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Summary of Report

Elections & Governance

Zimbabwe: Violence, Intimidation Mar Constitutional Outreach

Increasing violence, carried out by the Patriotic Front of ZANU-PF against the supporters of MDC and other civilians, in Zimbabwe during community meetings leading up to a constitutional referendum and new arrests of civil society activists highlight the lack of progress in ending human rights abuses and implementing urgently needed human rights reforms. It is also damaging the constitutional outreach program badly. Human Rights Watch urged the government to take immediate steps to end abuses and create the necessary constitutional and electoral framework to ensure free, fair, and credible elections, as envisaged in the Global Political Agreement.

ZIMBABWE: Struggling to create a constitution

Zimbabwe has started a Constitutional Outreach Program in an attempt to create a new constitution so that elections could be held by 2011 on the basis of that new constitution. For the Constitutional Outreach government has made committees to take views of the public, what they want in new constitution. But violence and intimidation by ZANU-PF has ruined this process. They are preventing the people by threats, injuries and killings, to not to contribute in the Constitutional Outreach. They are doing so because ZANU-PF wants an existing draft of constitution, commonly referred to as the Kariba Draft, to be adopted. It places no limit on the number of presidential terms, and gives the president wide-ranging powers.

Politics

S. Africa tries contracts to hold gov't accountable

The ruling African National Congress has faced mob protests over the last two years for failing to provide the poor with homes, hospitals and sanitation some 16 years after the end of apartheid when the party take over control of Africa's largest economy. Elections for municipal posts across the country will take place early next year and President Jacob Zuma's government is under pressure to be seen as addressing the infrastructure backlogs or risk losing votes in the ballot. For this reason government has signed services delivery contract to hold itself responsible. South African ministers, who are signatories to a delivery agreement, will be accountable by the President. And they will be compelled, beginning this week, to deliver on government pledges to bring electricity, running water and proper schools to the country's legions of poor.

IMF will not replace Madagascar representative

The International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday it would not replace its outgoing Madagascar representative due to the constitutional vacuum on the Indian Ocean Island.

US: sanctions stay until Zimbabwean rights improve

The U.S. State Department has expressed on Sunday that Zimbabwe must show greater respect for human rights and political freedoms before the U.S. sanctions on the poor African nation can be removed.

S. African ministers to set performance goals-Zuma

South African President Jacob Zuma said on Sunday he would ask his cabinet ministers to set their own performance targets that he would then monitor to try to improve the delivery of services to citizens.

Economy & Energy

ZIMBABWE: A Fourth Chimurenga, for gold

A new wave of farm invasions in Zimbabwe has been nicknamed the Fourth Chimurenga (liberation struggle) - the fast track-land reform programme launched by President Robert Mugabe in 2000 was the third - but this time they are not looking to redistribute land, they are looking for gold. Some farmers are concerned about the impact of illegal mining on the environment and food security - river banks are becoming severely eroded, affecting water flow, and mining on fertile land means less food is being produced. Innocent Makwiramiti, a Harare-based economist and former head of the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC), said poverty was driving illegal miners to exploit farmland.

In-Brief: "No position" on EU restrictions on Zimbabwe

The European Union (EU) said it had "noted positive developments" in Zimbabwe as the deadline for a decision on targeted restrictions against the troubled Southern African country approaches. Jesús Carmona, spokesman of EU President Herman van Rompuy, told IRIN that South Africa raised the issue with EU President Herman van Rompuy at a bilateral meeting in Brussels, Belgium, on 28 September. But there is no position on it [for or against the restrictions] - the matter will come up for review in February 2011, and then we will examine the situation.

Analysis: Subsidies won't keep bread on Mozambican tables

In response to food price demonstrations in early September, the Mozambican government has laid on a range of price cuts and subsidies to make life easier for the poor, and has promised to do some belt tightening of its own, but observers say the measures are unaffordable and will not address the deeper issues.

Food Security & Health Issues

Angolan polio outbreak threatens efforts to eliminate disease from Africa, UN warns

A polio immunization campaign targeting 5.6 million children was launched in Angola today (01 October 2010) as the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) warned that the southern African country was quickly becoming the greatest threat to continent-wide eradication efforts.

SWAZILAND: A dialogue to defeat AIDS

Communities in Swaziland are coming together as never before to tackle the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has so deeply affected them. Some NGOs are also holding seminars to offer facts, clear confusions, provide education and counseling regarding HIV.

Neonatal Circumcision Yet to Gain Ground

In Zimbabwe, Neonatal circumcision was introduced in 2010 by the ministry of health and child welfare. But it is only beginning to gain public attention as some mothers remain in the dark about the program and its benefits. But with the country's slow uptake of adult male circumcision, neonatal circumcision is seen as a sure way to reduce new infections in the long term. The Zimbabwe National Aids Council has already noted that the low level of male circumcision could reverse the gains the country has made against HIV. Cultural activists say it is a dying tradition in Zimbabwe. And many are not keen on it. Not many new mothers quite understand why an infant has to be circumcised and many claim this is not part of their culture and even their religion.

Growing Obesity in Africa Bad for Worker Productivity

Obesity is no longer a problem confined to wealthy nations. In their developing counterparts in Africa, an increasing number of people can be categorized as obese. According to researchers this trend could be harmful to countries' already fragile economies.

Progress in Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV

The number of pregnant women being tested for HIV and accessing treatment in Sub-Saharan Africa has shown significant progress – indicating that virtual elimination of mother-to-child transmission of the virus by 2015 is possible.

Detailed Report

Elections & Governance

Zimbabwe: Violence, Intimidation Mar Constitutional Outreach

(Human Rights Watch)

28 September 2010

(Johannesburg) - Increasing violence in Zimbabwe during community meetings leading up to a constitutional referendum and new arrests of civil society activists highlight the lack of progress in ending human rights abuses and implementing urgently needed human rights reforms, Human Rights Watch said today.

The national unity government began a series of community outreach meetings in June called the Constitutional Outreach Program to elicit popular views on a new constitution. The meetings have been marked by increasing violence and intimidation, mainly by supporters of Zimbabwe's African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and war veterans allied to ZANU-PF, the former sole ruling party. In the past few days, the violence has worsened, as the outreach meetings have moved to the capital, Harare, and the city of Bulawayo. Because of the violence, 13 meetings in Harare were suspended.

"ZANU-PF supporters and their allies continue to commit abuses with impunity, and the police remain partisan," said Rona Peligal, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "The government of Zimbabwe needs to put a halt to the attacks and allow the constitutional outreach to proceed without violence."

Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement brought ZANU-PF and the former opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) together two years ago into a unity government. The agreement calls for putting a draft constitution to a referendum. If the constitution is accepted, new elections would bring this interim government to an end. A Constitutional Select Committee was set up to oversee the process, and up to 70 outreach teams have been dispatched around the country to conduct the outreach program.

Human Rights Watch urged the government to take immediate steps to end abuses and create the necessary constitutional and electoral framework to ensure free, fair, and credible elections, as envisaged in the Global Political Agreement. The government should also repeal or amend all repressive legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, which severely limits rights to demonstrate. The police have loosely interpreted certain provisions of the POSA and other laws to justify arbitrary arrests of civil society activists. The government should also respect and uphold the recent human rights additions to the current constitution, particularly those obliging state officials to respect and uphold the rule of law and guaranteeing free and unfettered political participation.

Human Rights Watch has received reports of violence in Harare, Bulawayo, Masvingo, Mashonaland West, and Mashonaland East during the outreach process. The attacks were reportedly perpetrated by ZANU-PF officials and supporters against villagers, perceived supporters of the MDC, and civil society activists who are monitoring the process.

On September 18 in Greystone Park, Harare, a group of war veterans, and ZANU-PF youths reportedly barred white residents from participating in the outreach program, contending that the white residents were not Zimbabweans. One resident in the area was assaulted when he tried to intervene on behalf of the white residents.

The following day in Mbare, Harare, ZANU-PF supporters attacked MDC supporters and prevented them from attending an outreach meeting, which ended when the violence broke out. ZANU-PF supporters and uniformed police assaulted 11 residents and MDC supporters from Mbare with blunt objects as they left the meeting. One resident, Chrispen Mandizvidza, died from his injuries on September 22. Medical reports indicated that he died as a result of complications from a ruptured bowel, which he sustained after being hit in the abdomen with blunt weapons.

Human Rights Watch received similar reports of violence and intimidation by ZANU-PF supporters and war veterans in the Harare suburbs of Budiriro, Chisipite, Glen View, and Glen Norah.

In an unrelated incident, 83 men and women from the group Women of Zimbabwe Arise were arrested in Harare on September 20 as they demonstrated against the lack of professionalism by the Zimbabwe police. The group was detained at the Harare Central Police Station for two days. On September 22, they were taken to appear at the Harare Magistrates Court to answer charges of criminal nuisance under the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act and were later released on bail.

The perpetrators of this violence should be brought to justice, Human Rights Watch said, and the activists who were detained after they reported ZANU-PF attacks should have the charges against them dropped.

"This violence and intimidation do not bode well for the referendum and elections that could be held next year," Peligal said. "Without rights reforms and accountability for continuing abuses, the kind of violence that plagued the 2008 elections is likely to happen again."

ZIMBABWE: Struggling to create a constitution

(IRIN)

28 September 2010

Harare, 28 September 2010 (IRIN) - Violence has marred the series of outreach meetings being held across Zimbabwe, where members of the Constitutional Parliamentary Select

Committee (COPAC) come to hear what ordinary Zimbabweans want to be included in their new constitution.

Brian Kachingwe, 22, who lives in Chitungwiza, a town about 25km south of Harare, the capital, and is studying political science at the University of Zimbabwe, suffered head injuries and a broken nose after violence broke out at an outreach meeting about two weeks ago.

When he went to the local government hospital to have his injuries treated, he was detained for six hours. The attackers were not arrested and his parents have had to pay for the medical expenses.

"It is unfortunate that I never had the chance to air my views ... I will not risk the danger of attending outreach programmes in the future. This is a blow on democracy," he said.

Last week Chrispen Mandizvidza, an activist in the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, died after a meeting in Harare ended in violence.

COPAC, jointly led by the MDC and Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF, suspended the process in Harare and Chitungwiza, noting the allegations of intimidation, threats and violence. "The atmosphere might not have been conducive for the free expression of opinion by some participants." Nevertheless, the process of public consultation will continue.

The Herald, a state-run newspaper quoted Munyaradzi Paul Mangwana, a ZANU-PF member and co-chair of COPAC as saying, "We, however, successfully completed 69 meetings in Harare."

A new constitution is one of the requirements stipulated by the Global Political Agreement, signed in September 2008 between Zimbabwe's three main political parties: the MDC, a smaller group of the MDC led by Arthur Mutambara, and ZANU-PF led by Mugabe, president in the current coalition government.

The outreach process began early in 2010 and is expected to be wrapped up by the end of September 2010. But since about May 2010, in an operation dubbed "Vhara Muromo", or Shut Your Mouth, members of the youth militia aligned to ZANU-PF have allegedly been warning villagers to either shut up or support the party's views on the new constitution.

ZANU-PF wants an existing draft constitution, commonly referred to as the Kariba Draft, to be adopted. It places no limit on the number of presidential terms, and gives the president wide-ranging powers.

Mugabe has ruled since independence from Britain in 1980 and the new constitution will replace the Lancaster House Agreement, which has been amended 19 times. The new constitution, if approved in a national referendum, will open the way to elections in 2011.

John Makumbe, a Harare-based political scientist and university lecturer, told IRIN he feared a referendum would lead to violence "just as we saw in 2000, when the rejection of the referendum saw the government of Mugabe unleashing soldiers on civilians".

The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, an umbrella body for NGOs promoting human rights, said the victimization of participants was rife. "The violent disruptions by suspected ZANU-PF supporters, and the ensuing lethargy by the police in stopping the violence," the coalition noted in a statement.

"The Harare disruptions give credence to earlier allegations of intimidation and violence in rural areas, particularly Mashonaland and Manicaland provinces."

Teachers under threat

Teachers, particularly in rural areas, have reported victimisation during the process. "All those responsible for violence and killing in rural communities are actually killing the teaching profession and destroying the education of our children," said David Coltart, the Minister for Education, Sport, Arts and Culture.

Raymond Majongwe, secretary general of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), noted that "Our members have made reports of militias and unidentified people visiting them before the arrival of COPAC teams and warning them against making any contributions during the outreach sessions."

Teachers in rural areas have been avoiding the consultations out of fear. "A few have, however, managed to make written submissions, but it is sad that teachers ... have not been given the chance to participate freely in the making of a democratic constitution," Majongwe told IRIN.

SW Radio, an independent broadcaster, reported Tsvangirai as saying: "The [outreach] process was to ensure that all Zimbabweans give views but unfortunately ... violence ensued. It has to be, ultimately, a negotiated settlement."

Politics

S. Africa tries contracts to hold gov't accountable

(Alert Net)

30 September 2010

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 30 (Reuters) - South African ministers will be compelled, beginning this week, to deliver on government pledges to bring electricity, running water and proper schools to the country's legions of poor.

The ruling African National Congress has faced mob protests over the last two years for failing to provide the poor with homes, hospitals and sanitation some 16 years after the end of apartheid when the party take over control of Africa's largest economy.

"At the national level, ministers that are signatories to a delivery agreement will be held accountable by the president," Collins Chabane, a minister responsible for monitoring government programmes, said in a statement obtained on Thursday.

Elections for municipal posts across the country will take place early next year and President Jacob Zuma's government is under pressure to be seen as addressing the infrastructure backlogs or risk losing votes in the ballot.

Zuma's administration has promised to improve the lives of the poor but 17 months into his term, his colourful personal life and widening rifts in a fractious ruling alliance with labour federation COSATU appear to have shifted his focus.

Zuma, viewed by many as an ineffective leader, could see his grip on power weakened if the ANC stumbles in the elections.

But the ANC has virtual one-party rule. It may lose a small measure of support if it fails to meet its pledges but will not be out of power for years, if not decades, due in part to the lack of a credible opposition.

Chabane will monitor the government programmes and evaluate ministers' performance but it is not clear what recourse he will have to deal with ministers who fail to meet their objectives.

The contents of the contracts eventually will be made public and will likely contain action plans, budgets and other measurable criteria on how the plans will be filtered down to local level.

Some critics see the performance contracts as a marketing ploy but it also makes it easier for Zuma to overcome political pressures and fire ministers for under achieving.

"If this government felt that it will lose an election or support because of poor performance, there would be sanctions and this process would have very sharp teeth," said Nic Borain, an independent political analyst.

"The fact there are no sanctions does imply there is some complacency, especially because they don't have voters nipping at their heels or market forces to punish them for failing to deliver."

IMF will not replace Madagascar representative

(Alert Net)

28 September 2010

ANTANANARIVO, Sept 28 (Reuters) - The International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday it would not replace its outgoing Madagascar representative due to the constitutional vacuum on the Indian Ocean island.

IMF country manager Pierre Van den Boogaerde said the Washington-based body's Nairobi office might cover the country, which has been mired in crisis since President Andry Rajoelina seized power in March last year.

"The absence of a replacement is because of the absence of constitutional order. There probably won't be a replacement until the situation returns to normal," Van den Boogaerde said.

An almost 2-year political crisis has stunted Madagascar's growth largely due to the suspension of budgetary assistance by donors which has forced the government to put nearly all public investment projects on ice.

The IMF froze aid to the world's fourth largest island, eyed by foreign firms for its oil, cobalt, nickel gold and uranium deposits, in May 2009 shortly after Rajoelina overthrew former leader Marc Ravalomanana.

Earlier this year, Rajoelina's government, which is not recognised internationally, slashed its forecast for economic growth in 2010 to 0.8 percent, saying government spending would be badly hurt by a suspension of donor aid. [ID:nLDE66L0KJ]

The \$8.6 billion economy shrank 0.2 percent in 2009 from 5.0 percent growth a year earlier, IMF data showed, as government spending dried up and private investment slowed sharply.

Madagascar is to hold a referendum on a new constitution in November before legislative and presidential elections next year.

US: sanctions stay until Zimbabwean rights improve

(Alert Net)

26 September 2010

WASHINGTON, Sept 26 (Reuters) - Zimbabwe must show greater respect for human rights and political freedoms before the U.S. sanctions on the impoverished African nation can be removed, the U.S. State Department said on Sunday.

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and his inner circle have been subject to Western sanctions since his ZANU-PF party won an election in 2000 after a violent campaign.

The sanctions were imposed at the start of his government's policy of seizing commercial, often white-owned, farms to resettle landless blacks.

Mugabe was forced into a power-sharing deal last year with opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai that has stabilized the economy after a decade of decline but the United States argues that human rights violations continue.

The State Department said its top diplomat for Africa and other U.S. officials met three Zimbabwean ministers on Thursday and had praised the economic advances but raised concerns "that political progress has not been as successful."

"Zimbabwe must make further progress for the removal of targeted sanctions," the State Department said in a statement.

"As long as human rights violations, land seizures, and intimidation of those participating in the political process continue, the sanctioned individuals and entities on the list who continue to perpetrate and benefit from these acts are unlikely to be removed," the statement said.

"Significant improvements in the political environment, greater respect for human rights and political freedoms will result in change in U.S. posture."

The statement described last week's meeting as cordial and saying the United States was committed to keeping the door open for further dialogue.

S. African ministers to set performance goals-Zuma

(Alert Net)

26 September 2010

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 26 (Reuters) - South African President Jacob Zuma said on Sunday he would ask his cabinet ministers to set their own performance targets that he would then monitor to try to improve the delivery of services to citizens.

Zuma said his ruling ANC had emerged united after a policy meeting that ended on Friday and he now saw renewed energy in the government's performance.

The ANC agreed to explore greater state control of the mining sector, but made no shift in economic policy at one of the party's biggest meetings in years.

"The mood in the country has become more positive because any perceived tension within the ANC affects all our people," Zuma said in a speech to journalists in Durban.

"We will put more energy into changing the way government works."

South Africans have protested and criticised the government over poor delivery of services in Africa's largest economy, prompting Zuma to sign performance agreements

with ministers in April. The agreements will now be followed up with the setting up of targets.

"We have also designed a programme for the president to visit government departments to monitor and evaluate work being done at the site of service delivery," Zuma said.

The site visits would include hospitals and police stations.

"This will enable us to celebrate achievements and assist those lagging behind to perform better and faster," he said.

Economy & Energy

ZIMBABWE: A Fourth Chimurenga, for gold

(IRIN)

01 October 2010

Kadoma, 1 October 2010 (IRIN) - A new wave of farm invasions in Zimbabwe has been dubbed the Fourth Chimurenga (liberation struggle) - the fast track-land reform programme launched by President Robert Mugabe in 2000 was the third - but this time they are not looking to redistribute land, they are looking for gold.

Thousands of unemployed Zimbabweans trying to survive in an economic meltdown that has lasted almost a decade have taken to unlicensed prospecting for gold and other minerals along the country's rivers.

As more and more illegal miners crowd the river banks, people have begun spreading onto farms near the rivers; sometimes they find consenting land owners, who often collude in the illicit enterprise.

Undocumented miners cannot dig openly so they sneak onto the farms at night and use wheelbarrows and sacks to cart away the rocks - which they hope will be gold-bearing - to millers who crush the ore and extract the gold.

"This is a new wave of land invasions and we have nicknamed it the Fourth Chimurenga," said Derick Gatsi, 24, an illegal miner or "makorokoza" who made the 300km journey from rural Wedza in Mashonaland East Province, in northeastern Zimbabwe, about a year ago.

"There are now too many makorokoza on the rivers and alluvial gold is becoming scarce; on the other hand, the farms that lie close to the rivers are rich in gold and that is why we have turned to them."

He said some of his colleagues had relocated to the Shamva district in neighbouring Mashonaland Central Province, about 260km away, where "the farms are also rich in gold."

Miners trespassing on farms were sometimes caught up in violent running battles with the farm owners and their workers, or were arrested when the police swooped on them, but Gatsi said they were never prosecuted because the police readily accepted bribes.

Ordinary Zimbabweans have to contend with a variety of shortages - foreign exchange, food, clean water, fuel, energy - because the industrial base has contracted by more than a third and unemployment is at nearly 80 percent.

Zimbabwe's mineral wealth has been in the spotlight, accompanied by lively speculation that it could take care of the country's enormous debt, but the International Monetary Fund has said this was unlikely - external debt is projected to reach 151 percent of gross domestic product by 2015.

Farm owners collaborate

Elijah Mhuri*, 53, a veteran of Zimbabwe's liberation war, lives in Mashonaland West Province, about 180km southwest of Harare, the capital, where for years he has employed illegal miners to dig for gold on the 32- hectares plot near the Musengezi River allocated to him during the fast-track land reform programme.

The mounting costs of agricultural inputs and a breakdown in extension services mean that Mhuri and other resettled farmers have struggled to earn a living from their new farms. "I make more money in a month [around US\$700 a week from mining] than a farmer who gets a good harvest from cotton or maize after toiling for a whole year," he said.

"As a war veteran, I support the land reform programme, but I don't have any problem with resettled farmers switching to gold panning for a living because that is one benefit we have from the land that we took from the whites."

The land redistribution programme forced more than 4,000 white commercial farmers to make way for thousands of land-hungry blacks, but dislocated agricultural production and turned Zimbabwe into a food insecure country that depends on imports.

The government has admitted that most beneficiaries of the land reform programme have underutilized the land allocated to them. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, has repeatedly called for an independent land audit to determine how many farms are gainfully used.

There have been efforts to subsidize inputs and more land has been planted; around 1.68 million people are expected to be in need of food aid in the pre-harvest season for 2010/11, compared to about 3.5 million people in 2009/10.

Impact on agriculture

Some farmers are concerned about the impact of illegal mining on the environment and food security - river banks are becoming severely eroded, affecting water flow, and mining on fertile land means less food is being produced.

Rodrick Masango, 60, a war veteran who was allocated a 40-hectares plot, said he was being harassed by illegal miners, who had brought down his fence, stolen livestock and tractor parts, and had ruined land he prepared for planting.

"I have made several reports to the police to flush out these illegal gold panners, but even though some raids have been made, the invaders keep coming back to dig up my farm. I don't have enough money to employ full-time security personnel," Masango told IRIN.

Innocent Makwiramiti, a Harare-based economist and former head of the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC), said poverty was driving illegal miners to exploit farmland.

"These miners are desperately looking for opportunities to make a living; illegal alluvial gold panning is no longer lucrative because of the intense competition among the miners and the destruction of the rivers," Makwiramiti told IRIN.

He said the move to dig for gold on farms threatened the land reform programme. "The government has always said the land reform programme was meant to boost food production by subsistence [farmers], and the new crop of commercial farmers, but if trends like the illegal invasions of farms by gold miners continue, I don't see how that will happen."

Last week the Zimbabwean authorities reportedly arrested five Russian nationals for illegal mining.

In-Brief: "No position" on EU restrictions on Zimbabwe

(IRIN)

30 September 2010

Johannesburg, 30 September 2010 (IRIN) - The European Union (EU) said it had "noted positive developments" in Zimbabwe as the deadline for a decision on targeted restrictions against the troubled Southern African country approaches.

South Africa raised the issue with EU President Herman van Rompuy at a bilateral meeting in Brussels, Belgium, on 28 September, van Rompuy's spokesman, Jesús Carmona, told IRIN. "But there is no position on it [for or against the restrictions] - the matter will come up for review in February 2011, and then we will examine the situation."

The EU also noted in a communiqué that there were "some important challenges" in the Global Political Agreement between the political parties - ZANU-PF led by President Robert Mugabe, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, and a breakaway group of the MDC led by Arthur Mutambara - signed in September 2008.

The sanctions were first imposed on 18 February 2002 and reinstated in February 2010 after the EU noted a "lack of progress" in the implementation of the agreement.

The restrictions include travel bans and the freezing of bank accounts, which affect more than 200 targeted individuals and 40-odd companies linked to Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF.

There is also a ban on the sale of arms to Zimbabwe, and in a February 2010 addition, the EU suspended development cooperation with the country for a further year. However, the EU has provided funding for various projects aimed at improving governance during that time, and has maintained that the sanctions were not aimed at the people of Zimbabwe.

Mugabe and ZANU-PF have argued that Zimbabwe's dire economic situation, near collapse of social services, and prolonged food insecurity are the consequence of these sanctions.

Analysis: Subsidies won't keep bread on Mozambican tables

(IRIN)

29 September 2010

Johannesburg, 29 September 2010 (IRIN) - In response to food price riots in early September, the Mozambican government has laid on a range of price cuts and subsidies to make life easier for the poor, and has promised to do some belt tightening of its own, but observers say the measures are unaffordable and will not address the deeper issues.

"When you have riots you need to do some damage control," Fernando Lima, a prominent Mozambican publisher and journalist, told IRIN. "This is a short-term solution as an emergency measure."

Mozambicans in the capital, Maputo, and the nearby town of Matola, took to the streets after the government announced on 1 September that the price of bread and other basic goods would rise.

In defence of its decision, the government pointed to external factors like drought and wildfires in Russia - one of the world's major wheat suppliers - to justify the higher prices and quell violent protests and looting that left hundreds injured and at least 10 dead.

Antonio Fernando, Minister of Trade and Industry, noted on state-run television that global oil prices had increased, while climate change and "other factors" had brought

about a worldwide slump in wheat production. "We have to understand that the financial crisis has still not passed and will take time ... we are still suffering the impact [of it]."

A day later president Armando Guebuza told Mozambicans that his government understood the hardship of the poor, "which is aggravated by external factors, such as the financial crisis and the rising price of food and fuel". Security forces cracked down hard on what they called a group of raiding "bandits".

Lima suggested that while external factors might have added to the growing discontent in the capital, other issues closer to home – like poverty and unemployment - were also to blame. "The very poor are very angry, and they have the sympathy of most of the country," he said.

Cheap bread back on menu

The unrest subsided only when, on 7 September, the government announced a u-turn on measures it had previously called "irreversible". Fernando told Mozambique's official news agency, AIM, that the bread subsidy would require "a major financial effort from the government", but no exact figures were given.

On 21 September, two weeks after the first riots, AIM reported that registered bakers would receive a subsidy of 200 meticaís (US\$5.6) for every 50 kg bag of wheat flour - costing 1,050 meticaís (US\$28) - they purchased.

Other relief measures include halving water connection fees for low-consumption households, considerably reducing the cost of piped water to the poor, and giving free electricity to households consuming 100 kwh or less; prepaid electricity consumers will no longer pay for trash collection.

Generalized fuel price subsidies will be converted into a direct subsidy for urban public transport, which will avoid giving subsidies to the rich who have their own vehicles.

The price of low-grade rice will be reduced by 7.5 percent, the surtax on imported sugar will be temporarily removed, and customs duties will be lower on vegetables like potatoes, tomatoes and onions imported from South Africa.

The government would also do its bit: the wages and allowances of all senior officials, board members of parastatals, and companies in which the state is the major shareholder would be frozen pending the outcome of an assessment of the wages policy. Wages would also have to be paid in local rather than foreign currency to bolster the national monetary unit.

State air travel would also be restricted; Guebuza promptly cancelled a scheduled trip to New York to attend the recent gathering at the UN to discuss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Richard Cornwell, Director of Current Affairs at the Africa Public Policy and Research Institute in South Africa, a think-tank, said the gestures were nice but not enough, and described them as "just a stopgap". "The pro-poor attention embodied in every measure announced by the government is a significant change," Young Kim, the World Bank's acting representative in Mozambique, told IRIN.

Triggers

"The protests seem to have been a manifestation of underlying frustration ... depreciation of the metical since the beginning of the year led to rapidly rising inflation and accentuated the frustration over joblessness and poverty," Kim said.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) figures show that the metical depreciated by more than 30 percent in nominal terms against the currencies of Mozambique's major trading partners - up to 50 percent against a strengthening South African rand, and 30 percent against a recovering US dollar - and by August 2010 year-on-year inflation had reached 17 percent.

Victor Lledó, Resident Representative of the IMF in Mozambique, said the cost of living for most ordinary Mozambicans had risen sharply since the beginning of 2010, and although "food prices played a very important role in the riots", the increase in the price of bread, along with the announced increases in the water and electricity tariffs, were only "the triggers".

"Because of the depreciation [of the metical], and because Mozambique imports quite a significant amount of its consumption goods [mainly from South Africa], there was a marked increase in living costs," Lledó told IRIN. "High and accelerated inflation has a significant impact, particularly on the poorest segments of society ... High inflation is a high tax on the poor."

Economic growth without jobs

Kim said the country had come a long way, but at the heart of the recent problems there was a growing feeling among Mozambicans that years of high growth in the gross domestic product had not significantly benefited the poor or translated into desperately needed jobs.

Economic growth hit double digits after a brutal civil war came to an end in 1992, and since 1996 the economy has grown by an average of 8 percent a year; government figures project growth in 2011 at 7.2 percent, but most experts agree that the type of growth Mozambique has experienced has not really been "pro-poor".

Foreign aid inflows and capital-intensive "mega-projects" - like the state-owned HCB power-station on the Cahora Bassa Dam, one of Africa's most powerful hydroelectric plants, and the Mozal aluminium smelter, which contributes almost three-quarters of the country's exports - add significantly to GDP figures but do not do much for jobs.

"Unemployment is a serious problem but it's not really measured," Kim said. Joblessness is officially estimated at just over 25 percent but is generally believed to be higher.

"It's about cost of living, and food is a core component of that," said Joseph Hanlon, Senior lecturer at the Development Policy and Practice department of Britain's Open University. "Half of Mozambique's population is poorer than it was 10 years ago, and all indications are that poverty in Maputo city is increasing sharply."

A widely quoted figure by government as well as donors is that the number of people living below the poverty line fell dramatically from 69 percent in 1997 to 54.1 percent in 2003, but the figure in the government's September Report on Millennium Development Goals 2010 was 54.7 percent.

Opportunity in agriculture

After almost three decades of peace Mozambique still depends heavily on aid and the domestic economy has failed to develop or diversify. "It's classic Dutch disease," Kim noted, referring to an economic term that describes how an increase in revenues from natural resources (or inflows of foreign aid) can lead to an immediate currency appreciation, making domestically produced goods less competitive internationally.

"Mozambique has got to start taking seriously the business of agricultural development. Aluminium smelters are all very well and good, but the linkages with the rest of the economy are too poor for it to be sustainable as a national development strategy," Cornwell noted.

"The [mega-projects] are essential ... because they create a cash cow for governments, but they do little to uplift the peasant in the countryside." Hanlon agreed, calling for urgent state intervention to help create the necessary domestic markets to help boost small- and medium-scale farmers.

"An area that the government itself is very aware of is the need to increase agricultural production; Mozambique has large areas of arable land that are not well used," the IMF's Lledó commented.

"If this dynamic could be changed, the food supply would be improved and Mozambique would need to import less, and that would shield it from movements in the volatile international markets," he said.

"The crisis has provided the government with a very good opportunity to show the donors how committed they are to improving the targeting of their expenditures, and making those expenditures more pro-poor," Lledó noted.

"With the World Bank, we [IMF] have been strongly advocating for the government to look at the possibility of introducing new social safety-net systems, or to scale up existing ones. One strong candidate would be conditional cash transfers."

Food Security & Health Issues

Angolan polio outbreak threatens efforts to eliminate disease from Africa, UN warns

(UN News Service)

01 October 2010

1 October 2010 – A polio immunization campaign targeting 5.6 million children was launched in Angola today as the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) warned that the southern African country was quickly becoming the greatest threat to continent-wide eradication efforts.

Only three African countries have recorded cases of the highly infectious and potentially lethal disease in the past four months – Nigeria, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with the latter infected from across the Angolan boarder, WHO spokesman Rod Curtis told reporters in Geneva.

Areas in Angola that have previously been polio-free have been re-infected this year from an expanding outbreak, he said.

Over the next three days and again at the end of the month, WHO, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Rotary International will be supporting tens of thousands of volunteers, health workers, parents, communities and traditional leaders as they go from house to house and village to village to ensure that every child under the age of 5 is reached with an oral polio vaccine.

These campaigns are not only critical to stopping polio in Angola, but also to stopping it in all of Africa, with Angola quickly becoming the greatest threat to eradication on the continent, Mr. Curtis said, stressing the need to close existing immunization gaps from previous campaigns in which up to 30 per cent of children were missed.

WHO believes the outbreak can be rapidly stopped, even by the end of the year, if these gaps are closed, he added.

Given the upsurge, now more than ever the key lies in the full mobilization and commitment of all sectors and all stakeholders at all levels, UNICEF spokesperson Marixie Mercado said. Particularly important is the engagement by local-level administrative leaders in planning and implementing the campaigns and mobilizing all levels of society to reach every child.

The whole world is watching this outbreak because the future of a polio-free Africa is at risk, she stressed.

Other than Nigeria, there has not been any case in West Africa since Mali, on 1 May, and the Horn of Africa became officially polio-free as of July, Mr. Curtis said.

Outside Africa, polio has been eradicated in most parts of the world, but remains endemic in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Last month WHO said great strides had been made towards eliminating polio in Nigeria, which has seen a 99 per cent drop in cases this year compared to 2009.

SWAZILAND: A dialogue to defeat AIDS

(Alert Net)

29 September 2010

LUBOMBO, 29 September 2010 (IRIN) - Communities in Swaziland are coming together as never before to tackle the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has so deeply affected them.

"We will defeat AIDS, we the women of this village!" chant a group of older Swazi women wearing voluminous black skirts and bright red wraps in Ka-Vikizuula, near the Mozambique border in the east of the country.

Government officials and bureaucrats from the capital, Mbabane, and the staff of health NGOs, received a warm welcome from the 200 community members assembled in a tent set up at the chief's residence, but this time they had come to listen rather than prescribe to the villagers.

"The NGOs are here to introduce themselves to us; they will hear what we want," said Isabella Katamzi, a former Senator, now the National Coordinator of child welfare group Banakekeli Bebantwana Bendlunkhulu, who has led the fight for more grassroots involvement in AIDS prevention and mitigation programmes.

"The people will tell them they want more home-based care, more drugs at the clinics, more nurses; and the NGOs will tell the people about the services they offer. We in the villages know our problems better than the people in Mbabane," she told IRIN/PlusNews.

In Ka-Vikizuula they want more attention paid to the psychological needs of orphans and vulnerable children; they also want the rural road network to be extended to make it easier for people to reach health facilities.

"Our voices are the last to be heard, but we have the most to say. This has to do with us, so why should outsiders tell us what must be done? We must tell them what must be done," said Thuli Thwala, 56, a grandmother of 10.

The women's traditional dance and a high-kicking warriors' dance by a group of athletic young men were followed by a play performed by a group from the commercial capital, Manzini.

The drama was based on an earlier meeting with community members who, led by a trained facilitator, had offered ideas for a story highlighting the way AIDS had entered their village. The lively interpretation of marital infidelity, and the seduction of young people by well-off older men and women, was watched intently.

Since the beginning of the year the group has performed locally created plays in 20 of the country's 365 chiefdoms as part of the Community Opinion Dialogues initiative, partly sponsored by UNAIDS.

"We know how to take these issues and bring them alive," said the troupe's leader, Modison Magagula. "The people are still shy to talk about sex, but they are learning to discuss [HIV/AIDS] as a health issue."

After the performance, the facilitator led a discussion about the drama and asked for real-life instances of the issues it raised. "We have those problems here, it is true. I know for a fact that when some of the men come back from jobs outside the country, their wives - who were never sick before - fall ill from this thing," said one man, who, like many others, was reluctant to say the word "AIDS" aloud.

Health officials had often spoken of the need to involve rural residents in healthcare, but little was done before the community dialogues. "The people are responding well," said Esau Dube, Administrator of the Lubombo Region and a guest at the Ka-Vikizuula village meeting.

"You see how they open up during these community meetings. It is always humbling to hear the wisdom of the folk - they know best what they and their neighbours need."

The discussion also brought to light some common misconceptions about HIV and AIDS: confusion about the effectiveness and cultural appropriateness of male circumcision to reduce the risk of infection; the belief that intercourse with a virgin cures AIDS, and that encouraging condom use primarily benefited condom manufacturers.

The facilitator, assisted by the NGO representatives, offered facts, cleared confusion and provided education. At the end of the four-hour programme of drama, dance, song and discussion, the audience headed to the chief's kraal where a cow had been slaughtered for a feast.

Ernest Dlamini, recently assigned to the local clinic to provide HIV counselling and testing, commented: "We are here to make friends, and enjoy some meat."

Neonatal Circumcision Yet to Gain Ground

(IPS)

30 September 2010

BULAWAYO , Sep 30 (IPS) - Judith Sikhosana recently gave birth to a healthy baby boy. And while she has strictly followed the advice of health workers about the post-natal care for her child, there is one thing she is yet to understand: why nurses want her baby to be circumcised.

"I have been advised about the benefits of circumcision for my baby concerning HIV, but he is just a child. I should not be thinking about things like that," said Sikhosana about her four-month-old son.

Sikhosana said she has not met any mothers who had their babies circumcised and she does not want to be a "pioneer". "I will see as time goes," she said, as she chatted among other new mothers who nodded in agreement.

Nurses in Bulawayo's high density council clinics say Sikhosana's response – and that of other mothers – to neonatal male circumcision is not isolated.

Neonatal circumcision was introduced in 2010 by the ministry of health and child welfare. But it is only beginning to gain public attention as some mothers remain in the dark about the program and its benefits.

But with the country's slow uptake of adult male circumcision, neonatal circumcision is seen as a sure way to reduce new infections in the long term. The Zimbabwe National Aids Council has already noted that the low level of male circumcision could reverse the gains the country has made against HIV.

According to the ministry of health and child welfare only 5,000 Zimbabwean men have been circumcised since 2007. This could make the circumcision of babies a more practical approach toward reversing what the World Health Organisation still sees as the high level of HIV/AIDS in the country.

But the reluctance seen among mothers like Sikhosana has shown that there is still a long way to go before the practice becomes an established one, says midwife Thubelihle Mkhwebu. Many new mothers have said the HIV fight ought to be confined to adults as they do not want their babies to be "cut up". "We still have a lot of convincing to do," said Mkhwebu.

While male circumcision is a rite of passage still observed here among some communities, cultural activists say it is a dying tradition in Zimbabwe. And many are not keen on it. "Not many new mothers quite understand why an infant has to be circumcised and many claim this is not part of their culture and even their religion," Mkhwebu said.

These concerns come as the United States President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief and its implementing partners donated male circumcision medical kits worth five million

dollars in September. This is a first major donation towards the male circumcision drive that has also targeted male babies in the country.

The ministry of health and child welfare aims to have 80 percent sexually active adults and newborn male babies circumcised by 2015. But if what is happening in local clinics is anything to go by, it has become apparent that not all new mothers have met the neonatal circumcision call with enthusiasm. And it is not solely mothers who remain unconvinced about the need for neonatal circumcision, but fathers too.

Nyarai Moyo, a new mother attending the post-natal clinic in Nkulumane suburb said that she has discussed the idea of having her son circumcised with her husband. But he is not convinced that there is a need to do so. "I wouldn't mind as long this (circumcision) seeks to protect my child. But this is a decision I cannot make alone," Moyo said.

"My husband has not taken it very keenly, pointing out that he himself is not circumcised so why should his child be burdened with that? He says the child will decide for himself when he is grown up," she said.

The slow response to neonatal male circumcision could also be attributed to what the country's 2009 Multiple Indicator Monitoring Survey noted as a continued lack of comprehensive knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS among many Zimbabweans.

The understanding of HIV/AIDS, the survey said, tends to increase with education and wealth. And because the reluctance to have male babies circumcised largely comes from mothers who attend clinics in poor working-class suburbs, there are concerns it could take some time for attitudes change.

There are, however, pockets of hope. Jennifer Muza, a self-employed mother of one-year-old boy, said she is willing to have her child circumcised.

"I have never thought about it, but why not? I can have him circumcised. It's no big deal really," said Muza, oozing the kind of confidence health workers says has so far been sorely lacking amongst mothers. It is a confidence that is yet to be translated into action.

But meanwhile, for mothers like Sikhosana, the responsibility for circumcision is being left to their children once they reach adulthood.

Growing Obesity in Africa Bad for Worker Productivity

(IPS)

29 September 2010

CAPE TOWN, Sep 29 (IPS) - Obesity is no longer a problem confined to wealthy nations. In their developing counterparts in Africa, an increasing number of people can be categorised as obese. According to researchers this trend could be detrimental to countries' already fragile economies.

Dr. Zandile Mchiza, researcher at South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), has found that both under-nutrition and over-nutrition are evident in poor African communities and that these phenomena are inter-related. Her research is directed at informing policies to address the growing problem of obesity in Africa.

"Obesity may result in all sorts of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, heart problems and various types of cancer. This can have various implications for countries' economies," explains Mchiza.

Mchiza headed a recent research project that investigated the scope of Africa's obesity problem. The statutory HSRC specialises in humanities and social sciences research with Africa as its focus.

"An obese farm worker won't be as productive as someone with a healthy weight level. Such a person won't be able to walk long distances or to stand in one place for a long period of time while performing tasks. Loss of productivity due to obesity may therefore hamper a country's economy," according to Mchiza.

Obesity may also lead to absenteeism, she adds: "If you are obese, you will probably be going to the doctor more often compared to healthy people, especially if you suffer from an obesity-related illness. This again is detrimental to productivity and will affect the economy if occurring on a wide scale."

Determining whether someone is obese or overweight can be done using the body mass index (BMI), which requires dividing a person's weight in kilogrammes by their height in square metres. It is generally understood that a BMI over 25 kg per square metres is defined as overweight and a BMI of over 30 kg/sq m as obese.

A high prevalence of obesity can put extra pressure on Africa's already overburdened public health care systems, Mchiza stresses. Many African nations struggle with a shortage of nurses, doctors and other healthcare professionals, as well as a lack of money for hospitals and clinics.

"If more people utilise the already overloaded public health care system because of obesity-related problems, it may force the government to spend more on the treatment of preventable and unnecessary diseases. This could lead to less money being available for housing, education and other priorities," Mchiza notes.

The exact number of obese Africans is unknown, as not much research has been conducted on the topic.

"Most information that is available deals with the situation in South Africa. The reason for this is the quality of the country's communication and technology infrastructure and how various government departments are organised.

"This is not the case in most other countries, which makes it difficult to get information on obesity," Mchiza points out. Her research, which was conducted in 2008 and 2009, mainly entailed reviewing the available demographic health surveys in African states published between 2003 and 2007.

Mchiza discovered that obesity is most common among women and teenage girls. "They are much more tolerant of being obese, as large bodies are associated with beauty and status in many African cultures," she explains.

Analysing the available data, Egypt is the African country with the most significant obesity problem as 35.7 percent of adult women are obese. The land of the Pharaohs is followed by South Africa (27.4 percent), Swaziland (23.1 percent), Mauritania (16.4 percent), Lesotho (16.1 percent) and Namibia (11.7 percent).

Ghana (9.3 percent), Republic of Congo (7.5 percent) and Zimbabwe (7.2 percent) have an emerging obesity problem.

Rising obesity levels has partially to do with changing lifestyle patterns due to the influence of globalising Western culture, such as choosing convenience and fast food over traditional dishes. Price is also an important factor.

"A plate of chips is often cheaper than a balanced meal," Mchiza says. "Africans have shifted away from more traditional diets to convenience and fast food."

One of the countries where obesity is a problem that is not on Mchiza's list is Botswana. According to its very first research project, which was conducted by the University of Botswana, approximately 20.3 percent of the country's adolescents between the ages of 11 and 19 are obese or overweight.

"Approximately 21.5 percent of the students that we classified as obese or overweight were female," says Dr. Segametsi Maruapula, lecturer at the university's department of home economics education and head of the survey. "A little over 18 percent were male."

The food industry is partially responsible for Botswana's obesity problem, Maruapula explains: "People nowadays eat more refined foods that are high in fat and sugar. We are not just talking about fast food such as hamburgers and hotdogs but also about savoury snacks and other convenience foods."

"Half of the youngsters we interviewed told us they are eating fast food on a regular basis. About 26 percent said they were eating out once a day; 18 percent were eating out once a week. The problem with fast food and convenience foods is that they are highly accessible, promoted heavily and are very cheap."

Maruapula argues that the fast food industry should take responsibility for overweight and obesity in the workforce: "The industry needs to work closer with healthcare

professionals and listen to them regarding how they can make their products healthier," she suggests.

"Health is not just a task for healthcare workers. It is also the responsibility of the food industry."

Mchiza recognises the role of fast food in Africa's obesity problem but she does not regard the fast food industry as the main culprit: "It is the consumer who makes the choice. Companies such as MacDonald's have come up with healthier products, yet many people seem to prefer fatty products."

Progress in Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV

(IPS)

28 September 2010

NAIROBI, Sep 28 (IPS) - The number of pregnant women being tested for HIV and accessing treatment in Sub-Saharan Africa has shown significant progress – indicating that virtual elimination of mother-to-child transmission of the virus by 2015 is possible.

According to a new report Towards Universal Access, the proportion of pregnant women in Sub-Saharan Africa who received an HIV test increased from 43 percent in 2008 to 51 percent in 2009. The report by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS assessed HIV/AIDS progress in 144 low- and middle-income countries.

It found an estimated 24 percent of the approximately 125 million pregnant women in these countries received an HIV test in 2009, an increase from 21 percent in 2008 and eight percent in 2005. Fifty-four percent of HIV-positive pregnant women in Sub-Saharan Africa received antiretroviral drugs to prevent transmission to their children in 2009, up from 45 percent in 2008.

Speaking to IPS during the launch of the report in Nairobi on Sep.28, UNICEF regional director Elhadj As Sy said the progress made in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission is testimony of the fact that virtual elimination by 2015 is achievable.

"What we need is strong political leadership, funding, good programs and activism. If we build on the progress and with renewed commitment we are well on our way to achieving virtual elimination by 2015," Sy said. However, despite the progress there are still challenges with disparities between regions and within countries.

Four countries in the region report providing HIV testing and counselling to over 80 percent of pregnant women. They are South Africa, Zambia, Namibia and Botswana. These countries have already reached the target set at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS). This is the target of providing 80 percent of pregnant women in need of treatment with antiretroviral drugs to reduce transmission to their children.

Despite the marked progress, countries in Eastern and Southern Africa fared better than their counterparts in West and Central Africa. In Eastern and Southern Africa, 50 percent of pregnant women received HIV testing and counselling, an increase from 43 percent in 2008. In Western and Central Africa, coverage increased from 16 percent to 21 percent between 2008 and 2009.

"While the figures in Western and Central Africa are low, this does not mirror failure on their part. The burden of HIV/AIDS has leaned heavily on Eastern and Southern Africa and this is where most interventions have been directed. Western and Central Africa are just beginning to pick up the problem and their burden of the epidemic is lower," said Dr. David Okello. Okello is director, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Cluster at the WHO regional office for Africa.

Seven countries including Nigeria, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Ethiopia provided HIV tests to less than one third of pregnant women. "Knowing and accessing treatment is very crucial. Greater investments are needed to increase HIV testing and counselling among pregnant women in order to effectively prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV," Okello said.

Nigeria, DRC, Ethiopia and Uganda are still far from attaining the UNGASS target. These four countries contributed to 50 percent of the global gap in reaching the UNGASS target. The global gap is the difference between the current number of pregnant women in need who have access to ARVs and the estimated number who must be reached to achieve the UNGASS goal. Nigeria alone accounts for almost one third, 32 percent of the gap.

The number of children receiving antiretroviral therapy in Sub-Saharan Africa rose from 224,100 to 296,000. However, the total coverage among children in the region is still low at 26 percent compared to adults at 37 percent. "Too many children are still dying in this time and era when we can test and treat. We need to do more to reach the 10 million who still need treatment," Sy said.

Among infants and children exposed to HIV, access to early testing, care and treatment is still a challenge. More than 90 percent of children living with HIV are infected through mother to child transmission during pregnancy, around the time of birth or through breastfeeding. The challenges facing Sub-Saharan Africa include weak integration of services, persistent drug stock-outs and little follow up of patients started on treatment.

"To address these challenges, countries need to strengthen health systems, improve integration of services and bring facilities closer to the people," Okello said.

Integration of services means having related areas close together such as child and maternal health, tuberculosis and reproductive health services. "We need to develop strategies to reach out to every woman and child especially those in marginalised areas,

the poor and those living in rural areas. We need to counter stigma and discrimination and the risk of violence against women particularly," Sy said.

Countries need to develop mechanisms to engage communities as partners and establish links between health facilities and the local people. Address challenges that keep people away from health facilities such as financial barriers and user fees. Strong follow-up systems are needed to monitor and ensure identified needs are actually being met. Many infants and pregnant women who test HIV-positive are lost to follow up.

However, Sub-Saharan Africa which greatly relies on donors for its HIV interventions, faces tough times in the future, with the announcement that funding is steadily declining. "Funding for HIV has flat-lined for the first time in 15 years. In 2009 we had 8.7 billion dollars, now we have 7.7 billion (dollars), the funding gap has increased to about 10 million dollars," Okello said.

African governments are being urged to increase national budget allocation to healthcare. "Countries must live up to the Abuja declaration of 15 percent of national budget going towards health. With good governance structures and accountability, these monies can be put to good use. The advantages of increased investment in healthcare are immense," he said.

The platform at the Global Fund replenishment conference in New York in October will be used to appeal to governments to reduce the funding gap.