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Summary of Report

Elections & Governance

South Africa's ANC targets media at political meeting

South Africa's ruling African National Congress has planned to make a new tribunal to punish the journalists on dishonest and immoral reporting. ANC says the proposed Media Appeals Tribunal is designed to investigate complaints and punish the journalists for irresponsible reporting but media organizations said the tribunal is a bid to crush investigative reporters. On the other hand parliament is considering an information bill ANC lawmakers said is designed to protect state secrets, but which media groups believe could hinder investigations.

Zimbabwe Civic Group Urges Dissolution of Parliamentary Committee on Constitution

Zimbabwe's National Constitutional Assembly, a non-governmental organization that has long opposed the revision of the nation's constitution under Parliament's leadership, this week urged the government to dissolve the parliamentary committee in charge of the process, charging that it has demonstrated its incompetence.

Zimbabwe Civic Groups Demand Action on Attacks in Constitution Revision Process

Zimbabwean non-governmental organizations have again called upon the Harare unity government to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of violence during constitutional revision public outreach meetings.

South Africa Urged to Abandon Proposed Media Laws

A press freedom group is urging South Africa to abandon proposed laws to create a media tribunal and to limit information involving national security. Whereas President Jacob Zuma has defended the two proposed laws, saying they are needed to protect human rights. He has said the tribunal will strengthen, complement and support existing ways journalist regulate themselves.

New Crisis Arises With Breakdown of Zimbabwe's Constitutional Revision Process

Zimbabwean Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai on Wednesday issued a tough assessment of the constitutional revision process led by a parliamentary committee, which was suspended this week in Harare, the capital, following violence and disruption of public comment sessions. He said the process has not been "people-driven."

Transition to Democracy Proves Difficult for Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, no one is sure when the elections will take place and some analysts fear elections without reconciliation will spark a return to the political violence in which about 200 of Morgan Tsvangirai's supporters were killed during the last polls in March 2008. After the weekend violence and disruptions of public meetings on the constitution, Mr. Tsvangirai said that he will not take his MDC party into any new elections if there is political violence.

Politics

South Africa Zuma tries to mend alliance with unions

South African President Jacob Zuma tried on Monday to mend strained relations with his trade union allies who helped him to power, promising to get tough on corruption and create more jobs in Africa's largest economy. But he failed to embrace calls from his labor allies for nationalization of some mines and a weaker currency.

Zimbabwe's Mugabe Tells UN Western Sanctions Blocking Anti-Poverty Progress

Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Tuesday, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe again blasted the West for maintaining sanctions on him and his inner circle, charging that the restrictive measures were keeping the country stuck in poverty. President Mugabe told world leaders that "the devastating sanctions" were hindering Zimbabwean progress toward U.N Millennium Development goals on poverty and hunger, among others. But he said that despite the sanctions imposed by the United States, Europe and others, Harare had made great progress fighting HIV/Aids and maintaining quality basic education. He said Zimbabwe as in the past continues to have the highest literacy rate in Africa.

African nations push for permanent Security Council representation

Top officials from three African nations (South Africa, Swaziland and Congo) have called for the continent to have a permanent representative on the Security Council, saying it was a travesty that the region that comprises so much of the body's work does

not have a permanent place. South Africa's Foreign Minister told the General Assembly's annual general debate today that a transformation of the United Nations will not be complete until there is a "fundamental reform" of the Council, which currently has 15 members. Swaziland's King Mswati III told the General Assembly that his nation backs the so-called Ezulwini Consensus regarding reform of the Security Council. This consensus, which was developed in the Swazi town of Ezulwini in 2005, states that Africa should be given two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats on an expanded Council.

Comoros calls for UN help over island of Mayotte

President Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi of the Comoros warned today that France's refusal to recognize the island of Mayotte as part of the Indian Ocean archipelago nation brings the credibility of the United Nations into question.

Economy & Energy

Billionaire Branson urges investment in Zimbabwe

Billionaire Richard Branson (a non-profit group) urged people on Monday to invest in Zimbabwe, saying the world was wrong to wait instead of helping the politically unstable, poor southern African nation revive itself.

Malawi on the road to fighting poverty

Five years ago, Mwandama village in the Southern district of Zomba, Malawi's former capital city was a hunger prone area. The village, with a population of 35,000 people was generally characterized with high poverty levels, malnourished children, and no access to clean water. But a lot has changed in the last five years, since the introduction of the Millennium Villages Project -MVP- in the area. The Project is a partnership between the UNDP, the Earth Institute at Columbia University and the Millennium Promise. It has been implementing practical interventions in rural areas including Mwandama, to alleviate poverty and provide access to education and other basic necessities.

Despite Re-Engagement, Washington Declines to Review Sanctions on Zimbabwe's Mugabe

Despite the re-engagement of Zimbabwe a senior U.S. State Department official has ruled out lifting of sanctions imposed on Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and more than 200 members of his inner circle, saying supporters of Mr. Mugabe's former ruling

ZANU-PF party have continued to violate human rights, most recently in the nation's constitutional revision process.

In Major Revision, Zimbabwe Finance Minister Projects 8.1 Percent 2010 Growth

Finance Minister Tendai Biti says Zimbabwe's economy is likely to expand by 8.1 percent this year on the back of a strong recovery in agriculture and unexpected growth in manufacturing, mining and tourism. He told a gathering of business leaders in Harare on Thursday that agricultural output is expected to increase by 34.1 percent, exceeding an earlier 18.8 percent forecast.

Tax Could be The Way Out of Aid Dependence

Many African countries struggle with debt and finding money for national budgets because they fail to recognise taxation as a sustainable source of funding. Moreover, multinational companies are too easily given tax breaks while siphoning off money through illegal tax evasion. History proves that no country will march out of poverty through aid but effective local resource mobilisation can aid development of African countries.

Human Rights, Social Issues & Developments

ZIMBABWE: Juliet Mashoko, "I was beaten on the head and all over the body"

In the recent Survivors Summit in the Zimbabwean capital organized by Heal Zimbabwe, an NGO working to rehabilitate people affected by political violence during the 2008 elections, a 61 year old woman told her story during a group testimonial session. She said that in political violence of 2008 elections I was beaten on the head and all over the body by ZANU-PF militia and sustained a broken leg. Her daughter in law, who was pregnant, and her six year old grandson were locked in a house which was then set on fire. And she asked President and Prime Minister must apologize her because of this violent act.

Zimbabwe Drops Charges Against HIV/AIDS Health Workers

Zimbabwe's Office of the Attorney General on Wednesday dropped charges against four U.S. health workers, a New Zealander and a Zimbabwean arrested September 10 on charges they had illegally provided medical services.

Women Traders Confronting Sexual Harassment at Borders

Harassment and sexual exploitation by border officials seeking bribes constitute the biggest obstacles for female informal cross-border traders in Africa, according to a United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) research study. The study, which surveyed over 700 informal traders at their homes, workplaces and markets in Zimbabwe and Swaziland, as well as at border posts with South Africa, describes harassment of traders by South African police, soldiers and customs officials if traders should refuse to pay bribes.

Environmental Issues

ZIMBABWE: A decade of living in the aftermath of flooding

10 years ago a cyclone hit remote rural communities in eastern Zimbabwe which destroyed much of the basic infrastructure in those communities. As its aftermath, students are still getting education in roofless classes. These communities were also isolated from rest of the Zimbabwe as flood destroyed the bridges. Although Zimbabwe did not experience irreparable destruction and repairs should not have taken this long to be done but in spite of that repairs could not be made because of the shortage of funds.

MOZAMBIQUE: Hoping to reach the MDG on water

Although there have been improvements in recent years in the water and sanitation system of Mozambique, government figures show that only 43 percent of Mozambicans have access to safe water, and only 19 percent have access to improved sanitation. The situation in rural areas - where over 70 percent of the estimated 22 million people live - is worse than in urban areas, and only 30 percent have access to safe water and just 6 percent have access to improved sanitation. These figures indicate that Mozambique will hardly be able achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of "To Halve, by 2015. According to the UN MDG monitor, Mozambique is "off track" for the whole of goal 7, which is to "Ensure environmental sustainability".

Food Security & Health Issues

New Measles Outbreak Claims Lives of 70 Children in Zimbabwe Province

Some 70 children have died in a new outbreak of measles in Mashonaland, a Central province of Zimbabwe, in the past two weeks in spite of a national vaccination program carried out earlier this year.

Zimbabwe President Mugabe Calls For Universal HIV Testing To Curb Disease

President Robert Mugabe said in an interview with Chinese state television that compulsory HIV tests could help curb the spread of the deadly disease, a point of view that drew objections from many Zimbabweans. He said the Zimbabwean government has been prevented from adopting compulsory testing by the lack of international agreement on this with regards to possible violations of human rights. But he doesn't think that it is a violation of human rights.

Village Chief Leads Fight For Maternal Health

In Ntcheu, a rural district in central Malawi, villagers have taken the fight against the country's high maternal mortality rate into their own hands. They have almost eradicated maternal deaths in the area by urging pregnant women to give birth in hospitals, under medical supervision. Chief Kwataine, who has 89 villages in Ntcheu under his traditional authority, launched a maternal health campaign that first addressed common cultural beliefs associated with pregnancy, for example that a woman's first child should be born at home or that the men of the family decide when women need medical attention. Kwataine also banned all traditional birth attendants in his villages, compelling women to give birth in hospital.

Refugees/IDPs & Migration

Many Zimbabweans in South Africa Fail to Surmount Hurdles to Legal Residence

Many thousands of Zimbabweans have eagerly responded to the call by South African authorities for them to come forward and establish themselves as legal residents before a December 31 deadline. But many are telling stories of disappointment saying they have been sent away by officials of the Home Affairs Department for failing to meet documentary requirements.

UN-backed repatriation of Congolese from Zambia passes milestone

The United Nations refugee agency is preparing to close two refugee camps in Zambia as the number of Congolese who have successfully returned home in a UN-backed programme over the past three years tops 40,000.

Gender-Based Violence Wrecks Malawi Refugee Camp

In a refugee camp of Malawi (where 11000 refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo live together) rape, stress, hopelessness, domestic and gender based violence are widespread problems. They are destroying the Malawi Refugee camp.

Detailed Report

Elections & Governance

South Africa's ANC targets media at political meeting

(Reuters)

22 September 2010

(Reuters) - South Africa's ruling African National Congress will press on Wednesday for a new tribunal to punish unscrupulous reporting that has been heavily criticized as a plan to muzzle the press.

The ANC's media panel will meet behind closed doors at the party's National General Council, one of its most important political events in years, to iron out details of the plan heartily embraced by its leaders.

The influential international media group, the Committee to Protect Journalists, has said the media rules are reminiscent of draconian apartheid-era press laws and could stunt democracy.

The proposed Media Appeals Tribunal is designed to investigate complaints and punish irresponsible reporting, the ANC has said.

But media organizations said the tribunal was a bid to crush investigative reporters who regularly expose corruption and hold the government accountable in a country where the ANC has a near two-thirds majority in parliament.

Separately, parliament is considering an information bill ANC lawmakers said is designed to protect state secrets, but which media groups believe could hinder investigations.

If passed, the bill would also restrict access to information from regulators and state-owned enterprises. Critics say that could cut investors off from information affecting equity, treasury and foreign exchange markets.

During the first two days of the week-long meeting, the ANC eased concerns among investors by giving the cold shoulder to proposals to drastically devalue the rand and nationalize mines in the world's fourth largest gold producer.

There had been speculation President Jacob Zuma could try to adopt left-leaning policies proposed by allies including the powerful labor federation COSATU to help mend strained relations with the group and firm up his popular support.

Zuma risks leaving the meeting in a weakened position if he cannot win back traditional supporters on the left or find new ones among the pro-business ranks in his divided ANC. That could hurt him over the remainder of his term expiring in 2014.

The central bank and the South African government have worried about the impact of a strong rand on exports and manufacturing.

The rand hit a new 2-1/2 year high of 7.0225 against the dollar on Wednesday and has gained around 25 percent since the start of 2009.

Zimbabwe Civic Group Urges Dissolution of Parliamentary Committee on Constitution

(Voice of America)

24 September 2010

Zimbabwe's National Constitutional Assembly, a non-governmental organization that has long opposed the revision of the nation's constitution under Parliament's leadership, this week urged the government to dissolve the select parliamentary committee in charge of the process, charging that it has demonstrated its incompetence.

The call by NCA Chairman Lovemore Madhuku followed the suspension of the constitutional revision public outreach process in Harare after violence last weekend claimed one life, reported Thomas Chiripasi.

Madhuku said a non-political constitutional commission should be established to take over from the Constitutional Parliamentary Committee or COPAC, under which the process has often been disorganized and chaotic.

Another civic grouping, the Crisis In Zimbabwe Coalition, denounced the process in a statement earlier this week, urging the national unity government to take steps to ensure the outreach process will be peaceful.

But political analyst Joy Mabenge, who has been monitoring of the constitutional revision process, said things have progressed too far for the exercise to be abandoned at this point. He told VOA Studio 7 reporter Patience Rusere that the parliamentary committee should ensure the outreach phase is concluded in the capital and Bulawayo, the second largest city, and let Zimbabweans decide whether or not they want to endorse the draft.

Though the outreach process has stalled for most Zimbabweans, organizers late this week managed to glean some intelligence on youth and child issues from a sampling of 300 young people gathered in Harare for a consultative meeting that ended with presentation of a document outlining what the constitution should say to youth.

Correspondent Sylvia Manika in Harare reported on the meeting and its conclusions, among which were that the constitution should guarantee the basic rights of children including access to a healthy living environment with safe drinking water and proper sanitation, decent housing, education and health care.

The meeting also resolved that primary education should be free as it was following independence in 1980.

Zimbabwe Civic Groups Demand Action on Attacks in Constitution Revision Process

(Voice of America)

23 September 2010

Zimbabwean non-governmental organizations have again called upon the Harare unity government to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of violence during constitutional revision public outreach meetings.

The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition issued a strongly worded statement on Thursday condemning the wave of violence that has marred many outreach meetings since the process began in June and culminated with attacks on members of the public last weekend during meetings in Harare and Bulawayo, the second-largest city.

The Crisis Coalition is an umbrella group representing many non-governmental organizations.

The group also denounced attempts by militants of the ZANU-PF party of President Robert Mugabe, implicated in the attacks on outreach venues in the capital and elsewhere, to exclude white Zimbabweans from the process.

Crisis Coalition spokesman Sidney Chisi said his organization is calling on the Ministry of Home Affairs to investigate police who neglected their duty in standing by as outreach participants were beaten up or intimidated to prevent them from expressing their opinions, particularly during the past weekend in Harare.

Elsewhere, a constitutional outreach meeting organized for disabled people in Bulawayo turned into a ZANU-PF political meeting when able-bodied party activists were bused to the venue on Tuesday to make the case for the party's position on the new constitution. Correspondent Mzenzi Tshabangu reported on the incident.

South Africa Urged to Abandon Proposed Media Laws

(Voice of America)

23 September 2010

A press freedom group is urging South Africa to abandon proposed laws to create a media tribunal and to limit information involving national security.

Reporters Without Borders said Thursday such measures would move South Africa a "dramatic step backwards."

The ruling African National Congress is meeting in Durban this week to consider creating a tribunal that would hear complaints about allegedly inaccurate or unfair reporting. The tribunal would have the power to punish journalists.

The other proposed law, the "Protection of Information Bill," could send journalists to jail for publishing anything the government defines as compromising "national security."

Reporters Without Borders said the laws could make investigative reporting impossible, and could prevent journalists from reporting sensitive stories for fear of being imprisoned.

South Africa President Jacob Zuma has defended the two proposed laws, saying they are needed to protect human rights.

President Zuma has said the media tribunal will "strengthen, complement, and support" existing ways journalists regulate themselves.

Some officials from the African National Congress have criticized South African journalists for allegedly flawed reporting and what the officials call a lack of ethics.

Reporters Without Borders said it hopes South African Mr. Zuma and the government will understand reservations by media and press freedom groups toward the laws.

It said the independence of South Africa's journalists and the country's image are at stake.

New Crisis Arises With Breakdown of Zimbabwe's Constitutional Revision Process

(Voice of America)

22 September 2010

Zimbabwean Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai on Wednesday issued a tough assessment of the constitutional revision process led by a parliamentary committee, which was suspended this week in Harare, the capital, following violence and disruption of public comment sessions. He said the process has not been "people-driven."

Mr. Tsvangirai said he with President Robert Mugabe and Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara would meet to discuss the way forward following the episodes of violence which have claimed one life. He denounced what he termed the "militarization" of the constitutional revision process, correspondent Thomas Chiripasi reported.

Political and civil society sources said the death of Crispin Mandizvidza, an activist of Mr. Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change, marked a serious turn in the country's halting effort to transition to democracy.

Mr. Mugabe's ZANU-PF is alleged to have mobilized members of its youth militia along with soldiers and agents of the Central Intelligence Organization to intimidate opponents in Harare, the satellite town of Chitungwiza and in other parts of the country in recent days. But ZANU-PF officials have vehemently denied any such effort.

Spokesman Nelson Chamisa of Mr. Tsvangirai's MDC wing said Mandizvidza's death was an alarming development. The MDC member's death following a beating by alleged ZANU-PF militants at a constitutional outreach meeting in the Harare township of Mbare, an MDC stronghold, evoked memories of 2008 election-related violence.

The parliamentary committee in charge of constitutional revision extended the outreach exercise by one week owing to the many disruptions of meetings around the country. Panel co-chairman Douglas Mwonzora said other sessions outside Harare were canceled this week due to violence or logistical problems, in Makoni South and Nyanga, in Manicaland province, as well as in Masvingo and Midlands province and in the Matabeleland region.

Mwonzora told VOA Studio 7 reporter Patience Ruserere that the resources of the Ministry of Home Affairs will be brought to bear on violence and disruptions in a bit to halt such disturbances. The failure of police in Harare to intervene to halt the violent disruption of outreach meetings has disturbed many observers.

Despite such developments, about 300 children from all of Zimbabwe's 10 provinces gathered Wednesday in the capital for a national consultative meeting on the new constitutional. Sponsored by the U.N. Children's Fund, the meeting was called in response to a disappointing turnout by youth in the national outreach process.

Sylvia Manika reported on the youth consultation, which was to conclude on Thursday.

Earlier Wednesday, Mr. Tsvangirai visited Parliament for the official launch of a digital video system donated by the U.S. government which will allow Zimbabweans to view proceedings over the Internet. House Speaker Lovemore Moyo told Ntungamili Nkomo that the live Web streaming of parliamentary debates will soon begin.

Transition to Democracy Proves Difficult for Zimbabwe

(Voice of America)

22 September 2010

Zimbabwe Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai says he and his colleagues in the unity government must continue to rebuild the country, despite difficulties and slow progress towards democracy. Mr. Tsvangirai and other Zimbabwean leaders were in Johannesburg for a recent investment conference.

The primary goal of Zimbabwe's transitional unity government is to stabilize the country and create a suitable environment for free and fair elections.

No one is sure when the elections will take place and some analysts fear elections without reconciliation will spark a return to the political violence in which about 200 of Morgan Tsvangirai's supporters were killed during the last polls in March 2008.

Glacial pace

But, some ministers in Prime Minister Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change say Zimbabwe is slowly moving forward from the chaos and violence of the past 10 years.

One of the major difficulties faced by Zimbabweans is an erratic power supply resulting in lengthy power cuts. This has severely constrained the possibility of rebuilding mining, industry and agriculture.

The Movement for Democratic Change energy minister in the unity government, Elton Mangoma is upbeat about new investment in electricity. He says Zimbabwe will be self sufficient in power in three years through repairs and increased output from existing power stations and investment in new ones.

"We have already lined up investors, it is all sorted out," Mangoma said. "And then two greenfield investments, in coal, one at Sengwa and that is a 2,400 megawatt project, with a European country coming in."

Mangoma, like Mr. Tsvangirai, was arrested and beaten in detention under the previous ZANU-PF government. Mangoma says it is more important to try to rebuild Zimbabwe than to dwell on President Robert Mugabe and the past.

"Do you fight Mugabe every day or do you focus on achieving your objective? You have to commit yourself," Mangoma said. "We say we think we can work this thing through, and surely we have better insight. It is not out of stupidity. You do not achieve the growth rates we are getting if you are stupid."

Exodus

During the political crisis of the past 10 years, ZANU-PF closed several newspapers, many journalists were arrested and some fled the country. One of those affected was Trevor Ncube, a Zimbabwean publisher who moved to South Africa several years ago.

Under the unity government he is now regularly back in Zimbabwe and recently launched a new daily newspaper, Newsday.

Ncube says one of the most pressing problems facing Zimbabwe is the lack of skills because so many people have left the country due to the political crisis.

"There simply is not the depth of skill in Zimbabwe," Ncube said. "The banking sector, the insurance industry and so forth is suffering. As a result quality of products, quality of service is lower than it has ever been in Zimbabwe."

He says many who left the country are nervous to return in case the inclusive government fails.

"A lot of people do not have confidence that what has been started is sustainable, that there will not be developments around the corner that are going to reverse the situation so that they are back to square one, having to deal with same issues that caused them to leave the country," Ncube said.

Black vs white

Although political violence has declined under the inclusive government and there are fewer partisan arrests, the situation for white commercial farmers and their workers has worsened.

Official statistics show that 90 percent of white commercial farmers, whose products provided 40 percent of Zimbabwe's foreign currency, have been evicted since 2000.

Pressure group Justice for Agriculture's John Worsley-Worswick said former commercial farm workers, now employed by new farmers who were given white-owned land, are among the poorest people in Zimbabwe.

"Those that remained internally displaced on commercial farms, who were forced to work for new farmers, were forced into a cashless existence where the work they were doing was paid for in kind," Worsley-Worswick said. "They were getting a couple of slices of bread, and tea a day, and at the end of the month if they worked a whole month, they would get a bucket of maize."

He said farm workers without cash cannot pay for health care or education for their children or buy subsidized food that is available on the former commercial farms. He said these farm workers are "slaves."

High hopes

Mr. Tsvangirai says although he is regularly disappointed by ZANU-PF's behavior within the inclusive government, there is hope for the future.

"Zimbabwe is moving forward," Tsvangirai said. "We have health workers and medicines in our hospitals, teachers and books in our schools, food in our supermarkets and granaries, water in our taps and fuel in our petrol stations. We have a dependable and stable multi-currency regime, a single digit inflation. And we have expected growth of over seven percent this year."

Last weekend, as people gathered in Harare and second city Bulawayo to discuss a new constitution, there was a spurt of political violence and arrests. Members of the public who attended some of the meetings blamed Mr. Mugabe's ZANU-PF for attacking and injuring some members of the public, throwing stones and aggressively disrupting meetings. Some journalists say they had to flee from ZANU-PF activists and the police.

Mr. Mugabe and Mr. Tsvangirai agreed two years ago that Zimbabwe needed a new constitution before new elections.

After the weekend violence and disruptions of public meetings on the constitution, Mr. Tsvangirai said that he will not take his MDC party into any new elections if there is political violence.

Politics

South Africa Zuma tries to mend alliance with unions

(Reuters)

20 September 2010

(Reuters) - South African President Jacob Zuma tried Monday to mend strained relations with his trade union allies who helped him to power, promising to get tough on corruption and create more jobs in Africa's largest economy.

Zuma, who is striving to shore up his authority, rejected suggestions that his governing alliance with the COSATU labor federation was in trouble.

But he failed to embrace calls from his labor allies for nationalization of some mines and a weaker currency, when he delivered a keynote address at a major policy event for his ruling African National Congress.

"All the bold headlines about the imminent death of the alliance are a waste of time and ink because the alliance will live for a long time to come," Zuma said at the ANC's National General Council, a weeklong event in the coastal city of Durban.

Zuma, already seen by analysts as an ineffective leader, could leave the ANC's most important meetings in years in a weakened position if he fails to hold on to old allies, who want left-leaning economic policies, or to win over some new ones.

One of Zuma's main tasks is to mend ties with the powerful COSATU federation, strained by a three-week state workers' that was suspended earlier this month, and union accusations of cronyism and corruption in his government.

Zuma promised to take on the concerns of the labor federation about growing corruption, but offered them little in terms of embracing their economic policies. "We must eradicate corruption as well as perceptions of corruption," Zuma said.

ZUMA FIRM ON RAND

One big headache for the export-reliant country is the rand, which rose 30 percent last year and is up 5 percent so far in 2010 versus the dollar as foreign investors pile into the country's bond markets.

COSATU has called for a reversal of steps to relax currency controls on the rand, which is also up 13 percent against the euro this year, eroding export competitiveness.

But Zuma showed that he would not bow to some of COSATU's demands by saying he wanted to keep the rand, now at 2-1/2 year highs, "stable and competitive" and criticizing aspects of the state workers' strike, led by COSATU-affiliated unions.

One analyst said COSATU, through its active support for the public sector strike, had embarrassed Zuma and the government.

"It would be fair to expect the president not to just take that on the chin. He will not chase them away but he may also look to strengthen his position by broadening the alliance that has brought him into power," said Roland Henwood, the acting director of the Institute for Strategic and Political Affairs at the University of Pretoria.

Former backers have indicated they may not support him for re-election when his term as president ends in 2014, while economic growth looks set to slow.

Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan told delegates to the conference that the country has lost billions of rand through corruption. "It's a cancer. If you don't catch it early enough and if you don't tackle it early enough, it will become the end," he said in a speech.

Zimbabwe's Mugabe Tells UN Western Sanctions Blocking Anti-Poverty Progress

(Voice of America)

21 September 2010

Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Tuesday, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe again blasted the West for maintaining sanctions on him and his inner circle, charging that the restrictive measures were keeping the country mired in poverty.

Mr. Mugabe's U.N. broadside coincided with the arrival of a Zimbabwean delegation representing all three political parties in Harare's national unity government, which was to take up the sanctions question with U.S. officials in keeping with an ongoing bilateral re-engagement process, official Zimbabwean sources said.

President Mugabe told world leaders that "the debilitating sanctions" were hindering Zimbabwean progress toward U.N Millennium Development goals on poverty and hunger, among others.

But he said that despite the sanctions imposed by the United States, Europe and others, Harare had made great progress fighting HIV/Aids and maintaining quality basic education. He said Zimbabwe as in the past continues to have the highest literacy rate in Africa.

With him in New York was a so-called "re-engagement delegation" comprising Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa of ZANU-PF, Energy Minister Elton Mangoma of the Movement for Democratic Change formation of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, and International Cooperation Minister Priscilla Misihairambwi-Mushonga of the MDC wing of Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara.

The three arrived in New York early Tuesday for the bilateral discussions. Misihairambwi-Mushonga told VOA Studio 7 reporter Ntungamili Nkomo that the trio will open talks Wednesday with U.S. officials led by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnny Carson.

But political analyst Rejoice Ngwenya said the Zimbabwean delegation should not expect much in the way of concessions from Washington on sanctions as Harare has not implemented a range of political and economic reforms urged by the U.S. administration.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mugabe has come under fire for spending more than US\$2 million on his trip to the U.S., from which he was scheduled to travel on to Ecuador. He was accompanied to New York by an entourage of 80 officials, according to the U.S. Embassy in Harare. Sources at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said a request for two million in funding went to the Treasury.

Political analyst Charles Mangongera told VOA Studio 7 reporter Blessing Zulu that Mr. Mugabe's travel budget shows insensitivity to the plight of ordinary Zimbabweans struggling to survive.

U.S. Embassy spokesperson Sharon Hudson Dean said that contrary to Zimbabwean press reports saying that visas had been denied to Central Intelligence Organization head Happyton Bonyongwe and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corp. reporter Reuben Barwe, both of those individuals were in fact granted U.S. visas.

From New York Mr. Mugabe is to head to Ecuador to accept an honorary doctorate from that country's Anglican Church in recognition of 30 years of "outstanding leadership."

African nations push for permanent Security Council representation

(UN News Service)

25 September 2010

25 September 2010 – Top officials from three African nations have called for the continent to have a permanent representative on the Security Council, saying it was a travesty that the region that comprises so much of the body’s work does not have a permanent place.

South Africa’s Foreign Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane told the General Assembly’s annual general debate today that a transformation of the United Nations will not be complete until there is a “fundamental reform” of the Council, which currently has 15 members.

The Council must be “truly representative of the membership and effectively responsive to international crises as mandated by the Charter of the UN,” she said.

Ms. Nkoana-Mashabane said the UN had in general during its history shown its relevance and responsiveness to the diversity of the now 192-member organization.

In particular, she praised the world body for the role it played in the process of decolonization, “bringing the much cherished freedom and independence to the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America” and helping to dismantle the apartheid system in South Africa.

The Foreign Minister met with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today on the margins of the General Assembly, discussing several regional issues, including the situation in Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Also today, Swaziland’s King Mswati III told the General Assembly that his nation backs the so-called Ezulwini Consensus regarding reform of the Security Council.

This consensus, developed in the Swazi town of Ezulwini in 2005, states that Africa should be given two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats on an expanded Council.

The King said he was hopeful that negotiations, which have lasted for nearly two decades, could be wrapped up in the next year.

Basile Ikouebe, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Congo, stressed in his address last night that both the composition and the working methods of the Council should be reformed to ensure it is more responsive and effective.

Mr. Ikouebe also called for the General Assembly to be strengthened to make it more efficient.

Comoros calls for UN help over island of Mayotte

(UN News Service)

24 September 2010

24 September 2010 – President Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi of the Comoros warned today that France’s refusal to recognize the island of Mayotte as part of the Indian Ocean archipelago nation brings the credibility of the United Nations into question.

Mayotte was the only one of the four Comoros islands to vote in a referendum in 1976 to maintain its links with France and Paris now regards it as a departmental collectivity.

Mr. Sambi cited various General Assembly resolutions on territorial integrity in his address to the 192-member body on the second day of its annual session, backing up Comoros’ position.

“It is up to the UN as guarantor of respect for international law to demand that its Member States’ legislations conform categorically to its pertinent resolutions,” he said.

Economy & Energy

Billionaire Branson urges investment in Zimbabwe

(Reuters)

20 September 2010

(Reuters) - Billionaire Richard Branson urged people on Monday to invest in Zimbabwe, saying the world was wrong to wait instead of helping the politically volatile, impoverished southern African nation revive itself.

Virgin Unite, the philanthropic arm of Branson's Virgin Group, has helped create Enterprise Zimbabwe, a nonprofit group connecting philanthropists and commercial investors with business and social development opportunities.

Zimbabwe has struggled to attract foreign aid and investment because of President Robert Mugabe's policies, which include a plan for local blacks to acquire 51 percent shares in foreign-owned firms, including mines and banks.

Talks to improve Zimbabwe's ties with the European Union have stalled over slow political reforms in Harare while President Barack Obama said last month he was "heartbroken" by Zimbabwe's decline.

"Zimbabwe is a magnificent country that has had a really rough few years and either the world can continue to wait and see and not invest ... or the world can help (Prime

Minister) Morgan Tsvangirai and the coalition government get Zimbabwe back on its feet," Branson told Reuters in an interview.

"The idea of Enterprise Zimbabwe is to have a sort of safe haven for people to invest through," said Branson, whom Forbes magazine estimates is worth \$4 billion.

Zimbabwe's once-vibrant economy has been shattered by Mugabe's policies, particularly the seizure of white-owned farms for the resettlement of landless blacks. Mugabe has been in power since the country's independence from Britain in 1980.

A unity government by Mugabe and his political rival Tsvangirai appears to have halted the economy's decade-long free-fall, but the country is struggling to restore productivity, feed its people and repair its ruined infrastructure. Unemployment is estimated at over 90 percent.

"In life, people have got to take risks. If everybody waits on the sidelines it will be the people who suffer," said Branson. "The present state of politics in Zimbabwe is by no means perfect, but it's a great deal better."

"Zimbabwe, of all the African countries, it's got the best chance of getting back ... it just needs a bit of help being kick-started," he said.

About 85 percent of Zimbabwe's 12.5 million people live on less than a \$1 a day and annual per capita income is less than \$400.

Enterprise Zimbabwe, established by Virgin Unite, Humanity United -- run by Pam Omidyar, wife of eBay founder Pierre Omidyar -- and The Nduna Foundation, will be officially launched this week at former U.S. President Bill Clinton's philanthropic summit.

Branson said the three day Clinton Global Initiative in New York was a great place for fundraising.

"We're hoping to bring in other partners into Enterprise Zimbabwe this week and I'm sure that we will," he said. "You can get a lot done ... it's a good time to twist arms and get other people sold on your ideas."

Malawi on the road to fighting poverty

(UNDP)

20 September 2010

Five years ago, Mwandama village in the Southern district of Zomba, Malawi's former capital city was a hunger prone area. Although they are a predominantly farming area, the yields were very low. Few people could afford fertilizer and seeds to grow their own food.

The village, with a population of 35,000 people was generally characterized with high poverty levels, malnourished children, and no access to clean water.

But a lot has changed in the last five years, since the introduction of the Millennium Villages Project -MVP- in the area. The Project is a partnership between the UNDP, the Earth Institute at Columbia University and the Millennium Promise. It has been implementing practical interventions in rural areas including Mwandama, to alleviate poverty and provide access to education and other basic necessities.

When the project started in 2005, every household was given seeds and fertilizer worth US\$ 110 thousand. This improved harvests the following year. Over the years, with the continued use of fertilizer subsidies, hybrid seeds and improved farming techniques, the village now produces more than five metric tons per hectare of crop a year, exceeding the national average of 1.2 metric tones per hectare.

Through sale of crops like corn, soya beans and brown beans, the village has generated a combined income of US\$155 thousand in the last five years. A village grain bank with a capacity of 1,500 metric tones to store surplus corn and ensure food security throughout the year was recently constructed and helps villagers who are struggling to feed their families. This income has also enabled the villagers to buy essential commodities such as sugar, salt; clothes and build iron sheet for the roofs of their houses, items they could not afford a few years ago.

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In addition, each farmer contributes two 50kg bags of corn for the school feeding programme to ensure that children who go to school have a meal every day, just in case they are not able to eat properly at home. Corn is Malawi's staple food and various meals are made out of the dry seeds.

Matias Rajab a villager in Mwandama grew cabbages for sale and used the proceeds to open a small grocery store, where he sells food.

“The profits from my grocery store made it possible for me to build an iron roofed house and buy a TV set,” said a proud Rajab. My dream though is to work extra hard and get enough money to pay for my secondary education. I dropped out in the second year of high school because I could not afford school fees.

Generally life has changed in the village since the inception of the project. Over 70 boreholes have been drilled, enabling communities to drink safe water. The project also

incorporates an immunization programme, which reaches 95% of children, and provides health care to those who needs providers to make household visits.

The village was visited by UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon during his trip to Malawi in May this year, where he described it as a model for achieving the MDGs. He also promised to take Mwandama's success to the world.

"The good news is that people's lives are far better, The vast majority of families now have enough food. I saw that for my self at the community grain bank. Thanks to the new fertilizer and seeds, the areas small farmers produce a surplus of the grain. Today I call upon every country to look closely at this success. It is a case study on what possible in even the poorest places in the world," said the Secretary General.

Despite Re-Engagement, Washington Declines to Review Sanctions on Zimbabwe's Mugabe

(Voice of America)

24 September 2010

A senior U.S. State Department official has ruled out lifting of sanctions imposed on Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and more than 200 members of his inner circle, saying supporters of Mr. Mugabe's former ruling ZANU-PF party have continued to violate human rights, most recently in the nation's constitutional revision process.

State Department officials said Mr. Mugabe and his two fellow principals in the Harare unity government - Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change and Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara of a rival MDC formation - should speak out against continuing abuses including political violence.

The U.S. position was communicated on Thursday to a three-member Zimbabwe ministerial delegation that met with Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Johnnie Carson on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Susan Page told VOA that Harare has not sufficiently reformed to warrant a review of U.S. restrictive measures despite the formation of the unity government in 2009.

"Frankly, as long as these violations of human rights, this lack of respect for civilian and political rights of the people of Zimbabwe, as long as they continue, the sanctions must remain", Page said.

Addressing the General Assembly on Tuesday, President Mugabe blamed the sanctions for Harare's failure to reach Millennium Development Goals as well as to turn its battered economy around.

Page rejected this argument. "The targets are individuals and a few institutions that we believe have been responsible for the policies and the actions that have to led to

Zimbabwe's both economic and political decline," Page said, rejecting the proposition that sanctions were responsible for Zimbabwe's economic woes.

Sources said Harare enlisted the support of South African President Jacob Zuma, mediator in Zimbabwe on behalf of the Southern African Development Community, and Malawian President Bingu Wa Mutharika, currently chairman of the African Union, to make Harare's case with the United States and the European Union.

Speaking at the U.N. on Thursday, Mr. Wa Mutharika said the sanctions have outlived their time.

Zimbabwean Energy Minister Elton Mangoma, representing the Tsvangirai MDC formation in the delegation, said the meeting with Carson was a step in the right direction. But Mugabe aide Didymus Mutasa, who is also ZANU-PF secretary for administration, says he was not surprised by the American position to leave sanctions in place.

Mutasa, a minister of state, called the U.S. position inhumane.

Political analyst George Mkhwanazi told reporter Brenda Moyo that African leaders calling for an end to sanctions don't seem to understand how much harm Mr. Mugabe has caused the people of Zimbabwe.

In Major Revision, Zimbabwe Finance Minister Projects 8.1 Percent 2010 Growth

(Voice of America)

24 September 2010

Finance Minister Tendai Biti says Zimbabwe's economy is likely to expand by 8.1 percent this year on the back of a strong recovery in agriculture and unexpected growth in manufacturing, mining and tourism.

Biti told a gathering of business leaders in Harare on Thursday that agricultural output is expected to increase by 34.1 percent, exceeding an earlier 18.8 percent forecast.

He said tobacco sales and unexpectedly strong growth in manufacturing, mining and tourism, coupled with a decline in inflation, seemed likely to push the nation's growth rate to 8.1 percent - almost double the 4.5 percent growth Biti projected in his mid-year fiscal policy review. He initially called for 7.7 percent growth.

But economists dismissed Biti's latest projection, saying the economy remains in the doldrums.

Economist John Robertson told VOA Studio 7 reporter Gibbs Dube that he expects growth of about 4 percent. "Most of our own producers have yet to get back to work at the levels that will provide that much growth."

Political and economic commentator Rejoice Ngwenya said recurring violence in the context of the constitutional revision process could derail Biti's brighter economic projections.

In other economic news, pilots for Air Zimbabwe, the state-controlled carrier, ended a two-week strike Friday after the Flight Crew Association and the government reached agreement on salaries. The pilots and cabin crew were demanding a pay increase and settlement of six months arrears in pay and allowances.

Reports said the government agreed to pay 40 percent of the US\$3 million demanded by the pilots in back pay and allowances. The state carrier earlier dismissed the pilots when they refused to return to work.

Economic analyst Masimba Kuchera told VOA Studio 7 reporter Chris Gande that the end of the strike is good news for Air Zimbabwe's owner – the cash-strapped Harare government.

Tax Could be The Way Out of Aid Dependence

(IPS)

24 September 2010

JOHANNESBURG, Sep 24 (IPS) - Many African countries struggle with debt and finding money for national budgets because they fail to recognise taxation as a sustainable source of funding. Moreover, multinational companies are too easily given tax breaks while siphoning off money through illegal tax evasion.

Taxation plays an important role in determining the distribution of benefits to citizens. It also acts as a connection between state and citizenry.

But, "there is no mobilisation of national resources for national development in African countries, which is why we are seeing agitation among ordinary people", Percy Makombe, programme manager at the Cape Town-based Economic Justice Network (EJN), told IPS. EJN is a project of the Fellowship of Christian Councils of Southern Africa (Foccisa).

Attention to the tax issue has generally been lacking.

"History proves that no country will march out of poverty through aid but effective local resource mobilisation can aid development of African countries," declares Alvin Mosioma, coordinator of the Tax Justice Network - Africa based in Nairobi.

The politically independent Tax Justice Network was launched in Britain and does research and advocacy on taxation.

It co-hosted a roundtable discussion in Johannesburg on Sep 14-15 with the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (Afrodad) and the Institute for

Democracy in Africa (Idasa) to discuss ways of using tax as an instrument to reduce Africa's dependence on aid as a tool for development.

Idasa is an independent, non-profit public interest organisation based in South Africa while Afrodad, as a civil society organisation with several member organisations across the region, seeks solutions to Africa's debt problem.

The majority of African governments spend large percentages of their annual budgets paying off debts while big foreign companies take money out of their countries through tax breaks or illegal tax evasion.

Multinational companies are also not properly taxed due to the lack of capacity of African authorities to put in place tax systems.

According to Christian Aid figures, the Democratic Republic of Congo received a mere 86,000 dollars from mineral rights in 2006 while Tanzania lost at least 265,5 million dollars in recent years as a result of an excessively low royalty rate.

A 2008 Christian Aid report, titled "Death and Taxes: The True Toll of Tax Dodging", states that illegal tax evasion deprives least developed countries (LDCs) of 160 billion dollars a year. British-based Christian Aid works towards the eradication of poverty.

"The failure by multinational companies to declare profits translates into capital flight. Moreover, companies in the extractive industries enjoy far too many benefits through unnecessary tax reliefs," argues Obert Gutu, a Zimbabwean parliamentarian.

"When a government relies on the resources of its donors it is less responsive to citizens," Gutu adds.

Christian Aid defines capital flight as the unrecorded and untaxed illicit leakage of capital and resources out of a country. Dr Dereje Alemayehu, manager at Christian Aid East Africa, told IPS that many LDCs lose revenue due to capital flight caused by big western firms.

Alemayehu says this happens in different ways. First, through falsified invoicing, or the inflating or undervaluing of prices to increase costs and diminish tax liability.

Second, through transfer mispricing, a phenomenon in which companies sell to each other at inflated prices, inflating costs in intra-corporate financial transactions.

Third, through "round-tripping" where companies operating in a country send their money offshore and bring it back as "foreign investment" to get preferential tax treatment.

According to Malawi's ministry of finance, the country lost 125 million dollars in tax allowances in 2008-2009 alone. The amount equals what the government spends annually

on its national grain subsidy, which has over the years helped Malawi maintain a grain surplus.

"Multinationals come to invest in African countries on the back of so many investment incentives that are packed into our tax regimes," Benjamin Chikusa, a Malawian parliamentarian, told IPS.

Malawi offers as much as a 100 percent investment allowance on qualifying expenditure for new buildings and machinery; an allowance of up to 40 percent for used buildings and machinery; and a 50 percent allowance for qualifying training costs.

Manufacturing companies can deduct all operating expenses incurred up to 25 months prior to the start of operations in Malawi and pay zero duty on raw materials used in manufacturing.

Many countries offer such incentives in anticipation of returns through personal income tax, foreign exchange earnings and employment. But to what extent do such benefits accrue in reality?

"Most of the employment benefits come in the form of low-paid jobs at a level where income taxes do not recover what has been lost through tax allowances," says Chikusa.

Experts recommend that African countries design effective tax systems that allow them to track tax evaders beyond their borders; and that parliaments play a stronger oversight role when it comes to taxation.

Human Rights, Social Issues & Developments

ZIMBABWE: Juliet Mashoko, "I was beaten on the head and all over the body"

(IRIN)

22 September 2010

Harare, 22 September 2010 (IRIN) - Juliet Mashoko, a 61-year-old grandmother, attended the recent Survivors Summit in the Zimbabwean capital, Harare, organized by Heal Zimbabwe, an NGO working to rehabilitate people affected by political violence during the 2008 elections.

She told her story during a group testimonial session.

"President [Robert] Mugabe [leader of ZANU-PF] and Prime Minister [Morgan] Tsvangirai [leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)] must apologize to me because I was beaten on the head and all over the body by ZANU-PF militia and

sustained a broken leg. My daughter-in-law, who was pregnant, and my six-year-old grandson were locked in a house which was then set on fire.

"The Prime Minister owes me an apology because I suffered so much trauma because of supporting his political party [MDC]. Right now the two of them [Mugabe and Tsvangirai] are in an inclusive government and their lives have moved on, while some of us are carrying so much hurt, injury and trauma.

"It was just before sunset and a truck load of ZANU-PF supporters drove into my homestead, located on the eastern outskirts of Harare. They said they were looking for my son, Brian Chimova, who is an MDC councillor for the area.

"They said since I was not prepared to reveal his whereabouts, I would have to take the punishment they wanted to mete out [to him]."

They began assaulting her with sticks, and "They also stomped on my legs and hit me with thick logs until one leg fractured.

"They took my six-year-old grandson, my pregnant daughter-in-law and my 20-year-old son and locked them in one of the rooms. They threw a petrol bomb inside, which set it on fire.

"Up to this day, their cries of anguish continue to haunt me. I wanted to assist them but I was helpless as I could not move my legs.

"I am not able to provide for myself any more because of my injuries and the destruction of my property. The government should compensate all victims of political violence and assist them to rebuild their shattered lives."

Zimbabwe Drops Charges Against HIV/AIDS Health Workers

(Voice of America)
2010

22 September

Zimbabwe's Office of the Attorney General on Wednesday dropped charges against four U.S. health workers, a New Zealander and a Zimbabwean arrested September 10 on charges they had illegally provided medical services.

The six were initially accused of running HIV/AIDS clinics in Harare and Mutoko without authorization. The Americans work under the auspices of the Allen Temple Baptist Church AIDS Ministry in Oakland, California.

Reports said the California-based medical workers have been traveling to Zimbabwe three or four times a year at their own expense to provide antiretroviral drugs, vitamins, clothing and food to poor people with AIDS.

Dr. Anthony Jones, Dr. David Greenberg, health workers Gloria Crowell and Gregory Miller, New Zealander Andrew Cheyne and Zimbabwean Dr. Tembinkosi Ncomanzi were earlier freed on \$200 bail apiece.

Their lawyer, Jonathan Samkange, told VOA Studio 7 reporter Jonga Kandemiiri that the physicians intend to seek a license that will allow them to operate in the country without further difficulties.

Women Traders Confronting Sexual Harassment at Borders

(IPS)

22 September 2010

TSHWANE, South Africa, Sep 22 (IPS) - Harassment and sexual exploitation by border officials seeking bribes constitute the biggest obstacles for female informal cross-border traders in Africa, according to a United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) research study.

The study, which surveyed over 700 informal traders at their homes, workplaces and markets in Zimbabwe and Swaziland, as well as at border posts with South Africa, describes harassment of traders by South African police, soldiers and customs officials if traders should refuse to pay bribes.

"Women are more likely to be sexually abused by officials. The major challenge is harassment at borders by customs officials, and the fact that the traders cannot access needed information," stated Nomcebo Manzini, regional director of UNIFEM Southern Africa, at a workshop on the study held in Tshwane (formerly Pretoria).

The study characterises South Africa as a "green pastures" country, with many people coming from neighbouring countries to sell their wares in the country or to purchase goods to sell in their home countries.

The study estimates that almost three quarters of informal cross border traders contribute to governments' revenues through the payment of duty and licence fees.

Despite the lack of formal statistical data, some estimates have put informal cross-border trade contributions at between 30 to 40 percent of intra- Southern African Development Community (SADC) trade.

Many of the traders surveyed were educated, with 90 percent of those surveyed with secondary or higher education, partly a consequence of the low levels of formal employment in the declining Zimbabwean economy.

Unemployment is identified as a structural driver of informal cross-border trade, with many engaging in such activities to generate income and ensure food security.

Otilia Chikosha from the Harare-based Regional Export Promotion Women's Trust estimates that in Zimbabwe around 70 percent of women of productive age are involved in cross-border trade.

Chikosha described the "vicious cycle of poverty" as fuelling on-going cross-border trade activities. "We need money for school, we need money for food, we need money for rent. We cannot sit there and do nothing if there is no solution."

Participating in cross-border trade activities carries serious risk at times. "There is the whole issue around safety. Once traders reach their country of destination, they really struggle to find accommodation and in many cases find themselves sleeping on the streets," Manzini explained.

The UNIFEM study describes the effects of the traders' operating environment on their health. A reliance on public transportation, poor maintenance, high costs and incidences of theft and sexual harassment mean that women traders face serious threats.

The difficulty of obtaining loans and start-up capital for small businesses forces many women traders to borrow money from "loan sharks" to pay for transport and purchase goods.

Corrupt border officials who take advantage of traders' sometimes limited level of understanding of the customs process may also confiscate some their goods illegally.

Many are forced to engage in transactional sex along trade corridors to obtain accommodation, transport or get through borders - as Chikosha put it, "simply to get by and make a living".

Upon returning home, female traders - who may be gone for weeks at a time - may be accused of prostitution and stigmatised.

Chikosha said the major challenge is how to help women informal traders to enter the formal economy. "Women have limited options in terms of access to markets. They look for markets, but the challenge is that governments are not willing to put in place structures to help access," she pointed out.

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa's (COMESA) simplified trade regime, for example, has assisted trade within the regional bloc, but benefits mostly small and medium enterprises and not individual informal traders.

The regime allows for tariff relief and improved ease of customs handling but only applies to goods that originate in member countries. Most women informal traders deal mainly in low-cost imported goods such as clothing, household items and food purchased in South Africa and imported from Asia.

Thus the COMESA regime has little positive impact on their lives.

"In the context of South Africa as a receiving country for traders, there is a critical need to understand issues such as the provision of support services and guidance that is given to them.

"We need to think about how we can make this business transaction a lucrative one. South Africa benefits too. The traders buy their wares here, they keep the economy of South Africa going," Manzini stressed.

Currently no methodology exists for documenting and recording benefits that informal traders bring to a country.

A consultative workshop held during the third week of September 2010, organised by UNIFEM and the South African government, is a step towards involving all the relevant stakeholders in the discussion.

Environmental Issues

ZIMBABWE: A decade of living in the aftermath of flooding

(IRIN)

23 September 2010

HARARE, 23 September 2010 (IRIN) - It was 10 years ago that a cyclone hit remote rural communities in eastern Zimbabwe destroying much of the basic infrastructure, but in the absence of any reconstruction it may as well have been yesterday.

In a village in rural Chipinge District on the Mozambican border in Manicaland Province, schoolchildren have become accustomed to being educated in roofless classrooms.

"The majority of the children learn in these run-down classrooms and the situation has been like this since 2000 when heavy rains destroyed the school," primary school teacher, Trymore Sithole, 46, told IRIN.

"We have tried our best to source for money to build new school blocks, toilets and teachers' houses as well as replace the furniture but no one is ready to help us," Sithole, a teacher at the school for the past 14 years, said.

The impoverished community cannot afford to donate money for the school's repair and a local business which used to contribute modest amounts before the cyclone, ended donations after the cyclone destroyed its grinding mill and beer outlet, Sithole said.

During the rainy season, from November to April, lessons are routinely disrupted and "trained teachers shun the school because of the poor working conditions, forcing us to work mostly with those that are unqualified." A recent government directive has also prohibited unqualified teachers from teaching.

Sithole said only a few children from the school managed to qualify for secondary education, with most dropping out to help with family chores or participate in cross-border smuggling of second hand clothes and cane spirits from neighbouring Mozambique.

Bridges unrepaired

Numerous bridges destroyed in the province by flooding remain unrepaired, further isolating already remote communities.

"Transport operators now shun this area because there are no bridges. We have no option but to use ox-drawn scotchcarts for transport," 62-year-old Mandiziwa Mabika, a village elder from Chipinge, told IRIN.

The sick are ferried by these carts to Mount Selinda Hospital, the nearest clinic about 60km away, but many people have died during the journey, Mabika said.

"We don't have shops from which to buy basic commodities because our area is not easily accessible. That means we have to travel long distances on foot to buy such small items as salt and matches," Mabika said.

Apart from the illegal cross-border trade activities, there are few income generating activities for villagers.

A communal irrigation scheme under which villagers grew vegetables for sale in Chipinge was abandoned when the dam from which the locals drew water was damaged but "even if the dam was repaired, it would still be difficult for us to transport our produce to the markets", Mabika said.

No money, no recovery

John Robertson, an economist based in the capital Harare, told IRIN the cyclone coincided with the start of the country's 10-year economic decline after President Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF government instituted its "ill-advised" fast track land reform programme which redistributed more than 4,000 white commercial farms to landless blacks.

The violence associated with both the land programme and subsequent elections damaged the country's reputation and discouraged investment.

"If you consider the extent of the damage caused by floods in such countries as Mozambique [in 2000], Zimbabwe did not experience irreparable destruction and repairs should not have taken this long to be done," he said.

Robertson said the land reform programme led to a decline in tax revenue because it destroyed many businesses related to agriculture, one of the country's biggest sectors, making it difficult for the government to source money for disaster recovery.

MOZAMBIQUE: Hoping to reach the MDG on water

(IRIN)

21 September 2010

MACHAZE, 21 September 2010 (IRIN) - Every day Ster Mamboza, 37, covers 19 km on a bicycle over sand and gravel roads to the well at Machaze, in the southern Mozambican province of Manica, carrying two 20-litre plastic water containers and a two-month-old baby. It's quite a balancing act.

The better part of her day is spent fetching water from this well, the nearest safe source in the area, "even when I am sick", because "we need water for everything we do in life. I

only leave the baby at home when it is really hot, but I get anxious because sometimes it takes me more than six hours to get back," she told IRIN.

Other women waiting their turn at the well, like Kessina Muchanga, said they had come from villages up to 40 km away and spent well over 8 hours a day fetching water. "Sometimes I leave home at four in the morning and only get back at five in the afternoon. My two daughters always come with me so that between us we can bring back 120 litres - I have a family of eight," she told IRIN.

Poor access to safe water and adequate sanitation facilities lead to outbreaks of waterborne diseases like cholera and diarrhoea, a major cause of mortality, particularly among children.

"I would prefer to spend less time fetching water so that I could do other things, like enter an adult education programme or start a business to contribute to our household income," Mamboza said.

Off target

Although there have been improvements in recent years, government figures show that only 43 percent of Mozambicans have access to safe water, and a scant 19 percent have access to improved sanitation.

The situation in rural areas - where over 70 percent of the estimated 22 million people live - is worse than in urban areas, and only 30 percent have access to safe water and just 6 percent have access to improved sanitation.

A 2009 joint assessment by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, and the National Directorate of Water, found that main source of water for 36 percent of the population was unprotected wells.

These figures indicate that Mozambique will be hard pressed to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of "To Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.". According to the UN MDG monitor, Mozambique is "off track" for the whole of goal 7, which is to "Ensure environmental sustainability".

Conditions in Machaze district reflect those in other parts of the country: of the 98 boreholes and wells to supply a population of 105,000 only 57 are in operation. On average over 1,842 people depend on a single source, while government policy stipulates that only 500 people should benefit from each water point.

Taking aim

To improve its chances of reaching the water-related MDG targets, in March 2010 government launched the National Rural Water and Sanitation Programme

(PRONASUR) with a budget of US\$300 million to ensure that 70 percent of the population has access to clean water by 2015, and 50 percent can access basic sanitation. The programme includes building 12,000 new water sources to benefit an additional 4.5 million Mozambicans.

"Water has always been a problem in here," said Matchaze district administrator Gabriel Machate. "This year we should have built 30 new boreholes but bureaucratic issues delayed the plans."

Food Security & Health Issues

New Measles Outbreak Claims Lives of 70 Children in Zimbabwe Province

(Voice of America)

23 September 2010

Some 70 children have died in a new outbreak of measles in Mashonaland Central province in the past two weeks in spite of a national vaccination program carried out earlier this year, senior provincial authorities said Thursday.

Health Ministry Disease Control Director Portia Manangazira confirmed to the state-controlled Herald newspaper that a new outbreak was in progress in the province north of Harare.

The fatalities have occurred among members of the Apostolic church who declined to take part in the massive immunization campaign. The United Nations Children Fund said it is investigating.

Mashonaland Central Governor Martin Dinha told VOA Studio 7 reporter Brenda Moyo that he has been frustrated at the slow response by national health authorities to the deadly outbreak.

Zimbabwe President Mugabe Calls For Universal HIV Testing To Curb Disease

(Voice of America)

23 September 2010

President Robert Mugabe said in an interview with Chinese state television that compulsory HIV tests could help curb the spread of the deadly disease, a point of view that drew objections from many Zimbabweans.

Mr. Mugabe, who revealed in 2008 that a member of his family had tested positive for HIV, said in the interview that he wondered why a universal HIV testing program could not be agreed regionally or internationally.

The president said such compulsory testing would only be used by health professionals to identify those in need of treatment and to encourage those infected to make behavioral changes to stop the spread of HIV.

He said the Zimbabwean government has been prevented from adopting compulsory testing by the lack of international agreement on this with regards to possible violations of human rights.

"I don't think that it's a violation of human rights. If there is any justification for [testing] it is because it is a measure to justify stopping the spread of an epidemic,' Mr. Mugabe said in the interview. He added that "we don't have the courage to force testing and the law does not allow it. My feeling is that the law should be amended," though he acknowledged that this would have to be done under a regional or international protocol on the question.

For a closer look at Mr. Mugabe's controversial proposal, VOA Studio 7 reporter Sandra Nyaira we turned to AIDS expert Frenk Guni in Washington and National Aids Council Programs Director Raymond Yekeye in Harare.

Yekeye said that while testing everyone for HIV might be a bold step forward, not everyone who was found to be positive would be able to access antiretroviral drugs still in short supply.

Most guests speaking on the VOA Studio 7 LiveTalk program later Thursday disagreed with Mr. Mugabe, arguing that people should have the right to decide whether or not they want to be tested. They said the government should concentrate on health care delivery and encouraging voluntary testing with available counseling.

But a minority supported Mr Mugabe saying mandatory testing would help maintain a healthy nation.

Village Chief Leads Fight For Maternal Health

(IPS)

24 September 2010

LILONGWE, Sep 24 (IPS) - In Ntcheu, a rural district in central Malawi, villagers have taken the fight against the country's high maternal mortality rate into their own hands. They have almost eradicated maternal deaths in the area by urging pregnant women to give birth in hospitals, under medical supervision.

Chief Kwataine, who has 89 villages in Ntcheu under his traditional authority, launched a maternal health campaign that first addressed common cultural beliefs associated with pregnancy, for example that a woman's first child should be born at home or that the men of the family decide when women need medical attention. Kwataine also banned all traditional birth attendants in his villages, compelling women to give birth in hospital.

These measures have gone hand in hand with a widespread maternal health education campaign. In each of the 89 villages, between two and five skilled maternal counsellors register every pregnancy and advise mothers on best practices for achieving maternal health. Bright messages sprayed on the walls of villagers' houses are bold reminders of important health messages.

"We also monitor their hospital visits. Every time they go for an antenatal check-up, they bring their medical passports to us so that we can record what's been entered by the hospital," explains Pilirani Nkhoma, who is one of the maternal counsellors.

Tangible results

The results have been tangible. Between 2000 and 2005, before the chief started the maternal health initiative, the area recorded 52 maternal deaths. But not a single woman in the 89 villages under Chief Kwataine's authority has died during childbirth in the past three years.

This is unheard of in Malawi, where 510 women die per 100,000 live births, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Even though this number is down from 807 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2006, Malawi will not achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5 of improving maternal health.

To meet MDG 5, the country would have to bring the number down to 155 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015, which the country's government admits will be impossible to achieve.

Kwataine's maternal health initiative faces a number of hurdles, however, since the measures can only be successful in the long-term if they are accompanied by sufficient human and financial resources in the public health sector. The hospital closest to Kwataine's area of traditional authority, for example, now receives almost twice as many pregnant women than the maternity ward has capacity to admit and struggles to assist all women in need.

"By all accounts, the campaign in Kwataine's area is a brilliant approach. But we are almost buckling here now because we do not have corresponding resources," a health official who preferred to remain anonymous told IPS.

Lack of capacity

Experts fear that gains made in reducing maternal mortality could be reversed because of lack of skilled health workers and hospital capacity.

The national health department hasn't been able to get a grip on the problem. In 2005, it promised to recruit more midwives and upgrade health facilities, with a view to boosting

maternal health, but five years down the line, skilled health workers are still too few and health facilities remain poorly equipped.

The Malawi Health Equity Network (MHEN), a Lilongwe-based independent alliance of organisations and individuals promoting equity and quality in health, faults government specifically on budget distribution. A report in which it analyses the national health budget shows that in the past four years, the health department has allocated between 50 and 60 percent of its annual budget towards activities at the health ministry headquarters, instead of using those funds for the improvement of health facilities throughout the country.

"This is money spent on allowances and four-wheel drive vehicles that race in the streets of the capital, yet 80 percent of Malawians are in the rural areas where health problems are forever acute," complains MHEN executive director Martha Kwataine.

Showing initiative

Well aware of the questionable spending priorities of the national health department, chief Kwataine and his people decided not to wait for government to provide all services.

Malawi's rural population, even though largely poor, has the power to find its own solutions to the country's maternal health woes, the chief believes. On the back of a successful community-driven safe motherhood initiative, he managed to mobilise his people to donate money to construct their own clinic, which will be offering basic emergency obstetric services.

"We believe that the clinic will ease pressure at the main hospital, therefore allowing more women to access better services there and also ensuring faster attention here," he explains.

Kwataine also hopes that government will become aware of the successes he achieved in his villages and will make funds available for other communities to replicate the approach: "If communities around the country committed themselves into doing programmes of this nature, and if government came in to support such initiatives, Malawi would have a better story to tell in 2015."

Refugees/IDPs & Migration

Many Zimbabweans in South Africa Fail to Surmount Hurdles to Legal Residence

(Voice of America)

23 September 2010

Week one of South Africa's crash program to issue work, study and residency documents to many thousands of Zimbabweans in the country has been marred by frustration and disappointment on the part of many of those seeking to legalize their status who were turned away for lack of all the required paperwork.

Many thousands of Zimbabweans have eagerly responded to the call by South African authorities for them to come forward and establish themselves as legal residents before a December 31 deadline.

But many are telling stories of disappointment saying they have been sent away by officials of the Home Affairs Department for failing to meet documentary requirements, reported correspondent Benedict Nhlapho.

Elsewhere, Home Affairs officials in a meeting on Thursday with Zimbabwean representatives, decided to extend amnesty to Zimbabweans who surrender fraudulent South African identity documents.

But the penalties for holding fraudulent documents will also be stiffened after the December 31st deadline for Zimbabweans and other foreigners to legalize their status.

Home Affairs Deputy General Mkuseki Apleni said in the press conference that the procedures for dealing with false identities which may have been used to obtain driving licenses or bank accounts are still under consideration, but he emphasized that reports that individuals with false documents will be prosecuted are not true.

Apleni stressed Zimbabweans should surrender false documents in exchange for legitimate documentation.

Zimbabwe Exiles Forum Director Gabriel Shumba, among the expatriate advocates who met with Home Affairs officials in Pretoria, told VOA reporter Tatenda Gumbo that authorities assured the Zimbabwean representatives that the changes were not intended to threaten immigrants, but to provide an avenue to legalize their status.

UN-backed repatriation of Congolese from Zambia passes milestone

(UN News Service)

25 September 2010

25 September 2010 – The United Nations refugee agency is preparing to close two refugee camps in Zambia as the number of Congolese who have successfully returned home in a UN-backed programme over the past three years tops 40,000.

Mwange camp will be shut on Tuesday and Kala camp will be closed next month, with the wider voluntary repatriation programme winding down by the end of this year, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported yesterday.

Any remaining refugees who do not want to return to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will be moved to the Meheba refugee settlement in Zambia's North-Western province, according to UNHCR.

But the agency said that most Congolese now felt it was safe enough to return to their homeland, and many want to use skills obtained during life in Zambia – including agriculture, fishing and carpentry – to start new livelihoods when they return.

“The willingness of Congolese refugees at Kala and Mwange to repatriate is very high,” said Philippe Creppy, the head of UNHCR's office in the Zambian town of Kawambwa.

When the refugees return to the DRC, largely to the Katanga region in the southeast, UNHCR and its aid partners provide skills training, microcredit schemes and income-generation projects. Returnees also receive food, shelter and transport assistance.

The milestone of 40,000 returnees was passed last weekend when a boat chartered by the UN agency carrying 555 people reached Moba in the DRC after crossing Lake Tanganyika.

Gender-Based Violence Wrecks Malawi Refugee Camp

(IPS)

21 September 2010

BLANTYRE, Sep 21 (IPS) - At the age of 13, Chantal Kifungo* is mother to a ten-month-old baby girl. It wasn't her choice. Almost two years ago, she was raped by her stepfather – and fell pregnant with his child.

"My mother was in hospital because she had complications with her own pregnancy. I was left alone with my stepfather. One night, he came home and raped me. I tried to shout for help but nobody heard me," Chantal says while nervously playing with her hands in her lap.

The next morning, the girl confided to a neighbour, but the woman didn't believe her. Only when her mother returned from hospital weeks later did Chantal find trust and emotional support. But by then she was already pregnant, and her stepfather had disappeared.

What made the situation especially difficult is that Chantal and her mother Mathilde*, who are originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, live together with about 11,000 other refugees from all over the continent in Malawi's only and cramped refugee camp, Dzaleka. Conditions here are tough, and rape and domestic violence triggered by alcohol abuse, stress and hopelessness are widespread problems.

"Every day, we have conflict here in the camp," admits Martin Mphundukwa, Dzaleka compound manager and an official of the Malawian Department of Refugees. "The funding for the camp is inadequate, so life is very tough for refugees. Many resort to violence."

Since Malawian law prohibits refugees from living outside of the camp or seeking employment, they are forced to live in the Dzaleka compound, which lies 42 kilometres outside of Malawi's capital Lilongwe. The camp used to be a detention centre for political prisoners during the time of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Here, refugees live in rows of simple mud houses on an arid stretch of land. The basic food and toiletry rations they receive every month are barely enough to survive on.

As soon as Mathilde learnt about her daughter's rape, she reported the case to the camp's police station. But when she tried to follow up two weeks later, she was told she had to pay a bribe for the investigation to proceed. Since she didn't have the money, the report got "lost" shortly thereafter.

Only much later did Mathilde hear about a gender-based violence project run by the Malawi Red Cross inside the camp. The project educates refugees about their rights, raises awareness about violence and offers a safe house for abused women, counselling, access to medical care and HIV testing.

The Red Cross also cooperates with police and the refugee department to hold perpetrators accountable.

With the assistance of Red Cross staff, Chantal's case was eventually reopened, although it is rumoured that her stepfather has now fled the country. The girl also received counselling, had a medical examination and an HIV test. By then it would have been too late to administer post-exposure prophylaxis had she been infected with HIV.

Regrettably, Chantal's case is not an isolated one. Every month, between seven and ten cases of gender-based violence are reported in the camp, says Red Cross social worker Cecilia Banda. They range from wife beating and abuse to rape, abduction and child rape.

"We see many, many cases," confirms Constable Brian Mzembe, a police officer stationed at the camp. "But the positive thing is that reporting has increased since the Red Cross started to assist victims. People are now less afraid to speak out."

Still, very few perpetrators are sentenced. Currently, only one case has made it into court, and only two perpetrators have been sentenced this year -- one for rape, the other for rape of a minor. Reasons for the low conviction rate vary, says Mzembe. Some women withdraw their cases out of fear, while other investigations come to a halt because the perpetrator has fled the camp. But most cases seem to fall by the wayside due to bureaucratic inefficiency.

"Our main problem is that the police officers on duty in the camp rotate every month. Every time you follow up, you deal with someone new. That makes it difficult to keep track and lots of cases get lost," explains Banda.

Nonetheless, Banda believes that, within those limits, the police are doing their best to reduce crime in Dzaleka. They recently set up a team of 18 officers who patrol the camp day and night. And in cooperation with the Red Cross, they have launched a door-to-door crime prevention campaign to educate households about security and human rights.

For Chantal, however, these efforts have come too late. "I have lost hope. The other children taunt me. They say I share a husband with my mother. The adults accuse me of stealing my mother's husband. Some say my mother should kill me and my child," she says with a sigh.

But the teenager has nowhere else to go to start a new life. Until they are repatriated or resettled, they are prohibited to leave the camp. That may take years.

*Names changed to protect the identities of the interviewees.