 there were 164,000 measles deaths globally – nearly 450 deaths per day, or 18 deaths every hour.

The resurgence in Southern Africa could be partly ascribed to members of religious sects that did not believe in "modern western medicine" and prevented their children from being vaccinated, said Yakubu, who acknowledged that although the numbers were not substantial, "They are growing". Newspapers in Malawi reported that members of the Seventh Day Apostolic Church would not allow their children to be immunized against measles.

Walker said the last measles outbreak in some southern Africa countries occurred three years ago, and in others as much as six years ago. Namibia recorded its last wave of measles in 2002, while South Africa and Zimbabwe experienced one in 2005.

However, he noted that the "current outbreaks are much less frequent, and the level of incidence is much lower than outbreaks that used to occur before the measles control goals were adopted in 1998 in the Southern Africa Sub-region".

Measles "most probably have travelled through porous borders and trade", said Walker. "However, for an outbreak to occur following importation from a neighbouring province or country, it requires a sizable number of susceptible populations in both countries."

To prevent a resurgence, countries should run follow-up vaccination campaigns every two to four years until their healthcare systems could routinely provide two doses of measles vaccination to all children and offer treatment for the disease, said Luis Gomes Sambo, WHO Regional Director for Africa.

Prof Adrian Puren, Deputy Director of Virology at the South Africa-based National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), said they were monitoring the epidemic in South Africa to gain insights into how it spread.

The NICD noted in a recent communiqué on communicable diseases that a French journalist covering the football world cup in South Africa had been diagnosed with a strain of measles that was of European and North American origin.

The communiqué noted that "This ... imported case of measles ... highlights the possibility of imported communicable diseases making an appearance during the football world cup event."

South Africa Tackles Prevention of Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission

(Voice of America)

01 July 2010

Around 70,000 babies are born with HIV in South Africa every year. It is one of the main contributors to the country's high infant mortality rate. In a hopeful sign, programs aimed at preventing the transmission of HIV from mother-to-child are meeting with success. One such program is part of a community-based project called Total Control of the Epidemic (TCE).

Total Control of the Epidemic was started in Denmark in 1977 by the organization, Humana People to People. TCE provides care and support to entire communities heavily affected by HIV and AIDS.

The program has been operating in South Africa for eight years and has reached more than three million people in five of the country's nine provinces.

PEPFAR, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria are the main contributors.

Corp commander of the TCE program in Ilembe Province, Ruth Makembe, says one of the goals of the program is to make sure people know their HIV status.

"If they are positive, they should know where to go and get support-in clinics or hospitals where they can get medication," said Makembe. "If they are negative, we encourage them to stay negative for the rest of their lives. We are also saying that they have to change their sexual behavior."

The program employs locals as field officers for a period of three years. Each one works with 2,000 people. The field officers go from house-to-house, person-to person to get each individual to become active in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

A group of women welcome visitors to Ndulinde clinic, a child and maternal health clinic in Ilembe. They are wearing red t-shirts and red berets with the TCE logo, identifying them as field officers.

Troop commander, Ntsoaki Motaung, says the song warns women not to give into the sexual demands of men.

"You want everything. I give you my hand, I give you my breast-and then this one, you can't get it," said Motaung.

Pregnant women and mothers, holding their babies, are sitting on two long benches waiting to see a nurse. The clinic specializes in the prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV.

At the clinic, HIV-positive pregnant women receive the necessary medication and care to give birth to a child free of HIV.

"My name is Mbali Mhlongo, I'm 25 years old...I'm eight months pregnant," said Mhlongo.

Mhlongo has three children and is pregnant with her fourth. She says she got tested for HIV after she became pregnant because she saw that her boyfriend was sick and she got worried. She says she is HIV-positive.

"I came to take my treatment for the baby and to see how the baby is feeling," she added. "How he is kicking and all that stuff and I do everything what they say I must do. When they are giving us a treatment, they say it is for the baby, to protect the baby."

Mhlongo says she is feeling well except she is tired because she has to walk a long distance to get to the clinic.

Nonhlanhla Masuku, 23, welcomes visitors to her home, a one-room mud hut with a thatched roof. She lives alone here with her three-year-old son and six-week-old baby.

The house is situated in a poor rural area of Kwazulu Natal. There are few neighbors and the distances to the water well, to the clinic, to the school are long.

Masuku tells the visitors and the field officer accompanying them that she got herself tested and is HIV-positive. But, she says, she does not yet know whether her baby has been infected.

"She is saying she got the medication for the baby immediately after she delivered and, I think she is talking about AZT because she said they gave her to use that medicine for seven days," explained a field officer.

Six weeks after the baby's birth, a mother, who is enrolled in the treatment program, has to bring her baby to the clinic for injections against childhood illnesses, such as measles and polio.

Yogan Pillay is acting director of the National Department of Health that oversees the HIV/AIDS and TB epidemics in South Africa. He says the baby's HIV status is checked at the same time.

"And we're finding that fewer children are being born HIV positive to HIV positive moms," he noted. "Our target for 2011 is 5 percent. The national average at the moment is heading towards 7 percent."

Pillay says he has seen significant improvement and is sure the target of five percent transmission rate will be reached. While this is good, he says the ultimate aim is to completely eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

SWAZILAND: Poor health services hamper PMTCT progress

(Alert Net)

28 Jun 2010

MBABANE, 28 June 2010 (IRIN) - Swaziland has made remarkable progress in reducing HIV transmission from infected mothers to their babies, but health activists worry that this may be stalled or even reversed if lapses in basic health services are not addressed.

Since prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) services became available in 2003, HIV transmission has almost halved, from 40 percent of children becoming infected by their HIV-positive mothers to 21 percent.

"This is very positive news, and it makes me proud of our efforts in Swaziland," said Khanya Mabuza, Assistant Director of Programmes at the National Emergency Response Committee on HIV/AIDS (NERCHA), which coordinates efforts to combat the disease.

The number of teenage pregnancies has also fallen; teen mothers are less likely to use antenatal care and PMTCT services, so fewer teens giving birth means fewer HIV-positive babies.

But the news is not all good. A significant proportion of pregnant women are giving birth at home, and so are not using PMTCT services.

A rise in home deliveries appears to be a direct result of appalling conditions at underfunded clinics and hospitals: leaking roofs, unreliable water supplies and a lack of beds at clinics are contributing to the problem of "burnout" among nurses.

"Women are refusing to come to some clinics and hospitals because of the poor environment and the attitude of the health workers," said Sophia Mukasa Monico, Country Coordinator for UNAIDS in Swaziland.

She recounted the story of a woman who gave birth on the floor of a waiting room in a clinic in the capital, Mbabane, without any assistance from overworked, unmotivated staff, who ordered her to clean up afterwards.

"Pregnant women think: 'Why should I go to a hospital where I expect to have a safe birth and end up writhing on the floor in pain? I should stay at home.'"

Zodwa Mthetfwa, an HIV testing and counselling officer at Swazis for Positive Living, a local support NGO, confirmed that many Swazi women avoided going to clinics to have their babies.

"If you go to a place and have a bad experience, you don't go back, particularly if you are a pregnant woman whose ... needs are not met," she said. "Word gets around, and I get more requests from pregnant women for midwives' contact details than for clinics."

Most of the more than one in four Swazi women who give birth at home do not use PMTCT services. "The rise in home deliveries is quite alarming," said Dr Mahdi Mohammed of the Elizabeth Glaser Paediatrics AIDS Foundation. "The trend counters all our PMTCT efforts."

At a recent conference hosted by the health ministry in the central commercial town of Manzini, delegates from a number of local health groups said insufficient funding was the root cause of deteriorating standards and conditions at clinics.

"From shortages of drugs to broken equipment and discouraged [and thus underperforming] staff, it all comes down to money," said one participant. "This is a

perennial problem in a poor country like Swaziland, but it also has to do with government spending priorities."

New and old

Ingrained cultural practices have also proved difficult to change, limiting the success of PMTCT programmes and contributing to a stubbornly high infant mortality rate of 85 deaths per 1,000 live births.

"In Swaziland ... the child is raised by the entire homestead. We instruct [HIV-positive] mothers on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, but a granny will say, 'Our boys always eat other foods from birth; that's the way we do it'," said Percy Chipepera of the Swaziland Infant Nutrition Action Network.

Mixed feeding has been proven to increase the likelihood of infants contracting HIV from their mothers and is also detrimental to HIV-positive babies on antiretroviral (ARV) medication.

According to the latest World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, a pregnant woman's HIV status should be determined in her first trimester so as to provide optimal PMTCT services, but Swazi tradition discourages women from talking about a pregnancy during the first 14 weeks, let alone going to a clinic, for fear of inviting bad luck that could result in a miscarriage.

"Social and personal behaviour change doesn't take a second, it is complex, but it is key to our PMTCT success," commented Dr Fabio Mwanumba, HIV Specialist at the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNAIDS in Swaziland.

Experts agree that a more holistic approach is needed to integrate PMTCT services with strengthened maternal, newborn and child health programmes, but Dr Mwanumba said the success of behaviour change efforts should also be monitored.

PMTCT services were now quite widespread, "But what is the depth of these services? What is the quality?" he said. "It is easy to monitor commodities – the quantity of drugs available, the distribution of materials - but harder to quantify soft services, like the effect of counselling and behaviour change."