The African Advocate is born out of the necessity to enhance the visibility of our community and reorient our collective focus squarely on critical issues facing African immigrants and refugees in Illinois. It is a credible medium for the dissemination of relevant information about our community, and acts as a forum for constructive dialogue and exchange of views.

As the voice of all African immigrants and refugees, the African Advocate is a serious analytical paper with enough food for thought for the curious mind; it offers accurate and useful information to inspire readers, engender respect for African immigrants and refugees, and enhance unity in the African community. It is guided by the immortal words of Amilcar Cabral: “Tell the lies, claim no easy victories.” The African Advocate does not cater to divisive or pseudo-national interests in the African community; it will not be a space for ludicrous personal attacks and spurious claims; and it will certainly avoid the slimy path of yellow journalism.

The African Advocate is not a business venture. As a free community paper, our motivation is predicated on the need to raise public awareness about the state of African immigrants and refugees in Illinois. Hence, the pages will be essentially dedicated to the education of our readers. We will steadfastly remain committed to the role of the ethnic media as a vehicle for community empowerment.

We are a community with two souls, culturally rooted in Africa and psychologically responding and adapting to the sociopolitical forces of integration in America. We are black and immigrant. Our blackness is the circumference of our identity, and our immigration is the diameter of our blackness. Therefore, our immigrant sensibility expands the frontiers of the African American discourse on ethnic identity at the point of intersection between blackness and the immigrant experience in the United States of America.

The story of African refugees fleeing from persecution and death in the midst of bloody civil wars in the Congos, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Liberia and other parts of the African continent must never be forgotten. How African refugees adjust to life in the American salad bowl is a powerful thematic statement about the human capacity to transcend the claws of nightmares and embrace a new dawn of self-actualization. As the most educated segment of the immigrant community in the United States, our experience remains the untold story of a community in transition. How many people know that 86% of African immigrants arrive in Illinois with the equivalent of a high school diploma? How many people know that 49% of African immigrants have a college degree? How many people know that nearly a third of African cab drivers in Chicago have Master’s degrees or PhDs? Which begs the obvious question: Why do we suffer from chronic underemployment? Why are our mushrooming businesses unable to access needed capital for growth? Why are we without an African Cultural Center in Chicago? Why aren’t our many doctors, attorneys, professors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, restaurant owners and other professionals pooling their resources together to give life to an African Village/Business Corridor in Chicago? Why are some of us doing very well as individuals while our community remains marginalized and invisible? Why can’t we garner our strength/assets to empower ourselves and give voice to a collective agenda for community development?

The African Advocate marks the beginning of a new chapter, pregnant with deep faith in the promise of America. We know that if the sons of an African immigrant with a name like Barack Obama can sit at the seat of this nation, it is possible that the daughters of an African refugee will someday be Mayor of the great City of Chicago or Governor of the State of Illinois. It is against the backdrop of this unwavering sense of optimism and hope that we launch the first issue of the African Advocate.

(continued on page 12)
En guise d’éditorial

By Calvin Tchatchoua

"United African Organization, UAO", cette organisation regroupant les associations nationales des communautés africaines représentées dans l’Etat d’Illinois existe depuis plus d’une vingtaine d’années. Pour bien doré que, c’est certainement la première fois que vous en entendez parler.

L’UAO est organisée à peu près sur le modèle de l’Organisation des Nations Unies (ONU) avec un "Board of Directors" constitué de deux représentants de chaque pays africain (semblable à la conférence des Champs d’Etats pour l’ONU) et un organisme exécutif chapeauté par un "Executive Director" qui est semblable au Secrétariat Général de l’ONU. Le Directeur exécutif est chargé de l’implantation des programmes et de la réalisation des projets de l’UAO. Tout comme le SG de l’ONU rend compte à la conférence des Champs d’Etats, le Directeur exécutif de l’UAO rend compte au "Board of Directors.”

"African Advocate" est l’organe de presse de l’UAO. Il est bilingue (Anglais-Français). Pour une fois nous parlerons nous même de notre histoire. Nous ne laisserons plus les autres parler de nous à notre place, au risque de pires désinformations ou manipulations.

"African Advocate" est votre voix, la voix des communautés africaines de l’Illinois. Nous sommes tous sans ignorer la puissance et le pouvoir des mass media, vecteurs essentiels de communication moderne des peuples, plus encore au 21ème siècle, il revêt un caractère exceptionnellement important. Votre journal bimensuel sera ouvert à toutes les contributions, venant de toutes les communautés africaines, aussi bien francophones que anglophones.

"African Advocate" sera donc cette vitrine qui permettra de mettre au goût du jour, factuelle brillante dans votre communauté de l’Illinois, aux USA, aussi et surtout sur le vieux continent, notre continent.

Nous ne pouvons pas ne pas saisir l’opportunité de ce premier numéro de votre journal bilingue, pour vous présenter en détail le programme d’action de l’UAO qui globalement a pour but de défendre les intérêts des africains dans l’Etat d’Illinois.

Votre association est une organisation à but non lucratif qui se donne pour priorités :

- Eduquer les immigrants et réfugiés africains tout en promouvant leurs droits et leurs cultures pour une meilleure compréhension et des relations de coopération mutuel.
- Former la jeunesse africaine à s’intéresser profondément à l’éducation et la poursuite du savoir utile.
- Résoudre les problèmes de discrimination rencontrés par les africains et les assister dans les armes, des conférences, des tables rondes, des travaux en atelier et des publications diverses.
- Rechercher des voies et moyens d’assistance aux nécessiteux de nos communautés.
- Défendre les intérêts des communautés africaines à travers des structures démocratiques organises et des partenariats avec d’autres organisations de défense des droits des immigrants.
- Former les leaders communautaires africains à la bonne gestion de leurs associations nationales.
- Eduquer les immigrants et réfugiés africains tout en promouvant leurs droits et devoirs pour but de défendre les intérêts des africains dans l’Etat d’Illinois.

By Calvin Tchatchoua

Vos dits en quelques pointez les objectifs de l’UAO.


Nous avons l’obligation et le devoir d’informner, tel est notre vocation !

Bonne année 2008 à tous !
Since the China-Africa Summit of 2004, China has accelerated its relationship with Africa. This new relationship reflects China’s version of globalization, which has significant implications for the United States and for Africa.

The US perceives China’s economic expansion in Africa with serious concern—primarily because of Africa’s huge oil resources. For Africa on the other hand, China offers significant opportunities but also areas of concern that we must not ignore. Unless Africa finds ways of negotiating the complex web of international politics, it will once again become a theater and a proxy for imperial competition.

China’s relationship with Africa dates back to the 1950s when China’s revolutionary nationalism appealed to many African nationalists, including Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. Though a communist nation, China opposed both the Soviet Union and the West. Interestingly, while some African leaders sought to avoid Cold War politics by joining the China-led Non-Aligned Movement (created at the Bandung Conference), China created its own ideological block that shaped the nature of the Cold War in Africa. Indeed, Africa became a pariah Cold War zone, where China, the Soviet Union and the United States collided. The Congo Crises of the early 1960s, which set the stage for Cold War politics in Africa, saw China competing with the superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union), for Congolese copper resources, crucial for military and civilian hardware at the time. As Mao Tse-Tung remarked in 1964, “If we obtain Congo, we have obtained Africa. Congo is our passageway into Africa.”

Some African nationalist leaders clearly identified with China’s economic and political strategies so much so that they adopted China’s developmental model that centered on developing the agricultural sector first, and then shifting to industrialization. Julius Nyerere’s UJAMAA project and Ghana’s agricultural development initiatives were good examples of emulating the Chinese model. China also became directly engaged in Africa’s liberation struggles, sending military trainees and equipment to various parts of Africa. In fact, China’s primary objective in the 1960s and early 1970s was political, focused primarily on helping Africa overthrow colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism, the buzz words of that era. Not surprisingly, China’s fingerprints can be found in the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute in Ghana, which had significant number of Chinese military experts among the staff. China also helped Ghana in the development of its atomic energy (officially the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission). In return China also benefited from Africa’s supports at the United Nations over the question of Taiwan’s independence. But the relationship also reflected in cultural exchange and indeed, appropriation. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania adopted Mao’s dress code. China was the most favored foreign power in many African capitals.

China’s interest in Africa’s oil

Let’s begin with China’s interest in Africa’s oil. China’s booming industry is dependent on steady supply of oil. Given the crisis in the Middle East, China is moving ahead of the rest of the world in entrenching itself in Africa’s oil resources. According to an article in the Council Foreign Relations in January 28, 2007, Esther Pan noted, “China’s voracious demand for energy to feed its booming economy has led it to seek oil supplies from African countries including Sudan, Chad, Nigeria, Angola, Algeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and the Republic of Congo. The U.S. Energy Information Administration says China accounted for 40 percent of total growth in global demand for oil in the last four years; in 2003, it surpassed Japan as the world’s second-largest oil consumer, after the United States. In the first ten months of 2005, Chinese official sources say, Chinese companies invested a total of $715 million in African countries, primarily in oil exploration contracts and infrastructure. On January 9, 2007, state-owned Chinese energy company CNOCO Ltd announced it would buy a 25 percent stake in an offshore oil field in Nigeria for $2.27 billion. China already has a significant presence in many African countries, notably Sudan. China takes 64 percent of Sudan’s oil exports.”

New paradigm of globalization

This new paradigm of globalization favors China and provides Africans with a wider and a diversified market. But for the United States, China’s expansion into Africa represented a significant strategic threat, at a time when the US was also shifting its oil demands from the Middle East to Africa. Pan notes further, “Once the largest oil exporter in Asia, China became a net importer of oil in 1993. By 2014, China is projected to depend on imported oil for 45 percent of its energy needs. The country needs to lock in supplies at relatively low-cost African or Middle Eastern sources, experts say. But after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent upheaval throughout the Middle East, China is actively trying to diversify its supply lines away from Middle Eastern crude. Experts say China has adopted an oil and food strategy that has resulted in increasing supplies of oil from African countries.”

Angola and Sudan provides a good example of this potential competition over African oil between the US and China. Although the current Angolan government was the very government China sought to topple by supporting rival factions, Angola has emerged as China’s second largest commercial partner in Africa. Writing in Le Monde Diplomatique, Jean-Christophe Servant noted that in early 2006, “China’s export bank, Eximbank approved a $2bn line of credit to enable Angola to rebuild its infrastructure (electricity, railways and administrative buildings – destroyed during 30 years of civil war) in exchange 10,000 barrels of oil a day.” As a result, Angola exports 25% of its oil to China. China now buys 78% of Sudan’s oil export.

In 2005, Angola replaced Saudi Arabia as China’s largest source of oil.

China appeals to African leaders primarily because of China’s flexibility in deciding African projects and loans, but also in the speed with which Chinese businesses complete assigned projects. As one Angolan leader remarked, “When the Chinese agree to embark on a project, they get it done at the stipulated date and stipulated cost.” Most Chinese loans to Africa range from low interest (15% is very common) to no interests. But as several economists have emphasized, China also obtains a virtual monopoly over various business in the countries that have accepted China’s low interest or interest free loans. Angola agreed to the deals for a good example. In 2009, China offered Angola a line of credit pegged at 5% over 17 years. However, Angola also agreed to grant Chinese firms 90% of national contracts. Let us fault China for using its loans to create jobs for its firms operating in Africa, such conditions are often embedded in loans and aids the West offers Africa, except that Western loans often came with higher interests. China was only following a classical strategy. China has also been willing to finance projects rejected by Western financial institutions as too risky. Primary example is the Tanzanit Railway from Tanzania to Zambia intended to provide cheaper transportation for the Zambian company to the coast (Zambia is a landlocked country. Even nations like Chad that had maintained traditional ties with Taiwan are now being lured toward China, which has accepted to finance its oil explorations. With the help of China, Zambia’s Chambishi copper mine is now functionting again, and offshore oil installations that were rejected as dysfunctional by large petroleum companies are also operating again in Nigeria and Gabon. China, which for years was considered a landlocked country, has received contracts in many African countries including Ghana, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Fezi mining, a joint venture between the Chinese company Wambao Resources Corporation and Congolese businessmen, is finishing a plant which, according to the DRC’s Ministry of Mines, should produce 1,000 tons of pure cobalt per year. In Zambia, China has invested nearly $170 million in the mining sector, previously abandoned as unprofitable, and has scheduled to build a $280 million copper smelter at Zambia Chambishi Mine, with a capacity to produce 150,000 tons of copper a year. In Gabon, a Chinese consortium headed by the Chinese National Machinery and Equipment Import and Export Corporation (CEMEC) has been granted sole rights to explore, mine deposits of gold and build the costly rail links needed to reach them in the tropical forest.

This is particularly important in the face of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs that have stilled Africa’s investment capability. The World Bank’s imposed
China shows Africa that a nation can develop without following Western paradigm of economic development.

The Chinese proverb, don’t give me fish, but teach me how to fish so I can feed myself, explains Africa’s interest in China’s approach to economic development. China also has the foresight to appreciate African predilection in ways that are different from Western world. It is therefore not surprising that Siera Leone’s ambassador to Beijing, Sahr Johnny remarked: “The Chinese are doing more than the G8 to make poverty history. A country that wanted to rebuild the stadium, we’d still be holding meetings! The Chinese just come in and do it. They don’t hold meetings about environmental impact assessments, human rights, bad governance and good governance. I’m not saying it’s right, just that Chinese investment is succeeding because they don’t set high benchmarks.”

Effects on African Industrialization

In purely economic terms, low-cost Chinese textiles and electronic are ideal for Africa’s limited purchasing power. Yet, these same low-cost goods are affecting local industries that could not compete with Chinese imports. This is a classic example of what often collapses local infant industries, rapidly increasing national unemployment levels. Across the continent, such industries are really suffering from the weight of Chinese low-cost goods. The South African textile sector, for instance, is believed to have lost fifty percent of its labor force between 1996 and 2006 as a result of the sector’s inability to compete with Chinese imports. Citing Chinese competition as the cause, the South African government has raised these concerns did the Chinese start to export to the country. The Chinese are doing more than the West, especially the United States. The recently formed AFRICOM (Afghan Defence Force) slated to be functional this year, is a clear example of United States’ readiness to quickly respond to terrorist activities in Africa, but it could also mean the assertion of US military pre-eminence in Africa ahead of any Chinese military expansion on the continent. While this potential competition may be interpreted as a new form of colonialism, it is also important to note that it provides African leaders with the opportunity for pivoting one power against the other to maximize economic benefits for the continent. It will all depend on our leaders’ negotiating strategies.

Europe Trade Pacts Offer New Challenges, Opportunities

By Peter Draper

Johannesburg

New trade agreements with Europe have raised legitimate fears for the future of African industry but offer new potential for two-way trade, buttressed by aid and ‘aid-for trade’ packages. New trade talks turn to even more contentious issues, such as intellectual property and trade in services, writes Peter Draper of the South African Institute of International Affairs.

The first phase of re-ordering African trade relations with Europe is over. The EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been dismantled and moved to CAP II. This marks the beginning of African countries trading with Europe now fall into these following categories:

- 26 are regarded as ‘least-developed countries’ (LDCs) in whose favour WTO members are allowed to discriminate. These countries have duty-free access to the EU without obligation to reciprocate, under Europe’s ‘Everything But Arms’ preference scheme;
- 18 (including 8 LDCs) signed the interim agreements. They will enjoy the same access to the EU market as LDCs, but are obliged to open their own markets to EU exports;
- Three countries – Gabon, Nigeria and the Republic of the Congo – will now export to the EU under the less generous Generalised System of Preferences (GSP); and
- South Africa has its own trade arrangement in place.

The implications of IFEPs

First, it is not clear that signatories have the capacity to implement these agreements. This may give rise to administrative and political hurdles down the line.

Second, and more positively, the fears of countries which signed the agreements that they might be locked out of the EU market have been alleviated. (The validity of the agreements can be challenged in the WTO but this is unlikely.)

Third, as IFEP signatories open their markets to European exports they will experience competition, concomitant trade disruption, and possible trade diversion. Thus exports coming to Africa from countries outside the EU could be displaced unless those countries are also given tariff concessions (which is unlikely). Also African countries which have previously imposed duties on goods coming from the EU may experience declining revenues. These potential impacts are lightning rods for the global NGO movement behind the campaign against Economic Partnerships Agreements (EPAs).

Essentially, the fear of opponents of EPAs is that opening African markets to European exports will kill what little industry there is in African economies, whilst already fragile states will wither for want of revenue, reversing the tenous economic and political recovery seen in parts of the continent in recent years. These are legitimate fear. Offsetting them is the potential for new two-way trade – arising on the one hand from tariff preferences granted to EU producers, and on the other those granted by the EU to African exporters from countries which have signed interim agreements. The latter now have more favourable access to the EU market, although it remains to be seen whether or not they can overcome a host of non-tariff barriers and domestic constraints.

Unfortunately, previous decades of preferential access have not been very effective. But cheaper imports of EU goods, particularly those not produced domestically, should be good for consumers and producers reliant on South Africa’s markets. And IFEPs will be buttressed by EU aid and a potential ‘aid-for trade’ package. If deployed effectively, all these steps could alleviate the loss of revenue from taxing imports and build structures which support trade.

Fourth, the most enduring legacy of IFEPs is likely to be the potentially fatal blow they have dealt to efforts at regional economic integration efforts in Africa.

With the exception of the East African Community, which signed a bloc, every other regional grouping in the sub-continent fractured. (North Africa already has the Euro-Med agreements.) This happened because the regional groupings included both least-developed countries and non-LDCs, and the EU differentiated between these two categories.

Thus, some countries within regions are obliged to open their domestic markets to EU exports whilst others are not. In southern Africa, South Africa has a free trade agreement with the EU.

Consequently, the politics of the next phase are as complex as the first. Different African countries within the same region now have different interests, and the intra-African politics of negotiating regional economic integration have lost their anchor. When it comes to negotiating with regions, can Humprey Dumpy be put back together, or is euthanasia a better option? This issue will bedevil broader African politics.

The EU also faces its own internal tensions – between the former colonial powers intent on maintaining influence in their erstwhile colonies, and the African countries within the same region now have different interests, and the intra-African politics of negotiating regional economic integration have lost their anchor. When it comes to negotiating with regions, can Humprey Dumpy be put back together, or is euthanasia a better option? This issue will bedevil broader African politics.

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Cape Verde: Good Student, Reluctant ‘Example’

Inter Press Service (Johannesburg)

Editor’s Note: Cape Verde Foreign Minister Victor Barbosa Borges discusses one of the least placed countries, Cape Verde, among the 108 on the small Atlantic archipelago, which are calling it an example for the rest of Africa.

This chain of 10 islands, located 600 kilometres off the coast of Senegal in West Africa, was uninhabited when Portuguese navigator Diego Garcia made his last visit here in 1640, and its people are all descended from foreigners, basically a mixture of Europeans and Africans.

In an interview with IPS correspondent Maria de Queiroz, Barbosa Borges acknowledged that since winning independence from Portugal in 1975, Cape Verde has proved its capacity to achieve the different development goals set in a fact in comparison with other African countries.

Now, after persevering through three arduous decades, Cape Verde is graduating to the club of middle-income developing countries, and is about to achieve associate status with the European Union.

In other words, it’s an example to the rest of the countries on the continent.

I find that expression difficult to accept, because it implies that on the one hand there are people qualified to evaluate, who know what they are teaching, and on the other there are child-like pupils who need to learn.

Nevertheless, Cape Verde is often cited by different international institutions as a successful example that should be followed in Africa.

Yes, and we’ve even been described as “good pupils.” But from a philosophical point of view I rather disturbed that Cape Verde should be regarded as an “example.” We do not wish to be set up as an example for anyone. Each African country must choose its own road toward development.

In spite of this, the so-called “Cape Verde model” is highly recommended by the international community.

Cape Verde is a country that lacks natural resources. Even our water is obtained through an industrial process (desalination). We are a small country, with the high costs of a fragmented island economy. Despite these difficulties, since independence we have made continuous progress in terms of development.

That is why we are graduating this month from the group of least developed countries (LDCs) to the group of middle-income developing countries (MICs). Having said that, Cape Verde is a long way from having found solutions to all of its problems. Each successful government has concerned itself with solutions to all of its problems. Each successful government has concerned itself with...the countries of the continent.

In this respect, the Africa-EU Summit achieved, but our aspirations for a higher level of economic and social indicators are encouraging. Could this lead to an attitude of a “moral example” for the rest of Africa?

The economic and social indicators are impressive for the countries of the continent.

The economic and social indicators are impressive. In the field of education, for example, illiteracy rates have fallen sharply and are now one of the lowest in Africa.

The government (and the ruling African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde, PAICV) regards it as essential to respond to the expectations of Cape Verdeans by increasing the levels of education, training, health, safety and stability.

In a word, more development is needed. While our people recognize the progress, they are not satisfied, and it is the dissatisfaction of Cape Verdeans and of the government itself that will propel us further.

With respect to foreign investment and development aid, the enormous activity of Portuguese in this field now seems to be overshadowed, particularly by Brazil, which, with its 190 million people, is the farthest Portuguese-speaking country in the world.

It is not Cape Verde’s policy to replace Portugal with Brazil as our main international partner. Our policy is to diversify cooperation, trade and investments, with Portugal, the European Union, Brazil, China, West African countries and also the United States.

In the specific case of Brazil, we are forging close trade, economic and cultural ties, because it is a country that is geographically, linguistically and culturally close to us, and because the relationship has enormous potential for Cape Verde and we foresee a great future for it.

The visits by President Pedro Pires and Prime Minister José Maria Pereira Neves to Brazil, and of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to Cape Verde, were clearly a prelude to strengthening our mutual relations.

At the EU-Africa Summit on Dec. 8-9, 2007, Pereira Neves spoke out about the need to regulate emigration to Europe and to vigorously combat trafficking.

Cape Verde has a privileged geographical position, which can potentiate economic growth, but which also poses a threat from traffickers of persons, and of drugs from Latin America. Criminals use our territorial waters as a stepping stone to the EU.

It is not our market of 460,000 people with very low purchasing power that attracts South American drug traffickers. It is the European market, and therefore the EU and we ourselves have to face a common challenge. Europe is the final destination, and Cape Verde is a way stage on that route.

Cape Verde even has a de facto border with the EU in the (Spanish) Canaries Islands. So this is a concrete cooperation issue which goes beyond development aid.

There is a real danger going on, with people drowning at sea or living at the mercy of organized crime gangs. It is essential for the EU to be our partner in solving these problems.

In this respect, the Africa-EU Summit in December was a high point in the dialogue between the two continents, and now continuing that dialogue depends on political will on both sides.

But the difficult relations between the governments of the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe might block those intentions.

This issue does come up again and again in the international press, and in coverage of the EU-Africa Summit it has upstaged the truly important debates. A lot of people heard all about the problems between Zimbabwe and the UK, but received very little information about Africa’s real concerns.

It’s true that there are problems in Zimbabwe, but we insist that dialogue, however difficult and disagreeable, is the only democratic means of finding solutions, nationally and internationally.

Analysts and experts have criticised London’s insistence in refusing to sit down at the same table with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, because he has persecuted white settlers of British descent, yet having no scruples about holding talks with other African heads of state accused of trumping on human rights. What do Africans feel about this?

As things stand, we see both sides of that dispute engaged in radicalising their positions, which helps no one. There is a sense that a line has been drawn between the good guys on one side and the bad guys on the other. However, the situation is more complicated than that, and the line may not be quite so straight.

Doing business in Zimbabwe is certainly a need of a quantum leap, but we should never use that as a pretext to make dialogue impossible.

Laptops-in-Schools Debate

Turns Messy

UN Integrated Regional Information Networks

Aluja, Nigeria

A scheme to give one million low-cost laptops to Nigerian schoolchildren has stalled because some policymakers say the money would be better spent on other educational projects, while government officials and private computer companies have actively worked to undermine the project, its manager told IRIN.

“The program has had to face a series of difficulties,” said Tomi Davies, manager of a US-based organization, One Laptop per Child, which has designed a cheap laptop, known as the XO. “It has had a lot of misinformation and negative press,” he said.

Designed to withstand harsh conditions

The laptop is designed to withstand harsh conditions such as rain and dust. It has a screen that can be read under intense sunlight. Its battery lasts for 12 hours and can be recharged with the use of a solar panel or a pull cord.

The laptop went on sale for around $100, under a marketing strategy of selling large numbers “directly to Ministries of education, which can distribute them like textbooks,” according to a statement by the organization.

In 2006 Nigeria’s government ordered one million XO laptops. Becoming the first in the world to make such a large order, but since then Nigeria has had an election and the new government in power says it is reassessing the deal.

Education ministry reassesses

Nigeria’s new education minister, Iy配合, Aja-Nwankwo, told the BBC recently that he found the project questionable given the absence of basic equipment in many Nigerian schools. “What is the sense of introducing one laptop per child when they don’t have seats to sit down and learn, when they don’t have uniform and textbooks?”

So far only 500 laptops have been delivered to children at one school in Galamadura, a village in the outskirts of the capital Abuja.

Teachers there told IRIN that computers have had a positive impact on the students.

“Nice classrooms are important...and indeed the [school] environment here is not the best - but what more important is the knowledge that we can bring to children,” one teacher, Ochegba Oluolua, said.

Students at Galamuda were also enmired: “I love your laptop,” Grace Ogwo, a 12-year-old, told IRIN. Another student, Cyrilta Oluolua, proudly showed IRIN a design for her dream house which she made on the computer.

For Davies, the One Laptop per Child’s project manager, computers are the key to transforming developing countries like Nigeria. “The world is not going to wait for Nigeria. Screen-based interaction is going to be a prerequisite for literacy in the future and if we don’t start now there’ll be a digital gulf,” he said.

Competition

Davies said there are other reasons his project is failing. The multinational computer company Intel has been selling a new type of cheap laptop in Nigeria called the Classmate below cost in order to drive competitors out of market.

He has denied such accusations. “We’re not trying to drive [the One Laptop per Child’s project] out of business,” Intel chairman Craig Barrett told the BBC last May. “There are lots of opportunities for us to work together.”

Intel and One Laptop per Child have had hot and cold relations for the past two years. In 2006 they talked of collaboration but tensions mounted in December because of increased competition over prices.

The price of Intel’s Classmate is around $300 in some parts of the world but the company recently dropped its price in Nigeria.

At the same time, the original price of XO laptops rose from US$100 to $185 because of the price of raw materials, Davies said.

One Laptop per Child is now trying to market its laptops to education departments of Nigeria’s state governments, rather than the federal government. “Six states have already given us their commitment [to buy 250,000 laptops in 2008],” Davies said, but added that the state governments have not yet secured the necessary funds.
Teachers Regional Body Formed

Teachers in Southern African have formed a regional body called the Association of Non-aligned Teacher Unions in Southern Africa (ANTUSA), whose aim is to address challenges confronting the teaching fraternity. The regional body comprises the Basic Education Teachers Union of Zambia (BETUZ), Botswana Secondary Schools Teachers Union (BOSETU), Lesotho Teachers Trade Union (LTTU), Professional Educators Union (PEU), Progressive Teachers Union of Zambia (PTUZ) and the Teachers Union of Namibia (TUN). ANTUSA chairman elect Jake Dikobo, read the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Kabwe yesterday after a two day workshop for leaders from the various teacher unions in the region held at Zambia Source Lodge. Mr Dikobo who is also president of PEU, said the parties to the MoU noted various issues that included the Dakar declaration on education for all, the effects of globalisation on education and teaching before formulating the body. Under the MoU, the parties agreed to work together in an effort to learn from each other in order to uplift and improve the conditions of their members. The parties agreed to work together in areas which include organising where possible leadership workshops and capacity building, sport and cultural activities, attending to each other's conferences and other activities. Mr Dikobo said. The parties agreed to share information on regular basis as to what they are doing and support to sister unions facing internal or external challenges. He said the agreed MoU would not in any way affect any arrangements that respective parties currently had nationally, regionally or even globally or that parties would have in future. It was agreed that leaders would be elected from among the membership and that to that effect Mr Dikobo was elected as chairperson. His duties would include presiding over all meetings of the association in consultation with the secretary. It agreed that there be no monetary subscription to the association but each member would bear its own costs relating to travelling to the meeting of the association. The duration of the MoU was for life and that the chairmanship would from time to time rotate among parties. He said the association would in April next year meet in Botswana on a date to be set time rotate among parties. The Times of Zambia (Ndola)

Regional

UAO Unveils 2008 Action Agenda

The United African Organization is building on last year’s significant capacity development efforts by initiating several important projects.

Comprehensive Needs Assessment Survey

This project seeks to investigate the social, cultural and economic dynamics of African immigrants and refugees in Chicago and the rest of Illinois. Furthermore, the research will investigate how African immigrants organize themselves in new locations and to what extent their ethnic, religious and other cultural identities are preserved. The main objectives of the project are to investigate spatial-temporal patterns and other basic demographic characteristics of the community; examine the methods African immigrants employ in building community organizations and the ways in which the organizations assist each other; an assessment of the needs of African immigrant and refugee community, how they cope with the disjuncture between cultural conventions, gender balance, family ties and religious practices in Africa vis-a-vis the United States. Some of the research questions are:

- What is the nature of the socio-demographic, economic and cultural setup of African immigrants and refugees?
- What are the major issues and challenges confronting African immigrants and refugees in Illinois?
- What is the configuration of African immigrants and refugees residing in metropolitan Chicago and the rest of Illinois?
- What types of services do they utilize?
- As the most underserved immigrant community in Illinois, what service needs are there in the community?
- What barriers do they encounter in gaining access to health and other social services?
- What role(s) do national or ethnic associations play in assisting African immigrants to overcome barriers to accessing health and other basic needs?

Overall, the project will contribute to general knowledge about African immigrants and refugees, as well as strengthen the advocacy agenda of the United African Organization. Furthermore, it will illuminate the needs of the African immigrant and refugee community, and in the process, facilitate the emergence of a network of African service providers to serve the community.

Chicago Summit on African Immigrants & Refugees

Following the successful first Chicago Summit on African Immigrants and Refugees last May, the UAO will organize the second Summit on May 13, 2008. It will provide a unique forum for scholars, advocates, public policy analysts, diplomats, clergy and students to discuss African-centered issues.

African Immigrant Resource Fair

The United African Organization will organize a one-stop Resource Fair to bring together private sector employers, public sector entities and others for a day of targeted outreach to African immigrants and refugees on June 28, 2008.

African Community Resource Clearinghouse & Language Bank

As part of the UAO efforts to connect African immigrants and refugees to needed services and resources, we are launching the African Community Resource Clearinghouse & Language Bank as a central point for disseminating information, coordinating referrals, and building a comprehensive database.

African Cultural Center

The need for a socio-cultural space has increasingly become manifest as the African immigrant and refugee community in metropolitan Chicago continues to grow. The United African Organization has launched an ambitious three year capital campaign to establish a multi-purpose center for African immigrants and refugees in metropolitan Chicago.

Immigrant Rights and Integration

As we face a hostile political environment for immigrants, there is urgent need to engage in coordinated bridge-building efforts to advance immigrant rights and foster a climate of inclusion and tolerance. The UAO will work to connect African American clergy and community leaders to the campaign for a just and comprehensive immigration reform, as well as foster a Black Latino alliance for a more perfect Union. As both immigrants and blacks, African immigrants symbolize the fusion of two experiences that can serve as a bridge of understanding through inter-community dialogue.

Democracy, Human Rights & Development in Africa

The UAO will continue to be a strong voice for the promotion of democratic values and human rights in Africa. By establishing a framework for an effective African lobby and raising awareness about critical issues facing the continent – genocide in Darfur, HIV/AIDS, good governance, gender inequality, debt burden, economic reform, etc. – the UAO will be in the forefront of African led organizations advocating for a constructive US foreign policy toward Africa. With increased organizational capacity – as a result of having permanent staff, dedicated Board of Directors, sizable funding sources, and committed allies – the inevitable impact of the UAO’s action agenda will be felt in the community as a whole. Let’s keep our eyes on the vision. As an African proverb puts it succinctly, the hunter in pursuit of an elephant does not stop to throw stones at birds.

For more information about the UAO, visit the website at www.uniteafricans.org

Region
Dispatch from Minnesota:

Langston Hughes Predicted Kenya

By IBé

What happens to a dream deferred?

What happens when foreigners come and conquer a nation, hold the people hostage (at best), and slaves (at worse)? What happens when in the midst of genocide these foreigners realize their victims have become more resistant even than the Germans they just came from defeating? What happens when they devise wicked schemes of divide and conquer: put fathers against sons, brothers against cousins, and sisters against nieces? What happens when these locusts are forced to leave, but upon their exit, create one group oversee over the others? What happens when land is taken from all natives, but when comes to return this land, one group is favored over the other? What happens when sons sit across the street from that land waiting for the right opportunity to strike, take back what they consider rightfully theirs? What happens to What happens when African leaders become European puppets? What happens when dictators are propped up by superpowers? And young democracies promise far more than they can deliver? What happens when promises between politicians are broken? And two thieves accuse each other of stealing? What happens? What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or crust and sugar over—like a syrupy sweet? Is it willing to bet, 9 out of 10 times, it explodes? And Kenya serves as the latest testimony to Langston Hughes’ warning.

Don’t believe the hype. Africans are not bloodthirsty idiots. We know better, for we don’t just wake up one day and attack our brothers and sisters. Whether wielding the machete or taking the hit, we are all victims of a wicked game set in motion a long time ago. As a Pan-Africanist, I was more than disappointed when I heard the news that once again my brothers have taken up arms against each other, in one of the most promising countries on the continent for that matter. Put plainly, I was proud! That their inflicted carnage got the best of me, I wanted to go beyond the headlines to make sense of the madness.

Talking to few of my Kenyan friends here in Minnesota soon confirmed what I already suspected:

African problems are hardly ever African doing alone.

Ever since Bartholomew Diaz, David Livingstone, Mungo Park and their cohorts landed on the African shores, our present and future have been shaped by their footprints. And what I heard from some of these Kenyan friends is that what is going on in Kenya today is the fruit of a seed long planted by the British.

The question then becomes: how do we, as the first African-based social service organization, ECAC is uniquely positioned to combine culturally sensitive services with an experienced, multi-lingual staff—many of whom came to the United States as refugees themselves. The association also advocates for increased African refugee admissions to the United States and for greater protection of said refugees. Similarly, ECAC advocates alongside other organizations for affordable housing and home ownership for immigrant and refugee families. Significant results have been achieved in all domains. Additionally, ECAC is responsible for instituting Ethiopian holiday and New Year celebrations across the Midwest. These events have been highly acclaimed as opportunities for Ethiopians to share their experiences and affirm their cultural identity.

The Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago (ECAC) is a non-profit, mutual aid organization committed to serving the educational, cultural, and economic needs of refugees and immigrants in Chicago and its surrounding areas. ECAC facilitates the adjustment and development of its constituency by offering programs in the areas of resettlement, human services, and community outreach.

ECAC was founded twenty-three years ago as a grassroots committee of the refugees who had recently fled civil war in their homeland. Their goal was to bring together the scattered community of Ethiopian refugees and immigrants living in Chicago, with the hope that mutual aid and cooperation would ease the difficult adjustments they faced in moving to the United States. ECAC has served approximately 25,000 individuals in its 23-year-old history. Since 1993, the organization has sponsored and successfully resettled approximately 1,300 refugees from Africa, South East Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Caribbean. Presently, ECAC provides programs and services for approximately 4,000 refugees and immigrants annually.

Today, ECAC is comprised of eight full-time staff members, over 150 active community members, and a growing number of dedicated volunteers. Services offered include refugee resettlement, employment counseling, training, community health outreach, financial and computer literacy training, after school programming, citizenship and civic education, and youth and family life education. ECAC community events reinforce cultural identity, and introduce the rich heritage that Ethiopian immigrants bring to the United States to a wider Chicago audience. In addition to providing to the immediate needs of its clients, ECAC works with Chicago-area coalitions to advocate for long-term issues such as refugee rights, fair housing, and equal opportunity. Active affiliations include the Organization of the North East (ONE), Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), Coalition of Asian, East European, and Latino Immigrants of Illinois (CAELII), United African Organization (UAO), and Uptowns Mutual Aid Association (MAA). Over the past twenty years, ECAC has also worked to foster relationships with local businesses, schools, landlords and employers to ensure both public awareness of the issues facing African refugees and immigrants, and adequate representation of their diverse and changing needs. As one of the few resettlement agencies in Chicago with an intentional African focus and as the first African-based social service organization, ECAC is uniquely positioned to combine culturally sensitive services with an experienced, multi-lingual staff—many of whom came to the United States as refugees themselves. The association also advocates for increased African refugee admissions to the United States and for greater protection of said refugees. Similarly, ECAC advocates alongside other organizations for affordable housing and home ownership for immigrant and refugee families. Significant results have been achieved in all domains. Additionally, ECAC is responsible for instituting Ethiopian holiday and New Year celebrations across the Midwest. These events have been highly acclaimed as opportunities for Ethiopians to share their experiences and affirm their cultural identity.

IBé, African Advocate, February 2008

Erik Tymen, Executive Director, ECAC

ECAC earnestly strives to:

• Continue to provide quality resettlement services to incoming refugees in an effort to ease their cultural and economic adjustment
• Build and sustain the Ethiopian community in Chicago through health advocacy, cultural education, family life education, and community events
• Lay the necessary foundations of support for exciting new initiatives, such as a childcare center, radio station, and Cultural Center
• Develop resources for an Immigration Program that will manage the diverse legal challenges of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers
• Enhance and expand employment services, including the development of jobs with a visible career path
• Improve and expand youth services, including after-school and cultural education services
• Participate in CAELII’s apprenticeship on organizing and civic activity
• Be certified by the Department of Homeland Security’s Bureau of Immigration Services in order to provide a variety of immigration services

Presently, ECAC is embarking on building a cultural center that will provide community space for the expansion and development of current and new programming. The center will house a childcare facility, a cultural museum, and administrative offices. It will also allow for the development of new initiatives, including a program for seniors, a community forum, skill development training centers such as computer and entrepreneurial services. Capital campaigns are being conducted successfully.

By IBé

African Advocate, February 2008
Chapurukha M. Kusimba

Anthropology Department, The Field Museum

We think there are several reasons.

First, slavery. Because some parts of Africa were populous, poor, and militarily weak, they became major suppliers of slaves to other continents. In Christian Europe and the Americas, though not necessarily in Islamic countries, slaves were low in status and some of this low status rubbed off on Africans who were by no means slaves.

A second reason for negative images of Africans is that they were enforced to produce raw materials only of raw materials. As European imperialism developed in the 19th and 20th centuries, Africa shifted from being an equal trading partner to being a continent of mines and exploitable forests and plains, yielding much of the world's ivory, gold, platinum, diamonds, chromium, manganese, bauxite, uranium, and so forth. With these being exported in raw, unprocessed forms, the profits and prestige of manufacturing went to peoples of other continents. In the eyes of Europeans, North Americans and East Asians for whom factories were close to the essence of civilization, Africa looked primitive because it was seen as manufacturing nothing from its own resources. Few of those observers took into account the fact that neither the colonial nor post-colonial systems allowed Africans to set up plants for converting raw materials into consumer products.

A third reason: climatological chauvinism on the part of East Asia and Westerners. Both groups lived in climates, in places with large, light-colored skins, and wore lots of clothes. So it was quite natural for them to conclude that partial nudity was immoral, that dark-skinned people were inferior, and that warm climates encouraged laziness, messiness, and generally undisciplined attitudes. In the opinion of Europeans, Africa and other tropical regions shared another "uncivilized" trait: their peoples took too many baths. Europeans, by contrast, bathed infrequently and tends to regard this along with their heavy clothing as symbols of their more civilized status.

A fourth reason: ignorance. Outsidors of the colonial period consistently failed to recognize the remarkable qualities of traditional African technologies and to appreciate their suitability for sustainable development. Western agricultural specialists, for instance, tried hard to introduce European-style methods, crops and breeds in spite of the fact that traditional African farming methods were often as productive as those of Europe and far better suited to tropical environments.

None of these reasons—former slavery, persistent colonial production patterns, climatological prejudice, or simple ignorance—fully account for Africa's negative image, especially in regions like the Far East which had little historical contact with Africa.

And yet that negativism persists, and has serious consequences.

One such consequence has been environmental devastation in traditional African agriculture and stockbreeding. Western agricultural experts have spent more than a century trying to persuade Africans to raise European and American breeds of cattle, even though these tend to do poorly under African conditions. It is only quite recently that modern breeders have begun looking at African cattle as a primitive, but as the products of hundreds of generations of carefully controlled, patient and intelligent selection for desirable qualities. One of the first results of this new attitude has been the introduction of the Tuli breed, initially from Zimbabwe, into the United States. With meat quality as good as Angus steers, an exceptionally docile nature, and the ability to thrive in spite of extreme heat and drought, the Tuli may replace many of the breeds that are currently popular with American cattle ranchers.

Another consequence is the disappearan cе of much of the well-adapted material culture of traditional Africa. For instance, African communities had for several millennia exchanged earthware industries that were well adapted to the functional and symbolic requirements of those communities, and most of which are still relevant to present-day populations. Yet, today many African nations import, at great expense, ceramics of a far less popular range of shapes at far higher expenses while the indigenous industry has collapsed. The negative effects are not only economic but cultural, leading to a dilution of traditions and a loss of design skills on the level of the individual craftperson.

Yet another consequence is the loss of what has been learned over the centuries about environmentally adapted agriculture and settlement planning.

Beautiful and elegant old houses constructed of indigenous materials are being allowed to decay and collapse centuries before their working life is over. Some are converted to new uses, but their fabric is remodeled with insensitivity to the ecological and climatic setting. On the other hand, modern structures constructed with imported materials are problematic. Falthy walls, poor design, bad sewage systems, overgrown grounds, leaking roofs, and other appalling facilities contribute to the overall impression that mega-slums are indeed in the making in Africa.

We could cite many more unfortunate effects of negative attitudes toward Africa and African achievement. But the point is made. While many communities around the world may be aware of Africa's important contributions to their cultural and historical heritage in the distant past, they ignore the potential of those contributions in the present and future. The solution, we think, is education, and that has to be done not only by non-Africans and Americans and Europeans of African ancestry but by Africans themselves. When Africans can confidently and knowledgeably offer their heritage as solutions to the problems of other continents, Africa's historical place in the modern world community will become a reality.
by Kelley Johnson

Focus on narrowing the information gap about America’s most invisible immigrants—the estimated one million Africans who have made the United States their home over the last 40 years.

I am currently a graduate student in Applied Sociology at Loyola University. As an intern for research and analysis, my internship with the UAO will focus on narrowing the information gap about America’s most invisible immigrants— the estimated one million Africans who have made the United States their home over the last 40 years. Even for those who are interested in the experience of this community, information is hard to find. In Chicago, despite the fact that Africans have been coming in sizable numbers since 1990 and continue to arrive in increasing numbers as refugees, asylum seekers, students, and workers, these numbers are strangely absent from the strong research tradition documenting the history and experience of Chicago’s various immigrant communities.

Who are Illinois’ Africans and what are the key factors impacting their quality of life in their new home?

A complete response to this question would require documentation of community demographics and organizational structure, assessment of current needs and assets within the community, and ethnographic research highlighting the experience of African newcomers. Such research would go a long way to advancing UAO objectives as well as helping service organizations provide better services, informing future scholarship, and policy agendas of specific topic areas. Although their experience living and working in the African community has allowed the UAO leadership to identify a few key areas for action over the last few years, the questions they bring to the table is a large one.

Currently, the absence of research into the experience of post-1985 African immigrants is proving to be a significant obstacle to the work of organizations which seek to provide services to this population. One such organization is the United African Organization (UAO), a Chicago-based advocacy coalition of African national organizations dedicated to social justice, civic participation and empowerment of African immigrants and refugees in Illinois. In their attempt to bring more visibility to the African community in Illinois, as well as raise awareness about the challenges faced by Africans in Illinois and lobby for program and policy changes to benefit this community, UAO advocates have found themselves without the data necessary to substantiate their community agenda to legislators or to convince funders to support specific program initiatives. Hence, the United African Organization (UAO) has identified a major information gap that is hindering their work. Any effort to fill this gap would have widespread benefits for the community and comes at a very opportune time as Africans are arriving in larger and larger numbers. However, in order to make extensive research possible it is necessary to have a base of knowledge from which to move forward. The preliminary research I have proposed would pull together the patchwork of documented information among different African communities, which currently exists in order to enable future research efforts to be conducted efficiently and in an informed and effective manner. At the same time, collection of this preliminary information would have immediate impact by facilitating other UAO objectives such as serving as an information clearinghouse for constituents and networking with other organizations and institutions for the benefit of the community.

Although their experience living and working in the African community has allowed the UAO leadership to identify a few key areas for action over the last few years, the questions they bring to the table is a large one.
Women’s Advocate

Market Women Help Revive Economy
By Nelisabande Crocket-Niang

To the untrained eye of a visitor from elsewhere, the markets in Liberia and many other African countries seem chaotic, noisy, sordid and often dangerous. Traders and shoppers alike are wary of ever-present pickpockets or, more threatening, criminals.

Still, the basic business of market operations appears straightforward, with traders—predominantly women—peddling just about everything, short of big-ticket items like cars. Depending on the market, dozens, hundreds or even thousands of people buy what they need—including food for the evening meal, household wares big and small, CDs and electronic devices, toiletries, shoes and clothing—from intricately designed African dresses to American blue jeans, new or used.

But what goes on at these markets is, in fact, quite complex—and represents a major foundation of life in Liberia, during and from long before the two decades of unrest. It is an age-old system of war and the succession of regimes and militias which have left the nation in ruins.

Everything in the marketplaces of this West African country’s awakening economy is negotiable, often in loud voices. “I spoil the price” means a trader reduces the price of an item to attract a sale.

The idea is that “fast money is better than slow dollar”—a trader makes more by selling quickly at a lower price than if she holds out for a higher price.

Even though most market women in Liberia are illiterate, they are essential to food distribution throughout the country, and they remain a formidable economic force. With Liberia’s post-war unemployment rate at 85 percent, market women—who comprise the great majority of the traders—are breadwinners, often the only people supporting families of up to 20, often including war orphans.

Many of the women are also farmers, growing food on smallholdings of two or three acres and then transporting their goods to market, usually walking with a big load on their heads, often with babies tied to their backs. Before the war, some say, they had dreams of getting an education but were forced to turn to trading to make a living.

During the years of conflict, agricultural production was disrupted and most of Liberia’s people were displaced from their homes. Minimal international food aid was often the only means of survival. But fighting frequently thwarted blockaded distribution of relief supplies.

The only sources of food

With men constantly subject to being killed or coerced into fighting forces, unless people faraged in the wild, market women were the only sources of food in many areas. What little was left of Liberia’s war-time economy was often sustained by the endurance of women, who shucked buffets and scraped together rents or the hot, relentless sun to grow and fetch fruit and vegetables.

Many women conformed between rebel and government-controlled areas to supply key commercial centers like Monrovia, the capital, and the towns of Libranza and Buchanan. Sometimes they too were conscripted into armies to provide labor and were forced to live as sex slaves. Now the market women, along with the rest of the country, are trying to put the past behind them as they struggle to restart the economy.

A voice for small traders

The Liberia Marketing Association (LMA) is the umbrella organization that oversees markets in the country. Established as a voice for small traders, through advocating better market facilities and lending practices, the LMA has a vast network of branches in each of the country’s 15 counties.

When a woman wants to sell in the market, she registers with the LMA and pays a one-time fee to get a table. Each trader pays daily fees to a collector who works for the LMA. A flat tax, rather than a fee based on income, prevents subsistence traders. Those who don’t pay can have their goods confiscated and be barred from selling in the market. The fees collected are supposed to be used for the cleaning and maintenance of market facilities, but there is no mechanism to enforce performance.

Traders say the organization has a long history of poor leadership and lack of financial accountability. Critics say these problems cannot be addressed until the organization is professionalized and establishes checks and balances, and the membership is trained to hold the leadership accountable.

Lusa Sloan, interim LMA chairperson, estimates its predominantly female membership at 75,000 nationally, making it one of the largest organizations in the country. She says the group is struggling to regain lost ground during the war.

“Before the war we had microcredit for fertilizer and farming tools. Farmers could get loans and pay back what they borrowed with small interest during the production season. Now that’s not in place. Before, we had an agricultural bank, and some traders had regular savings. Now you can’t get any funds.”

Widespread destruction of basic infrastructure

One of the biggest problems, Sloan notes, is the widespread destruction of basic infrastructure. Even before the war, upcountry roads were impassable during the worst of the rainy season. Now they are much worse. Where roads are passable, a lack of vehicles constrains movement of people and goods.

“We cannot go to reach goods in the forest, and some women are walking more than eight hours with goods on their heads. Sloan says, “We have a big problem with the lack of cold storage. Electrification has not been restored throughout the country, and it is too expensive to run cold storage on generators.”

Buyers and sellers meet from sunrise to sunset

On the outskirts of Monrovia, the bustling Red Light market is a sprawling, activity-packed center of trade where buyers and sellers meet from sunrise to sunset. Named after the last traffic lights on the main highway leading from the capital to the north of the country—the in the pre-war period when traffic signals actually functioned, it is Liberia’s largest open-air market.

A commercial hub, Red Light is dominated by women. Most are small traders who spread their wares on the ground on the sun in tables on small stalls, or— for the more successful—in small shops along a row of improvised sheds under plastic or tin roofs.意念 haulers, including street children, roam the market with goods on their heads, calling out wares and prices to entice buyers.

Thers is fresh local produce: fruits and vegetables, fresh and dried meat, fish and rice, Liberia’s daily staples. Since most Liberians lack electricity—even that supplied by generator—they buy small quantities and cook daily what they can.

Every day a pickup truck laden with giant bags of cassava, containers of palm oil and stacks of vegetables slowly turns into the markets. Perhaps a dozen of the more than 100 women nearby run toward the truck, untying a garment called a lappa from their waist and throwing it onto one of the bags.

Juanita Neal, a founding member of the fledgling Liberia Business Women’s Network, explains the ritual. “When the women take their lappa and throw it over a bag of cassava or pepper or potato leaf or whatever, then that lappa hits, that bag belongs to her and nobody better touch it. It’s organized confusion every day.”

Neal eats the food she grows. “I have 100 acres, but I’m not doing much with it,” she says. Instead, her attention is focused on helping a group of successful market women to spearhead a new movement to get small traders and producers better organized.

“We want to get women involved. We’re talking to women who have even small patches of land to see if we can get them together to do one big project, like growing jalapeno peppers or aloe vera plants. Anything that can make some money, because food is where the money is.”

Illicitness is a barrier to women improving their positions. Most market women can’t read, write or speak English, Liberia’s official language. Few have the experience to grow their own businesses without guidance. Nevertheless, supporters argue, they do have savvy, skills and determination to get started as micro-entrepreneurs.

Juanita Neal says the business women’s network was founded to address the need for expertise and financing. “We need loans, and we need to be educated about loans,” says Neal. “We have lots of ideas and plans but no money. We are trying to organize the women, come up with proposals. It should be easier to get small loans or grants if we are registered as a group. We are putting a system in place to monitor what the traders are doing, so money comes back to repay the loan and sustain the business.”

They know what they are doing and what they want

While many of the traders may be illiterate, says Neal, “they know what they are doing and what they want. We want to direct them to think bigger, to get better crop yields with pest controls, till the land, and good environment practices. They come to us and we write the plan for them.”

Most of Liberia’s women practice subsistence farming. But against the odds, there have always been market women who are morganal in their context: important, powerful, influential women with hundreds of acres of land and their own pickup trucks. A few who started small are now big farmers growing cash crops, like cucumbers. Some keep livestock such as goats and pigs, and a few have entered the rubber trade. Some are beginning to expand into the more lucrative field of food processing. They are writing notes, and they love their work.

Kebleh Freeman is such a woman. Lack of formal education, Mrs. Freeman started as a small-time market woman and learned the skills she needed to become the successful businesswoman she is today. She is a founder of the Red Light market, a former board chair of the Liberia Marketing Association and a former member of the Liberian legislature.

Today, as she sits on the front porch of her comfortable house on a side street of the market, she looks at her commercial compound and laughs, as if it’s hard to believe what she has accomplished from age 14’s beginnings. She invested her earnings to purchase her own vehicle, a pick-up truck, and sells rice and cement wholesale. She exports palm oil to the US and Europe. And she cares for an extended family of more than 30 people. She built her first small house before the war started. Now she doesn’t want to say how many houses she owns.

“I was born in the bush,” she says. “I don’t know my age or even my children’s ages. I had my first child when I was very young. I began doing market during Tulman days (the presidency of William Tolman), to help support the children and sometimes my husband. Now a lot of people know who I am. I may not know book, but at least I have a lot of sense and can give good advice.”

Freeman credits determination and sound business management for her success. Of course, it didn’t hurt that even though she was born poor, her parents were also traders. During Tulman time, so many people were selling like they are now. There was the common view that only uneducated people were selling. People with education were looking for jobs.”

Her practical advice for the hundreds of thousands of struggling market women today

10

2008

African Advocate

February 2008

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A daily struggle to earn enough

Freeman, however, is an exception. Most market women face a daily struggle to earn enough to feed their families one meal a day, and few can spare their children to attend school, even if they could afford books and uniforms. What they do have, they demonstrated in 2005, is a voice.

Strong support from market women, including powerful entrepreneurs like Freeman, were an important factor in the victory of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard University-trained economist and former World Bank executive, who became Africa’s first woman to be elected president of a country. The president, fondly called “Ma Ellen” by the women, regularly acknowledges that debt. She says her appreciation of the strength and resilience of the traders is personal as well as political. Both her grandmothers were illiterate market women.

Shortly after Johnson Sirleaf’s election, an international group of women friends and colleagues asked how they could help. The president asked for assistance for market women. The result was the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Market Women’s Fund (SMWF) (http://smwf.org/), established under the umbrella of the African Women’s Fund (SMWF) (http://smwf.org/), to help women with the ambiguous use of language, stating that H/AVs funding is actually “flat funding”

The President has proposed doubling spending to $30 billion, but the reality is that his proposal would not double current spending, as he said. Bryden argued.

According to Bryden, the U.S. is spending U.S. $6 billion on HIV/AIDS in 2008. Over five years, the total would be U.S. $30 billion, equaling the amount of spending Bush calls for.

Physicians for Human Rights school Bush’s desire for more funding, calling in a statement that U.S. $59 billion to fund the fight against AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other global health programs. The advocacy group also called for more programs targeted at women.

“The building is now structurally sound. A huge, three-story building, it is one of the most important experiences to report on agricultural development and poverty reduction.”

FILE

Nelahatho Crockett-Ntunga, reporting as Phyllis Crockett, covered the White House for National Public Radio and was based in sub-Saharan Africa for more than 10 years working on development issues. She was part of the allAfrica.com team in Liberia to report on agricultural development and poverty reduction.

“Women historically have played a key role in the marketing side. They have a vital role in government’s poverty reduction strategy.”

By Brian Kennedy and Katy Gabel

Byron, however, is an exception. Most market women face a daily struggle to earn enough to feed their families one meal a day, and few can spare their children to attend school, even if they could afford books and uniforms. What they do have, they demonstrated in 2005, is a voice.

Strong support from market women, including powerful entrepreneurs like Freeman, were an important factor in the victory of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Harvard University-trained economist and former World Bank executive, who became Africa’s first woman to be elected president of a country. The president, fondly called “Ma Ellen” by the women, regularly acknowledges that debt. She says her appreciation of the strength and resilience of the traders is personal as well as political. Both her grandmothers were illiterate market women.

Shortly after Johnson Sirleaf’s election, an international group of women friends and colleagues asked how they could help. The president asked for assistance for market women. The result was the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Market Women’s Fund (SMWF) (http://smwf.org/), established under the umbrella of the African Women’s Fund (SMWF) (http://smwf.org/), to help women.

The building is now structurally sound. A huge, three-story building, it is one of the most important experiences to report on agricultural development and poverty reduction.”

FILE

Nelahatho Crockett-Ntunga, reporting as Phyllis Crockett, covered the White House for National Public Radio and was based in sub-Saharan Africa for more than 10 years working on development issues. She was part of the allAfrica.com team in Liberia to report on agricultural development and poverty reduction.

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By Brian Kennedy and Katy Gabel

United States President George W. Bush has asked Congress to vote an extra U.S. $38 billion for the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PepfA) over the next five years.

In his final State of the Union address, delivered to Congress Monday night, Bush said: “We can’t afford to beedi or to save. “Whenever I would sell,” she says, “I would eat some and keep some. If I buy two containers of oil today, when I keep some, the next time I could buy three containers and still keep some and then the next time I could buy four.” She was among the market women who managed to stay in Liberia during the conflicts, when hundreds of thousands of were forced to flee to neighboring countries.

She is proud that her work helped hungry, internally displaced people to survive. A daily struggle to earn enough

FRECUARy is Heart Attack Awareness Month for Women. A woman may not believe that she is vulnerable to a heart attack as men.

February is Heart Attack Awareness Month for Women. A woman may not believe that she is vulnerable to a heart attack as men.

Women make three-fourths of the healthcare decisions in American households and spend more than men to believe they are having a heart attack and more likely to delay in seeking emergency treatment. Women tend to be about ten years older than men when they have a heart attack. Heart disease in women often goes undetected and untreated until the disease has become severe. As a result, thirty-nine percent of women who have heart attack die within one year compared to thirty-one percent of men.

The symptoms of heart attack in women are often different than in men.

Women are more likely to experience nausea, dizziness and shortness of breath when waking up.

• Chest pain (may include back pain, deep aching, and throbbing in one or both arms).

• Breathlessness (inability to catch your breath when waking up).

• Clammy skin.

• Edema (fluid retention swelling of ankles or lower legs).

• Fluttering (rapid heartbeat, palpitations).

• Feeling of heaviness (pressure like chest pain between the breasts that may radiate to the left arm or shoulder).

• Sleep disturbance.

• Unusual fatigue.

• Indigestion.

• Weakness.

Stop smoking.

• Engage in physical activity.

• Eat heart healthy foods.

• Maintain reduced weight.

• Control cholesterol.

• Limit alcohol intake.

According to the National Institutes of Health, older women experience different physical symptoms as long as a month or more before experiencing heart attack. Therefore pay regular visit to your health care provider.

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Health Facts: Women & Heart Attack

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Women make three-fourths of the healthcare decisions in American households and spend almost two of every three health dollars, approximately five billion annually. According to American Heart Association, heart disease is the number one killer of women in America (fifty-eight percent of all deaths); death rate highest for women of color. There are differences between how women and men respond to a heart attack. Women are less likely than men to believe they are having a heart attack, and more likely to delay in seeking emergency treatment. Women tend to be about ten years older than men when they have a heart attack. Heart disease in women often goes undetected and untreated until the disease has become severe. As a result, thirty-nine percent of women who have heart attack die within one year compared to thirty-one percent of men.

The more risk factors, the greater the risk

The more risk factors a woman has, the greater the risks of having a heart attack. Some of the risk factor such as increasing age, family history, race and gender can not be controlled:

• High blood pressure.

• Diabetes.

• Smoking.

• High cholesterol.

• Age.

• Hormone replacement therapy.

• Physical inactivity.

• Gender (men are at greater risk than women).

• Obesity and overweight.

Heart attack is the most preventable cause of death. Women should pay attention to any of the above symptoms and seek professional healthcare advice.

Practice the following tips to lower the risk of heart disease:

Stop smoking.

• Engage in physical activity.

• Eat heart healthy foods.

• Maintain reduced weight.

• Control cholesterol.

• Limit alcohol intake.

According to the National Institutes of Health, older women experience different physical symptoms as long as a month or more before experiencing heart attack. Therefore pay regular visit to your health care provider.
A Bank in Every African Pocket?

Mary Kinani

Editor’s Note: Ann Wanjiku walks up to a green-and-white booth with a “M-Pesa agent” sign on it. There she shows the agent her identity card and her cell phone, which displays a PIN number provided by a client. Using the PIN number, the M-Pesa agent takes just a minute to verify that the client has transferred payment for 1,000 traditional earnings into Ms. Wanjiku’s mobile money account. Ms. Wanjiku then withdraws the amount in cash, writes Ms. Mary Kinani in the United Nations African Regional magazine.

Like 90 per cent of Kenyans, Ms. Wanjiku does not have an account in a regular bank. Across Africa, only 20 per cent of families have formal bank accounts, according to a World Bank survey. In Tanzania the percentage is as low as 5 per cent, and in Liberia 15 per cent.

But the proliferation of mobile telephone services around the continent has opened a new way to extend financial services to people like Ms. Wanjiku. In the few countries where they have emerged, companies such as M-Pesa can use any cell phone or phone card to provide affordable services to customers wherever there is a mobile phone signal.

Expanding such innovations in the use of modern information and communications technologies (ICT) more widely was a central topic at a World Bank Summit last week in Kigali, Rwanda, in October. More than 1,000 private-sector, government and donor representatives discussed how such technologies can help in finding solutions to Africa’s development problems.

Money under mattresses

Most banks in Africa have branches only in urban areas. Brian Richardson, the chief executive officer of Wizzit South Africa, a cell phone banking facility, notes that expanding access to rural areas has traditionally involved opening new branch offices. “As long as you have that banking facility, notes that expanding access to affordable services to customers wherever there is a mobile phone signal.

As a result, regular bank services are often simply unavailable. Ethiopia has just one bank branch for every 100,000 people, compared with Spain, which has 96 branches for every 100,000 people. Moreover, requirements to maintain relatively high account balances make such services too costly for most Africans.

Even in South Africa, which has a more extensive banking system, it is estimated that people keep about R12 (US$1.8bn) “under mattresses,” says Mr Richardson. “If we could take just a small portion of that into the formal banking system, the impact on the economy would be enormous."

Established in 2004, Wizzit has signed for the Nokia Siemens network, agrees that this “changed the lives of millions of Africans, catalyzing social ties.”

“By making social ties core to our technology, we believe it will redefine the mobile phone to the extent that people can extend their social ties and businesses, boost their productivity and so much more, all at the touch of a few buttons on a cell phone.”

Touch of a button

Some counterparts to Wizzit have emerged elsewhere in Africa. Like Ms. Wanjiku, about 1 million Kenyans use M-Pesa, a joint product of the Vodafone/Safaricom mobile phone company, the Commercial Bank of Africa and Africa First, a micro-finance organization. M-Pesa customers deposit money with a registered agent and then transfer the money to their mobile phone account. The agent then charges a fee and the mobile phone user can transfer this money to a desired recipient, deposits from bank accounts or sends and receives money to relatives, counts to send and receive money to relatives, even someone using a different mobile network.

Wizzit’s operations are not closed if the customer does not use it for five years. In contrast, a regular bank account, unlike a Wizzit account, unlike a regular bank account, also partners with cell phone provider Mobile Telephone Networks (MTN), which provides services for South Africans who already have a bank account but also want to send and receive money over cell phones.

Between them, MTN and Wizzit enable 500,000 South Africans who do not have an account to send and receive money to relatives, pay for goods and services, check balances and settle utility bills. Until the advent of the two services, South Africans often paid couriers the equivalent of $30 to deliver cash to relatives. Now such transactions cost only $0.50 through mobile bank networks.

The greatest impact is in rural areas, says Beyers Coetzee, a rural community officer for Wizzit. “Eighty per cent of all farmers do not have bank accounts.” Moreover, he adds, a Wizzit account, unlike a regular bank account, is not closed if the customer does not use it regularly. That is “very useful for seasonal workers,” in particular.

Rob Cramer, head of the Global System for Mobile Communications Association, an international group of mobile phone service providers, says that such innovations have “changed the lives of millions of Africans, catalyzing economic development and strengthening social ties.”

Lauri Kristin, head of corporate affairs of the Nokia Siemens network, agrees that this development is significant. “It means unprecedented, substantial change for ordinary people,” he says. The African Reserve Bank, through mobile banking, can extend their social and business networks, boost their productivity and so much more, all at the touch of a few buttons on a cell phone.”

As we live our lives in relative abundance here, we must work to be a force for change in Africa.

Continental Africans and the global African community are yearning for deep change in the twenty-first century. Nothing is more central to this change than the launching of a grassroots African Unification Movement to fulfill the Pan-African dream of a continental Union Government in Africa.

African unity will not come through empty proclamations by the continent’s leaders, nor will it come through self-serving leaders, for they have failed us in time and time again. With visionary leadership, African unity must come through consistent, systematic and assertive grassroots community organizing.”

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After successful decolonization in the twentieth century, the twenty-first century must be the century of African unity—at home and abroad."

Kwame Nkrumah was right. Didi we are and forever shall be an integral part of the greater African American community. Our advocacy work for social justice and community empowerment is an inseparable part of the thrust of the civil rights movement. Therefore, we must be at home on the South Side and West Side of Chicago; we must fashion our politics to reflect our interests as part of the African American social reality.

For those of us who are naturalized US citizens, it is OK for us to run for public office, it is OK for us to win and secure a voice for us at City Hall, the State Capitol, and the Congress of the United States of America. In so doing we will be discharging our unique responsibility to expand the human possibility frontier, articulate the fundamental aspirations of the global African community, influence US foreign policy toward Africa, strengthen the immigrant rights movement, and advance African American progressive agenda.

The New Year is bound to come with its unique set of challenges. No matter the challenges ahead, the enhanced organizational capacity of the UAO as the voice of African immigrants and refugees in Illinois is good reason to be optimistic about our future.

Alie Kabba is Executive Director of the United African Organization.

For more information about the UAO, visit the website at www.uniteinafricans.org or e-mail info@uniteinafricans.org.