UAO Summit Inspires Solidarity, Sets Stage for Action

By Kelley Johnson

“We must dare to invent the future.”

This quote from former Burkina Faso leader Thomas Sankara set the tone for the United African Organization’s Second Chicago Summit on African Immigrants & Refugees, which was held at the DuSable Museum of African American History on Saturday May 31st. A major public education and organizing initiative of the UAO, the day-long summit brought together academics, activists, practitioners and community members to raise awareness about the state of the African immigrant and refugee community and engage in dialogue about future possibilities. The summit’s more than 200 attendees and speakers represented a cross-section of the African community as well as representatives from the African American community, various immigrant communities, and allies. The event was free and open to the public thanks to the collaborative support of the DuSable Museum of African American History and the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Rights, as well as generous financial assistance provided by the Illinois Department of Human Services, Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Services.

As an advocacy coalition of African national associations, the UAO is dedicated to social justice, civic participation and empowerment of African immigrants and refugees in Illinois. Among its various objectives, the UAO seeks to combat the invisibility that plagues the African immigrant and refugee communities in the United States, gives voice to the aspirations of this vibrant and diverse community, and encourages dialogue and coalition building between Africans, African Americans and other immigrant and minority communities. In affirmation of these commitments, the theme of this year’s summit was “Harvesting Hope, Weaving Change: Contemporary Africa & the African Experience in the United States.” As UAO Executive Director Alie Kabba explains, the vision behind this theme was to “raise awareness about Africa as the backdoor to our understanding of the African immigrant and refugee experience in the United States, as well as provide a unique opportunity for honest dialogue and shared vision.”

Issues addressed

Keynote addresses were given by special keynote speakers Dr. Sylviane Diouf of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York and Dr. Carol Adams, Secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services. Dr. Diouf’s presentation provided an introduction to the his... (continued on page 2)

Dr. Lynette Jackson presents on gender and development.
Dr. Adams underscored the importance of building bridges between the African American and African communities so that the two groups can learn from each other and challenge what she called the “systematic resettlement of African people in places where African people don’t live” which serves as an obstacle to building such relationships.

 roy and demographics of African migration and addressed some of the major issues facing the community such as under-employment and loss of cultural identity in the second and third generations. She pointed out that while many Americans have a perception of all African migrants as poor, illiterate and driven from home by war, they are actually the most educated immigrant group in the country with many skilled migrants coming to the United States due to economic downturn and lack of professional opportunity back home.

Dr. Dion argued that the “eco-

nomic dictates of the world commu-

nity” such as agricultural subsidies and high rates of interest on debt have had a great impact on pushing Afri-

cans to migrate and that once in the United States, these skilled Africans become a major asset to their host country. After citing statistics about the exploitation of African natural resource and the close to 70% of for-

eign aid that is actually spent in the U.S. on farmers, shipping and special experts, Dion put the questions: Who really owes whom and who is helping whom? Ultimately, she sug-

gested that assistance to African im-

igrants and refugees is not charity but equity to people who contribute a lot to this country. At the same time Dr. Dion challen-

ged community members to become more active and have their voices heard on issues ranging from foreign policy to race relations and civil rights.

Dr. Adams then discussed the summit’s theme and made suggestions about the approach needed for successfully “Harvesting Hope.” She reminded the crowd that a great deal of work must go into the cultivation of the harvest and that the community must work hard to organize and have their voices heard on issues. While the life of any immigrant is full just taking care of its unique needs. While the life of any immigrant is full just taking care of its unique needs. While the life of any immigrant is full just taking care of its unique needs.

The second group of panelists shared information on some of the services available to African immi-

gress and refugees in Illinois, the de-

sign program and the importance of ensuring women’s protection and work responsibilities, as well as build bridges between the African American and immigrant communities.

The first panel addressed topics of African unity, the origins of post-elect-

tion violence in Kenya, possibilities for reversing or mitigating the Afri-

can brain drain, and the importance of ensuring women’s protection and empowerment during both war and peace-time.

The second group of panelists also made a positive change is an essential ac-

tivity for each member of the African community.

While the life of any immigrant is full just taking care of basic family and work responsibilities, civic engagement and work towards positive change is an essential ac-

tivity for each member of the African community.

Dr. Carol Adams, Secretary Illinois Department of Human Services

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African Advocate is published by the United African Organization

African community issues, Drane added: “I am hoping that there is a continuation of meaningful dialogue and action throughout the year.”

Like Drane, many who partici-

pated in the summit were enthusiastic about the dialogue that took place and energized to move forward from dialogue into meaningful action on some of the issues raised.

The United African Organization is working to publish the proceedings of this historic summit and develop a post-summit advocacy agenda with concrete action points behind which summit participants and others can throw their energy in the months to come.
The US could never have become an economic and military powerhouse without wave after wave of newcomers, 'floodling' its shores.

Yes, immigrants, from every corner of the globe, and their children built America and continue to build America.

Thinly disguised racism

About 35 million, 12% of the total U.S. population, are foreign-born. Of that total around 12 million are estimated to be undocumented, including around 50,000 Irish undocumented. Mexicans make up around 60% of the undocumented population. And it is towards Mexicans that a small but well-organized and well-funded modern Know-Nothing movement directs their venom and gets to drive public discussion of immigration. You’ll often find them apoplectic at the sight of the Mexican flag but they have absolutely no problem with the Irish contamination on St. Patrick’s Day. This and their visible mummling confusion when confronted with the problems faced by Irish undocumented tears the veil of their thinly disguised racism summed up in ‘we support legal immigration.’

Surely, anyone who has watched the remarkable performance of Oscar winner Daniel Day Lewis in the Gangs of New York can see the Irish and Mexican immigration stories have so much in common.

Today, the numbers of Irish arriving into U.S. cities is comparatively low compared to Mexicans or Filipinos. The Republic of Ireland’s recent economic fortunes have meant that fewer Irish have been forced to leave in large numbers to find employment overseas. In fact, Ireland has now become a beacon of economic hope for immigrants from all over Eastern Europe and Africa.

The mainstream media and US Presidential candidates scarcely acknowledge that vast numbers of Mexican workers have been driven here out of pure desperation because of our imposed neo-liberal trade agreements. NAFTA is not only the most recent manifestation of Uncle Sam’s imperial trade policy towards its southern neighbors. Internal restructuring of the US economy recruited Mexican workers in massive numbers and simultaneously drove down the living standards of US and Mexican workers either side of the border.

Irish emigration to the U.S. exploded during the years of Ireland’s Great Hunger. The famine lasted from 1845 to 1851 and was a disaster of unimaginable proportions. Over two million people died of starvation and disease and another one million emigrated. As Christine Kinealy points out “The Irish Famine did not occur in a vacuum and is better understood within the continuum of Anglo-Irish relations.” The potato blight was a natural occurrence but Imperial Britain’s free-market capitalism meant the outcome was far more devastating. The obvious point: the hidden hand of the free-market, today and yesterday, has always played a large role in shaping where we go, where we can live and where we work.

The raids, the deportations, the breaking up of families, the fear-mongering have to end now. Yet, none of the candidates dates demand this. The assumptions enforcement politics are built on are racist and legitimizing them only aids the immigrant-bashers.

Immigrants are the source of great wealth and profit but they are also stigmatized, criminalized and hounded.

The raids, the deportations, the breaking up of families, the fear-mongering have to end now.

And more: massive tax breaks and a low-wage, pilfered workforce. Worse still, Ireland’s political elite acted as the US’s hammer in the European Union, advancing a specific US agenda and advancing neo-liberalism in general. The Irish State is a neo-liberal regime modelled on and dependent on the US. In many respects, Ireland today seems like an economic colony of the United States.

Like in the United States, a large majority of Ireland’s population is also stigmatized, criminalized and hounded. The hypocrisy here does not belong to the undocumented.

Today, we are told we have to wait for a solution, for legalization. Yet, the war continues. In fact, it gets worse. We should not have to wait. Immigrants, past, present and future, are owed a tremendous debt, the fruit of their labor, in America. The raids, the deportations, the breaking up of families, the fear-mongering have to end now. Yet, none of the candidates dates demand this. The assumptions enforcement politics are built on are racist and legitimizing them only aids the immigrant-bashers.

In his book, The Corporate Taecnor of Ireland, Kieran Allen, documents how the Irish political establishment has bent over backwards to give American corporations everything they want and more: massive tax breaks and a low-wage, pilfered workforce. Worse still, Ireland’s political elite acted as the US’s hammer in the European Union, advancing a specific US agenda and advancing neo-liberalism in general. The Irish State is a neo-liberal regime modelled on and dependent on the US. In many respects, Ireland today seems like an economic colony of the United States.

Like in the United States, a large majority of Ireland’s population is
Immigrant integration in Illinois

CHICAGO
The New Americans Policy Council and the State Interagency Task Force recommended options to the state to improve integration for immigrants and refugees in Illinois. The recommendations cap off a two-year, two-phase process launched by Governor Rod R. Blagojevich in 2003 when he issued the landmark New Americans Executive Order. The New Americans Policy Council and the State Interagency Task Force, both created by the Order, presented their respective Phase II recommendations regarding economic and employment development, housing and homeownership, and public safety during a joint event at the Eric House in Chicago. Both groups presented their Phase I recommendations in late 2006. Illinois, which historically has welcomed immigrants from all over the world, is now home to an estimated 1.8 million immigrants and has the fifth largest immigrant population of any state in the U.S. Nearly 14 percent of Illinois residents are immigrants, hailing from approximately 200 different countries, and speaking over 100 different languages.

Gov. Blagojevich's New Americans Executive Order created two parallel policy development groups, each charged with studying and recommending strategies to improve immigrant integration. Within State government, the Order created the Office of New Americans Policy and Advocacy, which coordinates the work of the state-agency led Interagency Task Force. The Executive Order also established a New Americans Policy Council, comprised of prominent Illinois business, community, philanthropic, faith, labor, and governmental leaders with experience in this field. The work of the Policy Council is coordinated by the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR).

The Phase II report of the New Americans Policy Council suggests the state improve its capacity and service to immigrants and refugees in the following areas:

- Financial literacy education
- Micro-lending and other tools to help immigrant entrepreneurs
- Planning and developing affordable housing for immigrant household needs, and
- Enhance public safety policy for immigrant communities by recruiting more officers with bilingual skills, extending community representation on public safety governing bodies and fostering mutual trust between immigrants and public safety officials and field personnel.

“Immigrants play a crucial role in building our state’s economy and communities. As they build assets for themselves and their families, they also contribute to our state’s continued growth and vitality and become even better neighbors. We hope that these recommendations will guide the State in moving these processes forward.”

— Fred Tsao, Policy Director Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and editor of the Policy Council report.

Since the beginning of his administration, Gov. Blagojevich has championed the needs of working families through executive or legislative action, making Illinois the most progressive state in the nation when it comes to promoting the welfare of workers.

Minimum Wage
Gov. Blagojevich raised the minimum wage twice, from $5.15 to $7.50 an hour, benefiting more than 450,000 workers, and strengthened its enforcement. Since 2003, the state has collected and distributed more than $3 million in minimum wage/ overtime payments to Illinois workers.

Employee misclassification
In 2007, Gov. Blagojevich signed the Employee Classification Act to stop construction contractors from misclassifying their employees as independent contractors in order to avoid tax and labor law obligations.

Day laborers
In 2005, Gov. Blagojevich signed legislation making Illinois the most aggressive state in the nation in safeguarding day laborers. Since 2003, the state collected and distributed nearly $600,000 in back wages to day and temporary laborers that were underpaid by their employers and since 2006, and collected more than $60,000 in penalties against day labor agencies that failed to register with the Department as required by law.

Workers’ Comp reform
Gov. Blagojevich reformed the workers’ compensation system for the first time almost in 20 years to increase benefits for workers, reduce costs for business and raise the penalties on employers or insurance companies who fail to obtain workers’ compensation insurance or unreasonably delay the payment of benefits.

Prevailing wage
Gov. Blagojevich has signed four major prevailing wage bills into law (2003-2006) strengthening and expanding our law to ensure that people who build our roads, bridges, state facilities and schools receive good wages and benefits. Since 2003, the state has collected and distributed nearly $6 million to Illinois construction workers who were paid less than the prevailing wage on public construction projects, and has collected more than $1 million in penalties from contractors who violated the Prevailing Wage Act.

Overtime Protection
Gov. Blagojevich preserved overtime protections for hundreds of thousands of workers whose rights to overtime pay were threatened by federal regulatory changes.

Card Check
In 2003, Gov. Blagojevich signed Card Check legislation, which provides automatic union recognition to public and educational employees if a majority of the workers sign union authorization cards.

State building and highway projects
In 2003, Gov. Blagojevich signed an Executive Order which mandated that State building and highway projects be completed under an agreement with the AFL-CIO’s craft unions, where possible.

Collective bargaining
Gov. Blagojevich has signed two Executive Orders and additional legislation to give over 80,000 Illinois workers collective bargaining rights.

Responsible Bidder Act
In 2003, Gov. Blagojevich signed the Responsible Bidder Act which requires that contractors and subcontractors doing business with the State must participate in federally registered apprenticeship and training programs.

Equal Pay
In 2003, Gov. Blagojevich signed the Illinois Equal Pay Act to ensure that women who do the same work as men receive the same pay.

Advance notice of layoffs
Gov. Blagojevich signed the Worker Adjustment Retraining and Notification Act to require large employers to 60 days advance notice of a plant closing or mass layoff.
these recommendations will guide the State in moving these processes forward,” said Fred Tsao, Policy Director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and editor of the Policy Council report.

The Interagency Task Force also outlined agency specific recommendations, to address economic and employment development, housing, homeownership and public safety issues for immigrants and refugees in state agencies.

The top line Phase II recommendations for the Interagency Task Force are:

1. Establish a central language access office;
2. Implement an economic integration project; and

“The State Interagency Task Force and New Americans Policy Council recommendations are a result of extensive work by national experts, civic leaders, and state agencies. Throughout the year, they have assessed immigrants’ needs, resources and relationships with the State and helped establish national priorities for improving immigrant integration. They are helping those individuals and communities who have adopted Illinois as their home,” said Jose Luis Gutierrez, Director, Governor’s Office of New Americans Policy and Advocacy.

Since the beginning of his administration, Gov. Blagojevich has championed the needs of working families through executive or legislative action, making Illinois the most progressive state in the nation when it comes to promoting the welfare of workers.

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By Prof. Ali A. Mazrui

Large scale ‘diasporisation’ of Indians did not begin until after Vasco da Gama circumnavigated the African continent around the Cape of Good Hope in 1498.

The arrival of Europeans in India by sea allowed for the future migration of Indians by sea all the way to Europe and beyond.

In this sense, Vasco da Gama was a harbinger of a new imperial order. If the Raj could arrive by sea, the Raj’s subjects could be exported by sea. A new logic for the diasporisation of India had come into being.

We should bear in mind what had gone on before. Until Vasco da Gama, the landmass of Africa had been India’s main defense against European colonization from the sea. Alexander the Great had conquered parts of India overland.

But the trouble with overland colonization was that it often required conquering intervening countries in order to maintain supply routes. But conquest from the sea can focus on the particular country.

Geography is frequently the mother of history. One of Asia’s geographical impacts on world history was in preventing indefinitely European access to the Indian Ocean. European traders and merchants were interested for so long in the ‘fabulous and legendary Orient of silk, spices and pearls.’

They wanted a sea-route to the Orient. The Europeans wanted access to what came to be known as the Indian Ocean. But the African land mass was in the way, a huge stumbling block to European greed. Africa shielded India for centuries.

At long last in 1488 Bartolomeu Dias reached the South African Cape, but could not easily circumnavigate it. The Indian Ocean was so near, and yet so far away. He named the Cape ‘The Cape of Storms.’

It was not until Vasco da Gama in 1498 that Europeans fully circumnavigated South Africa, and gained access to the Indian Ocean. They had by then renamed the cape as ‘the Cape of Good Hope’, the presumed riches of the Orient finally appeared reachable across the Indian Ocean.

The role of Africa as the closed gate to the Indian Ocean for Europeans also had consequences for the Western hemisphere. Had Africa been a smaller continent that could easily be circumnavigated by the Europeans, there would have been no need to seek a Western route to the Orient for a long time.

Even as it was, Christopher Columbus had considerable trouble raising the necessary funds for his first trans-Atlantic trip in 1492. Odds are he would not have been funded at all if Europeans had gained access to the Indian Ocean much earlier.

The European ‘discovery’ of the Americas would have been delayed for at least another century if the Europeans had conquered the Indian Ocean sooner.

European interest in access to the Indian Ocean had long-term consequences for Africa as well. The Portuguese wanted to build trading posts to facilitate and defend their routes to the Orient. Their colonization of Mozambique was partly motivated by Oriental aspirations. In Mombasa, they built Fort Jesus which still stands today as a monument to the Portuguese efforts to control the trading routes of the Indian Ocean.

It was my own family (the Mazruis) who militarily helped to dislodge the Portuguese out of Mombasa. The Mazruis themselves were then to rule Mombasa as a city-state from 1698 to 1837.

In the 19th century European preoccupation with access to the Indian Ocean moved to the north of the African continent.

Now that the Cape of Good Hope was indeed navigable, could there be a shorter access to the Indian Ocean? The new ambition focused on the Isthmus of the Suez. Could the Isthmus be cut into a canal? Enter Ferdinand de Lesseps, the French engineer. De Lesseps was the Vasco da Gama of the North. The Suez Canal took a decade to cut and it opened in 1869.

The Canal provided Europe with access to the Indian Ocean. Moses had parted the waters in order to walk across the Red Sea. Ferdinand de Lesseps parted the land in order to sail into the Red Sea from the Mediterranean. India became even more accessible to the West, both for plunder and for diasporisation.

One of Africa’s geographical impacts on world history was in preventing indefinitely European access to the Indian Ocean.

Prof. Ali A. Mazrui is a professor of political science and African studies at State University New York

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Governor Rod Blagojevich and Dr. Carol Adams interviewed by Cliff Kelley
African Economic Integration Requires New Strategies

By Nkululeko Khumalo

While some modest achievements have been realized, the goal of having integrated and well-functioning regional economic communities (RECs) that are able to foster economic interdependence remains elusive in Africa.

Against this backdrop the African Union (AU) hosted the third Conference of African Ministers in charge of Integration (COMAI III) from May 19 to 23 in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire in a bid to accelerate continental integration – a longstanding objective of the AU and its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

With at least 14 regional communities and most countries belonging to at least two, regional integration in Africa is too complex and confusing. As documented in many studies, multiple and overlapping memberships in RECs have created a complicated web of competing commitments which, combined with different rules, result in high costs for trade between African countries and work against beneficial integration.

This situation has been exacerbated by the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations between the European Community and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) grouping.

The EPAs, negotiated under the aegis of the Cotonou Agreement which seeks to replace non-reciprocal export preferences that ACP countries have been receiving from the EU with regional reciprocal free trade arrangements from January 2008 onwards, are meant to align the parties’ trade regime with World Trade Organization rules. Though EPAs are meant to promote regional integration, among other aims, their immediate impact has been the further fragmentation of existing regional economic bodies across Africa - except for the East African Community.

Clearly the current state of economic integration (or disintegration to be precise) in Africa requires new strategies and approaches if the vision of a virtually borderless continent in economic terms is to be realized. The erstwhile OAU, through the Abuja Treaty (1991), envisaged the creation of an African Economic Community by 2028. In terms of this plan five (north, south, east, west and central) regional economic communities would serve as building blocks towards the creation of the continent-wide community.

However, the EPAs have, if anything, demonstrated that existing regional communities are not only too many but are largely too shallow and therefore unlikely to lead to continental integration as envisaged by the Abuja Treaty -- unless the AU plays a strong coordinating and monitoring role.

Unsurprisingly, the need to revise the Abuja Treaty is one of the recommendations of COMAI I and COMAI II since the treaty’s integration timeframes have become unrealistic. In principle, the AU as a continental body is better placed to promote the bigger picture – the economic integration of the whole continent and not just regions, individual countries often being too preoccupied with narrow national interests.

To succeed, the AU will have to deal with massive challenges hampering regional integration efforts in Africa. These include: lack of national mechanisms to coordinate, implement, and monitor integration policies and programs; inability to make integration objectives, plans, and programs part of national development frameworks; failure to provide equitable distribution of integration’s costs and benefits; insufficient technical capacity and financial support to regional integration programs; and lack of compatibility among RECs which are supposed to promote the goals of a continent-wide community.

Further, it is important for the AU and individual RECs to ensure that Africa’s integration agenda is compatible with the obligations these communities have to external trading partners.

It is also important for the African economic integration process, especially in the area of trade, to deepen and be ahead of other multilateral processes in order to allow African countries to speak with one voice and be able to respond appropriately to challenges such as the ones provided by the EPAs.

This will not be an easy task and will require the AU to build its own institutional capacity to shoulder this responsibility.

The current state of instability and uncertainty, especially in Southern Africa, about how existing RECs will shape out in response to EPAs provides a unique opportunity for the AU to assert its leadership and to provide and implement a clear plan towards continental economic integration.

It is encouraging that the AU seems to have risen to the occasion and has already held two conferences of ministers in charge of regional integration since 2006. While acknowledging the significance of regional communities as central pillars for achieving continental integration, both conferences emphasized the need to rationalize and harmonize their policies, activities, and programs with a view to accelerating the broader integration process.

A moratorium on the recognition of new RECs is already in place and eight of the existing ones have been recognized as building blocks of the African Economic Community. However, the AU can succeed only if it gets maximum support from individual countries and RECs. Therefore the institutionalization of the conference of integration ministers is a welcome development and we hope their resolutions will be taken seriously and get implemented.

Nkululeko Khumalo is Senior Researcher in trade policy at the South African Institute of International Affairs.

Vicious Dragnet (continued from page 3)

Shaun Harkin, originally from Ireland, is a leading voice in the immigration movement in Chicago. He can be reached at: shaunharkin@gmail.com

Fein President, Gerry Adams, has said: “The plight of the thousands of Irish undocumented working and living in the USA is a priority for Sinn Fein. We will continue to raise this issue at every political and governmental level open to us.”

During the US invasion of Mexico in 1846 a group of Irish immigrants had enough with hypocrisy. They deserted the invading US Army and joined the Mexican side as the Saint Patrick’s Battalion (Batalión de San Patricio). Real heroes: “In all my letters, I forget to tell you under what banner we fought so bravely. It was that glorious Emblem of native rights, that being the banner which should have floated over our native Soil many years ago, it was St. Patrick, the Harp of Erin, the Shamrock upon a green field.” ~ John Riley, rebel commander of the San Patricios.
Food Crisis Threatens Democracy

By Julius E. Coles

More than half the nations of the world in which riots have broken out over food prices are in Africa, says Julius E. Coles, president of Africare, a U.S.-based organization which has been implementing food security programs across Africa for nearly 40 years. Based on that experience, he outlines recommendations for a comprehensive approach to meeting current challenges.

The global food crisis has now reached every corner of the world, pushing millions of people living in poverty to the edge of disaster. Africa is the world’s poorest region: more than 210 million people live on less than U.S. $1 a day; more than 400 million live on less than U.S. $2 a day, and by 2015 that number is projected to reach 600 million.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the effects of the current food crisis have been most acute in Africa. With food prices up by 57 percent in March compared to a year ago, more than half the countries in which riots have broken are in Africa – they include Somalia, Cameroon, Senegal, Mozambique, Cote d’Ivoire, Morocco, Mauritania, Egypt, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

The widespread occurrence of the riots underlines the extreme urgency of the food crisis and the potential it has to destabilize African democracies.

External economic factors are not the only causes of the crisis. In order to identify and provide long-term solutions, the underlying causes of hunger and poverty must be better understood.

Some of these factors include: a rising demand for food products to satisfy the needs of rapidly growing populations; an internal shift from food farming to cash cropping; poor harvests linked to uneven rainfall; the rising costs of agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, transport, and labor; and limited infrastructure in rural areas for increased food storage, transport and marketing.

In addition, climate change is having a significant impact on fragile soils and traditional farming systems. Small rural farmers and communities simply can no longer produce sufficient quantities of the food needed to sustain their populations.

To help those most severely impacted, the international donor community must provide sustained quantities of emergency food aid. But the only real long-term solution to the problem of chronic food deficits and hunger is the development of programs to promote food security, adequate nutrition, improved incomes for farmers and urban dwellers, and overall economic development.

Sound government policies coupled with local farmer knowledge and participation are important pre-conditions to the success of a food security program for the African continent.

The various programs and initiatives proposed will require the sustained financial and technical assistance of governments, international and financial institutions, and non-governmental organizations working with African farmers. It is only through such a combined and focused approach that the people of Africa will be able to break the cycle of hunger, poor nutrition and disease.

These investments to improve African agriculture are essential for eliminating poverty and helping Africa achieve greater prosperity and stability in the long run. There is no doubt that a stronger and self-sufficient African continent is in the United States’ national interest, as well as that of the world community.

Julius E. Coles is president of Africare, a U.S.-based non-governmental organization that was founded in response to a drought and hunger crisis in the Sahel in 1970.

Number of people in Africa living on less than U.S. $1 a day and less than U.S. $2 a day

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Leila Nolidost is a staff writer for the Chicago Defender. She can be reached at buelliste@chicagodefender.com
In the colonial period, most high schools were boarding schools, but in Nairobi there were some day schools. In the colonial period we had schools for Europeans, for Asians, and for Africans. I was assigned to work in a national school, which was just integrating. I started teaching in Nairobi in 1968, and the school was just bringing Africans and others in to mix the races. So it happens that the children in the school in which I was teaching were from the low-income areas and quite a number of them were very sick. I would send them with little notes to the city health clinics and I’d tell the person there that the child has a wound on his leg, or a temperature – but they always came back with aspirin. By this time, I was already a wife and mother. My own daughter was getting sick. She had childhood fevers, and I would take her to the doctors and ask them: “What is the problem?” and they would say, “You don’t need to know. Just give her this.” I felt I was not being treated with respect. I thought, “Why can’t people tell me what’s wrong with my child, and what is this I’m giving her?” So I was feeling personally frustrated. I was also frustrated when dealing with the students. No one was treating them. I think there was just carelessness in the way that doctors handled their patients. Sometimes the students were not even examined... There was kind of a condescending attitude towards children’s health. So I thought that this had to change. It so happened that the University of Nairobi had established a medical school in 1967. I just went and picked up the forms and said, “I want to apply to go to medical school.” Well, they looked at me. I was 28. In those days, that was very old. So I took the forms home and my husband and I laughed about it, because in those days the University of Nairobi did not accept wives. If a girl got pregnant while she was a student at the University, she was sent home. A number of my friends lost their places in that way. So we thought, well, they probably won’t take me. But they did. Then I had the real challenge of my life: what do I do now that they’ve taken me? I had to give up my job, my salary, and the like. It sounds heroic, but what really pushed me was the fact that I couldn’t even get decent treatment for my own daughter. In those days there were not many African doctors. Most of the doctors in the clinics in Nairobi had been trained in Bombay... I was in medical school for five years... By the time I joined, I had decided to go into public service. My preoccupation was to push access to health care.

Q: How did you first get involved in community work?

I felt, as I progressed in my career, that we were not taking our young people along as we developed. These people are our future leaders, so they can wait their turn to make decisions. But there are so many ways they can decide to lead now. In Africa, our young people who are between the ages of 10 and 30 are the most educated group. So one of the things I tell them is, “You can’t afford to be the leaders of tomorrow—you have to be the leaders of today.”

When you open up possibilities for people, things happen faster.

When Africa has very high levels of poverty—with more than 60 percent of the population below the poverty line—most of the young people are below the poverty line. Sometimes people make the mistake of thinking that if you are poor, you are stupid. But there’s no relationship between poverty and stupidity, especially if you’ve grown up in a disadvantaged environment without opportunities. So the challenge is how to bring out the strengths and capacities of everybody, including our young people. Our young people are more than 65 percent of the population. Sometimes we talk about our young people being 50 percent of the population, and they are ignored. But when you ignore both your young men and young women, you are ignoring more than 65 percent... in some countries, 70 percent. I also found in my dealings with young people that they were more open to possibilities. They could look beyond what they have now, the relationships they have now, to what is possible. And we need that aspect in our development in Africa also—the broadening of the horizon from which you can make decisions... When you open up possibilities for people, things happen faster.

In Kenya, we have not always had universal education—universal primary education. In fact, it only became a reality in 2003. So when we started the Uzima Foundation, and like in the 1990s, there was no free access to education. So you find 14, 15-year-olds who are nowhere. They are in their homes, but not in any directional lifestyle beyond housework, if they are girls. And we have even more problems with young men who are not in family situations—they are not in school, and they are not employed. So you find a lot of young people just loitering on benches in markets, looking for work, feeling bored, helpless and idle. How can you blame them for getting involved in crime? Living in this blanket of hopelessness was what concerned me. If I imagine my life without having gone to school, having a job, having anything, I become very scared.

Q: How did you form the Uzima Foundation?

We didn’t originally imagine starting an organization. We wanted to work with existing groups like church groups and so on that we could support their young people’s work. But even our own church groups were not prepared to deal with that. They said, “Oh, no, we cannot let young people take part in decision-making. We’ll just tell them what to do.” When my husband and I started talking to young people about it, we remembered we had been saving some money for a rainy day, as we called it, but so many young people were in the rain. We wanted our young people to get involved in decision-making. At the same time, we don’t think it’s best to have a completely trial-and-error situation, because if they make terrible mistakes, it will shut even more doors for them from the adult world. As the saying goes, “Wise people learn from their mistakes, but wiser people learn from other people’s mistakes.” So we wanted them to be involved, but under the guidance of adults, so long as those adults realize that young people have potential, give them an opportunity to act like their sounding board. So it became a partnership between the youth, who are the majority, and a few adult leaders. By 1995 when we started Uzima I had been involved for years in management, organization and the like. So when we began work with Uzima, we asked ourselves, “Should we go with a program, or shall we go with an idea?” We decided to go with an idea—to find out what young people thought about the issues in their lives.
Q: Gathering a bigger picture of young people's ideas can't have been simple.
What did we do to host what we called a discussion forum. In fact, the first group almost threw us out. "How can you ask us about the issues in our lives?" they asked. "You know the issue in our life. It's poverty. So give us money and get out."

So I told them "Unfortunately, we don't have money to give you and get out. And even if we did, would that be the best thing for you?"

"Yes, just give us the money," they said.

"And tomorrow?"

"Don't worry about tomorrow. Give us the money today."

So I asked them to think seriously. Because the decision would be very important. "Are you telling me that if I don't come to you with money, I should not be interested in you and what's happening in your life? If that's what you're telling me then I will go."

"Ah, now you are being difficult," they said.

Then they talked in groups and said, "No, no, no - we still want you to be involved with us, and we still want you to be interested in us even if you don't have money." I told them we had saved a little money and it looked like a lot of money, but we have had to buy an office, and a desk, and a computer. Most of that money had gone. But we didn't want to stop because the money was not there. But they said, "How can we work with you? We are too poor to work."

And I said, "Well, you know, you must have something, because when God wanted Moses to undertake the responsibility of freeing the slaves from Egypt, he only asked Moses one question."

"What is in your hand?" He didn't ask Moses, "Which army should I mobilize for you?" So I said to them, "What is in your hand?" And of course they said "Nothing." So I said, "Think again, because if you had nothing in your hand, you would be dead."

That was the end of it; we had tea and bread and they went home.
When we met the next week, they said "We found out what is in our hand. We are healthy young people. One thing we can do is protect this health, and use this health for good."

They decided to start a running club in mornings and evenings.

Now one of the most interesting outcomes was that, previously, most of the young people - mostly young men - would come home at midnight and drink their relatives. But when they started running they came home earlier because they were tired.

The slum mothers and relatives were so pleased with what we had done that they wanted to give ten shillings each - for them, a lot of money - to give our young people tea. So I told them to give the money directly to their children. They said, "If we give it to them, they'll misuse it." I said, "Give it to them and let's see what happens." The young people were so touched.

Q: What other initiatives were taken? You know, when you are poor, sometimes there is no time for caring relationships. So the mothers started a tea club. They meet for tea and have discussions before they go to run. Then they said to one another, "Why don't you go in the library and look up information on contraception?" or addiction, and so on.

So these tea sessions became discussion sessions around issues like poverty, sickness, violence by the youth and violence against youth, boyfriends and girlfriends. But the most dominant issue was idleness. They complained of boredom, so we showed them some dirt to clean up. They organized themselves and got to work to clean their environment.

When you're in a slum, you're very discouraged: you're poor. What people don't realize is that living like that drains your initiative. You are lethargic, you have apathy; you are depressed and you don't realize it. Depression is rarely discussed but if you have depression you can be sitting in dirt and not even see it.

We learned that even if you want to focus on youth, you can't do it in isolation without the community. Because of these early groups, we decided to organize Uzima around youth groups of 10 to 20 who come together with a facilitator from the organization to discuss their issues with each other and decide on the way forward. We found that the strength of the group is very important. We have community in that people in Africa, we try to create that community sense. I've always said that in Africa if it doesn't happen in the community, it doesn't happen.

Out of these early meetings our first program evolved. Our first program was called Clean and Safe Fun. The youth would tell us, "Just because there is AIDS you want us to sit and have bored lives. But we want to have fun." So we asked them, "What kind of fun do you want to have?" And they said, "We want it to be clean and safe." So we started this program with football, netball, theatre, poetry, traditional story-telling, arts, dance… They've gotten very good at putting on plays. What they haven't done yet is put on a show for money, which is something we would like to do to raise funds. Clean and Safe Fun is a very good program because they come together with their talents. One may be a playwright, one may be able to recite poetry, one can sing, one can dance... so they put on quite interesting shows for their parents and for their communities.

The other popular program was the one on reproductive health. How do you keep yourself safe, happy and free from HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy? That became a very important area.

But the third, and most important area was economic empowerment. How do we economically empower ourselves so that we don't just become comfortable in this poverty, but become able to get out of it? We learned that even if you want to focus on youth, you can't do it in isolation without the community. In Africa, generational gaps are especially wide. Say your family is subsistence farming and they haven't had contact with computers or anything and are really living in another age. You come to high school and you hope it's going to be different. But there is that situation. So there has to be an active process of inter-generational communication.

In dealing with this we came to issues of violence – violence amongst youth and violence against youth. From there we had to deal with governance – in family life, community life and in the national context. Uzima Youth have been very active in civic education. They have organized themselves around certain political candidates, and they have become civic leaders themselves.

We also started working with schoolchildren. One boy in Standard 6 had an alcoholic father. He started taking him to Uzima meetings and now the whole family is educated. Uzima really made a difference for them. That's our motto – touching a life. It's reflected in our logo – a star – because we believe our youth are stars touching lives. We thought about so many names, but we went with Uzima because it means [in Kiswahili] the wholeness of life, apart from Eastern, Western, or African ideologies. It stands for itself; it's not tied to a particular group of people.
Death of a Zimbabwean Activist

By Farai Sevenzo

Tonderai Ndira lived in the desperately poor township of Mabvuku and Tafara, east of Harare.

He was no stranger to the Zimbabwean police and at one stage had 38 charges leveled against him, ranging from “political nuisance” to attempted murder.

He was one of a group of young men and women, barely in their thirties, who formed the backbone of the opposition’s ranks.

Their was the thankless and arduous task of mobilizing moribund, disillusioned and tired folk to believe in this new concept called change and to sign up to the messages of the eight-year-old opposition - the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

On election day, 29 March, the tall and charismatic Ndira was hanging around by what passes for shops in his sewage-ridden constituency, where electricity is erratic and where cholera has already claimed lives in the last 12 months.

“It is clear that the change we were waiting for is here. If we do not get it, the people must rise up and fight for their victory,”

— Tonderai Ndira

I asked him what he felt that day would bring, and, if given the history of elections in this country, the day would make any difference.

“It is clear that the change we were waiting for is here. If we do not get it, the people must rise up and fight for their victory,” he said.

Rising up and fighting for victory pits one against the awesome strength of the security machinery the state has at its disposal.

That is an undisputed fact in the history of this country’s opposition. It is an impossible task.

Beyond politics

In the weeks following polling day, a campaign of intimidation was unleashed which largely affected opposition party folk.

But on Tuesday May 13, according to his friends and eyewitnesses,

He was a youth activist who went around the country holding workshops and teaching people their rights.

Ndira came home and slept the sleep of the exhausted in Mabvuku township.

At around 06:45 a.m., a pick-up truck packed with 10 men arrived on his narrow street and drove past his house, stopping at the neighbors. The 10 men were armed with revolvers and AK-47s - some of them wore masks.

The neighbor’s child duly told them the right address and they reversed, disembarked and told Ndira’s wife they were looking for her husband.

The presence of so many armed men frightened her into calling out his name and announcing that there were people there to see him.

He answered with a voice drunk with sleep and asked her to tell them to come by later, as he needed his rest.

He was abducted in his under-wear, in front of his young children as they were heading to school and beaten into the truck until he was bleeding.

In the ensuing week, his family and friends desperately tried to locate him.

His jaw was shattered, his knuckles broken, a bullet hole below his heart, many many stab wounds and a large hole at the back of his head which seemed to have been caused by a hammer.

The omens were not good, several activists had been found dead and funerals were happening throughout the city and the rural areas - all connected to Zimbabwe’s protracted political impasse.

On Wednesday, the MDC went to claim two more bodies from Harare’s Parirenyatwa Hospital Morgue.

Party officials were told by the mortician there was another body that had not been claimed.

This new body was badly decomposed; a pair of bloody shorts was plastered to a face clearly broken and shattered.

“We only knew it was my brother by his distinctive ring, his bangles, and his unmistakable height,” said Cosmas Ndira, as family and friends filled his small home to mourn his passing before his funeral, which is yet to be finalized.

“His jaw was shattered, his knuckles broken, a bullet hole below his heart, many many stab wounds and a large hole at the back of his head which seemed to have been caused by a hammer.”

“Yes, we are like chickens waiting for the knife to reach our throats.”

— Cosmas Ndira

Jimmy Chidakwa, a colleague and fellow activist, struggled to contain his anger both at the assassins and his party’s leadership.

They are cowards, all of them. Ten men to take down one unarmed man.

“And where are our leaders? Out of the country.”

Cosmas chimped in: “Yes, we are like chickens waiting for the knife to reach our throats. Given his position in the party, my brother should have had more protection. I know so many people now too frightened to vote with their hearts come the run-off.”

Unlike the opposition leadership, who are not here and have been at pains to tell the world of diplomatic efforts under way as they travel - to Botswana, South Africa, Kenya, the UN headquarters in New York - the foot soldiers like Tonderai Ndira remained on the ground, visiting the injured and coordinating relief efforts to those displaced.

The opposition may yet feel the full force of the loss of such urban activists in the weeks to come as the country heads for the presidential run-off on 27 June.
Sickle Cell Disease

By Rosamari Mamei Tambi, RN

Sickle cell disease exists in all countries of Africa and in areas where Africans have migrated over the centuries, including the United States.

It is most common in West and Central Africa where 25 percent of people have sickle cell trait and one to two percent of all babies are born with a form of the disease.

The sickle cell gene was introduced to the western world largely by the transatlantic slave trade and is now present in the Mediterranean countries and the Caribbean islands.

The Sickle Cell Disease Association of America states that the disease affects approximately 720,000 people in the United States. One in ten African American carries the genetic traits and one in four hundred has the disease.

Hispanic Americans are also affected. One in twenty-five Hispanic carries the genetic trait and one in one thousand has the disease.

A Chicago cardiologist by the name of Dr. James B. Herrick (1861-1954) first identified the disease in 1910, and his intern Ernest Edward Irons (1877-1959) found peculiar elongated and sickle shaped red blood cells in people affected with the disease. The disease was named “sickle cell anemia” by Vernon Mason in 1922. Public awareness of the disease has since grown as medical studies have revealed more about the sickle cell anemia.

What is sickle cell disease?

Sickle cell disease is the name given to a group of inherited condition of hemoglobin formation. It includes Sickle Cell Anemia, Hemoglobin SC Disease (Hb SC) and Sickle Beta Thalassemia (hb Beta-Thal).

The disease gets its name because the blood cells are shaped like sickle or crescent instead of their usual round, flat shape. This disorder affects the hemoglobin in the red blood cell (an iron-rich protein that gives blood its red color) and which also transports oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Normally, red blood cells are round and flexible so they travel freely through the narrow blood vessels to carry oxygen to all parts of the body.

In sickle cell disease, the red blood cells become hard, sticky and develop a C-shaped (sickle). The sickle cells die early, which cause a constant shortage of red blood cells.

As the sickle red blood cells travel through the small blood vessels, they get stuck and clog the blood flow leading to pain sensation for the affected person.

How do people get sickle disease?

At the time of conception, a person receives one set of genes from the father (sperm) and another set from the mother (egg). The genes exist on structures inside cells called chromosomes. Some traits such as hair/eye color or height are determined by the combination of many genes while other characteristics are determined by only single pair of genes (one from each parent). Usually, people have two normal genes for hemoglobin.

A person who receives a gene for sickle cell disease from one parent and a normal gene from the other has a condition called sickle cell trait. This person does not develop sickle cell disease and generally has no symptoms and leads a normal life. Sickle cell trait produces no symptoms for most people.

Two sickle hemoglobin genes must be inherited from each one of the parent in order for a person to have the sickle cell disease. The disease is not contagious, it can not be contracted nor pass to another person. A person born with sickle gene can not lose it over time. Depending on which gene (trait or disease) a person inherits, that person will always have the trait or the disease. The sickle cell produces illness. There are variation in the severity of illness, some people lead lives that are nearly normal and some suffer multiple complications.

What are the signs and symptoms?

There are many symptoms and complications for the sickle cell disease; however each individual may experience symptoms differently.

23 Anemia: This is the most common symptom of the disease. The person’s blood has a lower-thannormal number of red blood cells or blood cells do not have enough hemoglobin. Normal red blood cells last about 120 days in the blood stream and then die. In sickle cell anemia, the red blood cells die faster, usually less than 10 to 20 days. The bone marrow can not make new red blood cells fast enough to replace the dying ones.

24 Pain or sickle crisis: Pain is produced when the flow of blood is blocked to an area because the sickle cells have stuck in the vessel (Vass occlusive crisis). The pain can occur anywhere, but most often in the chest, arms and legs.

25 Fatigue

26 Breathlessness

27 Rapid heart rate

28 Delayed growth

29 Fever

30 Yellow eyes/skin

31 Priapism (painful erections)

32 Open sores (ulcers)

33 Serious complications of sickle cell disease include stroke, gallbladder stones, damage to the retina (a part of the eye), severe infections and high blood pressure in the lungs.

How do you know about sickle cell?

A simple blood test helps to determine they type of hemoglobin a person has. It is usually diagnosed by newborn screening tests required under state law. Parents of newborns with positive screening test result for sickle cell disease are contacted by the department of public health before the child becomes two months of age to confirm the diagnosis. Presently in the United States 48 states have newborn screening programs for sickle cell disease.

Living with sickle cell disease

Regular medical checkups, early diagnosis and treatment are important. The disease is not preventable; however a couple may visit a genetic counselor before becoming pregnant to learn about their chances of having a child with sickle cell disease. Special prenatal care may be needed if a female with the disease becomes pregnant. During pregnancy, the sickle cell anemia can become more severe, with more painful crisis and increase risk for low birth weight babies.

Many people with sickle cell disease can live productive lives and live longer today than in the past by maintaining good healthy lifestyle habits which includes:

- Eating healthy (Folic Acid daily to help the make new red blood cells)

- Drinking at least eight glasses of water every day

- Avoid extremes heat and cold

- Stress reduction

- Avoid traveling in airplanes where the cabin is not pressurized (no extra oxygen is pumped into the cabin)

- Learn the signs and symptoms of stroke

- Yearly flu shot and other required vaccinations to prevent infections

- Regular visit to the dentist and the eye doctor

- Prevention of other medical condition such as diabetes

- Regular exercise

- Getting enough sleep and rest

- Limiting the amount of alcohol intake

- Quit smoking

Along with lifestyle modification, a sickle cell crisis can be prevented by early reporting of any sign of infection to the healthcare provider for timely intervention.

For more information:

- Sickle Cell Disease Association of America
- Kids’ Health: Sickle Cell Disease
- National Institutes of Health

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An African Finds Peace in Europe

By Elizabeth Dickinson

In her first moments with the reader, Oge is seated on a train, moving cautiously towards its destination, with passengers moving in and out of stale railway carriage seats, entering and exiting, minimising with each passing station.

Oge was born in the Nigerian city of Enugu, but the reader finds her as a young woman living far from home, in Belgium. The environment is new, unexpected, and lonely. “Everything here is different,” the narrator says in the opening pages of Chika Unigwe’s *The Phoenix*. “I had expected it but the magnitude of the difference still unsettles me.”

Emotionally, intimately and immediately, *The Phoenix* captures what it means to be a stranger—both to others and to ourselves. Oge came to Europe after marrying a Belgian man working in Nigeria. His voice, a voice she felt she could trust when the pair met in Nigeria, seduced her heart and soul.

Her parents, devout Catholics, were sad but proud to see her move to Belgium’s cathedral-dotted landscape.

Author Chika Unigwe

Oge met Belgium with excitement and fear. Her relationship with her husband Gunter is beautiful and simple at first. He appreciates her beauty, her laugh, and the novelty with which she greets everything in Europe.

But Oge soon realizes just how alone she is. She marvels that even her laugh, and the novelty with which she greets everything in Europe, is not the debtor nation.”

Obstacles to organizing around immigration reform and other issues occur because Africans in the U.S. come from different countries that still have close ties with their colonial benefactors, ties that sometimes perpetuate division. The UAO not only represents a place where allies organizations can speak to the African immigrant community as a whole, but also a place where Africans themselves can form closer ties.

“If you look at the African immigrant community, we’re the most educated but the least recognized because we come here as different countries. We’re fragmented, so organizing under one umbrella will help us present our ideas as a group of immigrants to the U.S. government and others,” said Rosemarie M. Tamba, a native of Sierra Leone who works in Chicago as a nurse.

Organizers said all African immigrants enter the U.S. with a visa, although one-in-three are here on expired documentation. Mexican immigrants often enter the U.S. without a visa simply by crossing the Mexican border, they said.

“Dr. Ousman Kobo, a professor at Ohio State University, “They were not, and their policies are not human-oriented. Their policies are to stimulate the economy of the donor nation, not the debtor nation.”

“Mr. Kabba. “The Mexican and the African are a little different from Africans, in that they come here as different countries. But in terms of the immigration issue, we share the same story,” said Mr. Kabba. “The Mexican and the African are subject to be deported and separated from their family.”

Speakers said many Africans would prefer to return but are prevented because of civil wars, few economic opportunities and other obstacles. Some have been here so long many ties to home have been lost. Dr. Dalindo Sulamoyo, a Malawi national who is a member of the Illinois Association of Community Action Agencies, told the audience Africa suffers from extensive “brain drain”—20,000 scholars leave the continent annually—and put too much trust in international finance agencies. He said professionals abroad must offer training to their counterparts at home, wealthy countries must pledge not to recruit talent from developing countries and the continent must be made safer and attractive for Africans who want to return. “The mistake that we make is thinking that the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank were created to help Africa,” added

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Her parents, devout Catholics, were sad but proud to see her move to Belgian’s cathedral-dotted landscape. Though Oge’s situation is particular, Chika Unigwe makes it one to which the reader can easily relate. Ms. Unigwe’s writing gives Oge’s memories a rich taste of every sense. So it is not a surprise that her salvation comes from Nigeria, the very community of Enugu, but the reader finds her as a young woman living far from home, in Belgium. The environment is new, unexpected, and lonely. “Everything here is different,” the narrator says in the opening pages of Chika Unigwe’s *The Phoenix*. “I had expected it but the magnitude of the difference still unsettles me.”

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