

Virginity on sale over the counter

Herbal soap will restore virginity, according to advertisers

By Caroline Somanje, Malawi

IT used to be that African women were deluged with advertisements for skin lightening creams, products that made their traditional short and curly hair longer and smoother and others that promised instant beauty and a return to the era of "Sweet Sixteen".

Now, in these days of HIV/Aids, they must also fork out money in the attempt to achieve the biologically impossible task of remaining permanent virgins. While governments, non-governmental organisations and churches are investing heavily in championing abstinence as the one certain way to contain HIV/Aids, Malawi has just been slapped with a new challenge — an influx of "sexually satisfying" products being advertised daily in local newspapers.

Key among these products is the "virginity soap" guaranteed to bring back virginity come hell or high water. The adverts practically challenge women to indulge in sex, lose their "virginity" and be assured of buying it right back — as long as they are willing to dig deep into their pockets to achieve this miracle. One of the better known adverts reads: "Argussy herbal soap, enriched with herbal extracts for cleansing the most sensitive area of a woman without leaving residue. Protects against irritations, bacteria, yeast and fungi that cause inflammation, itching, burning sensation and unpleasant odour. Tightens the vaginal muscle, giving a satisfying sexual experience."

Medical experts in Malawi have raised concerns about this soap and its claims to restore virginity, which some consider outlandish. Wyn Chalira, head of the medicine inspection department at the Malawi Pharmacy, Medicines and Poisons Board, describes the advertisement as exaggerated and a disingenuous marketing strategy.

Says Chalira: Although there is no cause for alarm in its use, the claims that the soap can tighten vaginal muscles is misleading. There is no scientific basis for such claims. It is the same as ordinary soap and contains some of the usual ingredients such as glycerine and mineral water."

The "virginity soap", according to the label, is made in France and distributed locally by the Kenya-

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{ SPORT SPECIAL }



AIMING HIGH: The Black Queens were a vastly improved side in the women's soccer world cup.

Ghana's Black Queens march against all odds

By Audrey Dekalu, Ghana

THEIR hearts in the right place and little else to go by, Ghana's Black Queens kicked their way to the fourth Fifa Women's World Cup held from September to October in the United States. It was a heart-warming experience for a nation numbed by the trail of dismal performances by the men's national team, the Black Stars.

But, just as in their maiden attempt, the Black Queens did not make it past the preliminary

stages. They did register their first World Cup victory, though, when they beat Australia 2-1 in their final Group D match, courtesy of skipper Alberta Sackey's two goals. The team lost 0-1 to group favourites China in the opening match and went down 0-2 to less fancied Russia.

It was a vast improvement on their showing four years ago. Then they were hammered 7-0 by China, drew 1-1 with Australia and lost 0-2 to Sweden.

What ails the Queens? Despite the fact that they are very promising, the Queens have never re-

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Virginity on sale over the counter

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based Prime Touch. A bar costs 800 kwacha (about US\$8) and weighs about eight grammes. Prime Touch's regional representative, Daniel Kuria, says the soap contains extracts of various plants and insists that it does exactly what it promises. Though he does not give further details on the sales or evidence of those who have benefited, he adds: "The soap has helped and is still assisting a lot of people. There is no miracle guaranteed, however. Sometimes it requires to be used over a reasonable period of time."

Charles Dzamalala, medical director of the National Cancer Registry, is worried however that the prolonged use of chemicals can lead to side effects such as nausea, rashes, dizziness and even the possibility of cancer. "What is even more alarming is the generalisation of 'herbal' without clearly indicating each ingredient. As doctors, we require that openness so that we are aware of their reactions and give the right information to the public."

People should be made aware that cancers develop slowly, says Dzamalala, who is also a consultant pathologist at the Malawi College of Medicine. He adds: "It takes about five to 10 years from the time a product is used for cancer to develop and it is sometimes difficult to associate a particular product with the disease."

The Pharmacy, Medicines and Poisons Board appeared unaware of the product until alerted by journalists, raising questions about the organisation's vigilance. Now scientists such as Dzamalala and Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital dermatologist Levi Mwale are asking for further investigations by the Malawi Bureau of Standards.

Despite medical concerns, the "virginity soap" continues to enjoy the benefits of a liberalised economy and plenty of advertisement in the newspapers. Kuria denies that his product is harmful or carcinogenic, adding that it has been tested and balanced to prevent the destruction of essential bacteria that are naturally present in women's reproductive organs.

Why women should risk their health and invest their money on a product that is virtually unproven remains an open-ended question. The so-called virginity soap and other products are not unique to Malawi, neither is the obsession with products that promise everlasting youth, beauty and perfection. According to the *Economist*, "rich, modern men and women" spend \$160 billion a year on beauty products.

Some of this goes into facelifts, surgery to enhance or reduce breasts, nose jobs and even drugs to enhance performance in sports — all things that are hard to legislate against or control as long as those involved are adults.

Despite several bans on cosmetics considered dangerous, for example, the Kenyan government has never been able to keep such products entirely out of the market. They may go into hiding for a while but are soon back on the shelves — and due to public demand.

Prime Touch also distributes breast firming and enlarging gels, a slimming detox kit, a cream that smoothens out acne and pimples and a men's gel that "sorts out men's sexual dysfunction".

NIGERIA

Churches in crisis as widows step into pulpits

By Tinu Odugbemi

NKECHI Anayo-Iloputaife is in a pensive mood. These are trying times for Nigeria's Pentecostal Christian community, which is growing increasingly uneasy with the number of widows taking over the running of their husband's churches.

When she set off the trend upon the death of her husband Hartford, who was president and general overseer of the Lagos-based Victory Christian Centre, many members of the congregation quit in protest. Even the man she thought she could depend on to run the church resigned despite her pleas. The Christian community, the media and virtually anyone who had an interest in leadership and religion joined in the debate over whether or not it was the right step — both biblically and culturally.

Nearly seven years later, the debate refuses to die. Not that it has stopped women from rising to the challenge: at least five other women have followed in Anayo-Iloputaife's footsteps. But Nigerians are asking the key question: Should the church be seen as a family business?

Africawoman went in search of the woman who started it all. The preacher, who took over leadership four months after the death of her husband on February 9, 1995, has a strong sense of mission. She was also injured in the attack at their home, during which her husband, a vocal critic of the Sani Abacha regime, was shot at close range in the head and chest. She believes her life was spared so she could carry on her husband's work. Besides, she refuses to let his killers abort his dream.

She says: "My husband invested years of preparation in me from the first day of the ministry. The training was rigorous and I was involved in everything. If my husband travelled outside the city or country, even for weeks, I was in charge. It would have been unreasonable for anyone to take the ministry off me because I am a woman. None of the ministers with me when my husband died came before me. They met me there. I raised them, taught them in our Bible School. I was ordained before them and I never reported to any of them. If I was vice-president, then it stands to reason that I should have taken over."

A good number of Nigerians found her convincing. Victory Christian Centre has grown from eight branches to 16 since she took over. And Anayo-Iloputaife has been joined in the business of winning souls by fellow widows Margaret Idahosa, Victoria Morenike Balogun, Abosede David-Yesu, Dele Ijagbulu and Sarah Omaku. Ijagbulu,

David-Yesu and Balogun eased themselves into leadership quietly but Idahosa and Omaku had elaborate ordination ceremonies.

The most recent was that of 43-year-old Omaku, whose husband died in the United States earlier this year after a long battle with cancer. On May 18, less than two months after his burial, his widow was ordained in a colourful ceremony led by the even more colourful US evangelist Creflo Dollar. Until her ordination, Omaku was a journalist working for the Christian Broadcasting Network.

A senior official of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, Moses Iloh, sees nothing wrong with a widow inheriting her husband's church, if the man had "confidence in her ability, maturity and comportment for leadership, coupled with a high degree of patience, tolerance and resilience".

He adds: "If he then dies, it is not a matter of a right that she should take over, but the church membership will have been more

"Every pastor's wife must assess her stand with God, her managerial skills and experience and her acceptance within the church before attempting to head it"

than convinced that she fits into the leadership position and it would come naturally. If she was reduced to just taking care of women and children and she was only tagging along while her husband was around, she should not try to take over. It is not something she is inheriting by marriage and it is unacceptable."

David-Yesu of the Light of Salvation Gospel Church confesses to having confined her activities to managing women's affairs while her husband was in charge. She says she had, however, been "called by God" to take over the leadership of the church in July 2001 — eight months before her husband died in February 2002. According to David-Yesu, God used the first three months to prepare her for the future. Shortly after, her husband fell ill and eventually died.

"Every pastor's wife must assess her stand with God, her managerial skills and experience and her acceptance within the church before attempting to head it," she says. "A church is like any other organisation, yet it is different. If a woman — or even a man — does not hear the call but dabbles in it, she may fumble and stumble along the way."

She invited a male pastor to join her even though her husband had presented her to

the church as his successor. Balogun has a different story: she says she founded her church but had to hide behind her husband if the ministry was to gain acceptance. When he died, it was relatively easy for her to take over the administration of the church.

Whatever the virtues of the women preachers, their path to leadership has exposed the lack of management structures in many independent churches. Clearly, there are no organisational charts or succession plans. Says Funmi Amuwa, a Lagos businesswoman: "Things are done at the whims of the founders/leaders. Accounts are not rendered. The followers are cowed into silence. When they query anything, they are said to be rebelling against God and may incur a curse from either the leader or God."

Iloh is even more candid: he says many leaders do not make succession arrangements because "they either feel they are too young to die or that they will live forever". Many churches are managed as sole proprietor businesses, which he describes as "one-man shows" or "me and my family/wife ministry".

Balogun appears to be doing well. She has acquired a permanent site for her church and publishes books and newsletters. Idahosa's Church of God Mission International has been granted a licence to start a private university. But Iloh is sceptical: "The churches are doing well, but the women are not. Many of them have lost control and depend on the men around them, who are actually the church managers. They are mere figure-heads."

These women mean many things to their followers. They are given titles such as "Mummy" and "Mother in Israel" and their followers look up to them for spiritual guidance and practical needs such as food. Stanley Egbochukwu, director of Business Day Newspapers, is an elder in Anayo-Iloputaife's Victory Christian Centre. He argues that women heads make a difference in their churches and are more innovative. He says: "They organise more welfare-oriented programmes. They pay particular attention to family and marriage. They care for widows and orphans. They have beautiful children's churches, creches and schools."

Idahosa turned 60 on July 27, 2003. In a fulsome tribute by her church published in the *Guardian*, Joseph Bienose, a bishop in the national office, wrote: "This man we call Maamah, you were not afraid to walk the road ... You broke the manacles, shackles and bonds holding the woman and the female minister in perpetual bondage and subjugation. You dare to give voice to the aspirations of the woman in all generations."

**Take a fresh look at
life in Africa**



Language dilemma as Tanzania opens up to the world

By Jamillah Mwanjisi,
Tanzania

University of Dar es Salaam law student Sylvia Bahame is Tanzania's new beauty queen. Though some had reservations about her taking the title, there is consensus that she was the best of the 26 contestants — if not necessarily the most beautiful. That accolade rightly belonged to Nargis Mohamed, whom virtually everyone had put their money on. The trouble with Mohamed was simple: she may have been taller and slimmer, but she could not speak English well and failed to answer the critical question that would separate the commoners from the queen.

"Yes, she was beautiful and had a good figure but she could not speak one proper sentence in English," says Rose Lungu, a beauty contest fan. "How could she represent Tanzania in the Miss World pageant? Bahame is smart. She is educated. She speaks perfect English."

Even though Tanzania is the home of Kiswahili, which has just been declared one of the African Union's official languages, it is English that is increasingly considered the measure of one's education. Children in Tanzania's public schools start learning English as a subject in standard three, at the age of 10. Kiswahili is the medium of instruction in public primary schools. The situation is reversed in secondary schools, with Kiswahili becoming the medium of communication in official matters only. By this time, however, most children have difficulty with speaking English fluently.

The need for fluency has been brought home graphically to Tanzanians, however. Be it in the media, marketing, banking or hotel industries, people who can speak English fluently stand a better chance of landing a good job. This has set off a chain reaction, with parents paying through the nose for their children to attend private schools that teach in English. Some send their children to boarding schools in neighbouring Uganda and Kenya and as far away as Zimbabwe, believing that this will give their children an advantage when it comes to job hunting.

"My entire salary is going into paying my son's



THE CRITICAL TEST: Nargis Mohamed had trouble answering questions in English.

One question only and the beauty queen lost her crown

school fees," says Abel Ngapemba. "But I don't regret it because I know he is getting a good education that will help him in future." Ngapemba has to take on extra work to supplement his income. Private primary schools here charge between Sh200,000 and Sh600,000 (US\$200 to 600) per term. This can only widen the gap between the rich and the poor, creating a vicious cycle of poverty for the majority of Tanzanians who live on less than a dollar a day.

A study done by Kuleana, a non-governmental organisation that advocates children's rights, shows that many of the gains of the 1970s and 1980s — driven by policies and campaigns for better education — have been eroded by growing demands. Children fortunate enough to go to school face low quality education, over-

crowded classrooms, poor teaching, lack of books and deteriorating structures.

Researchers and academics argue that Tanzania's poor education system and the place of English in it have had a bigger impact on society than has been acknowledged. Says John Kiango, acting director of the Institute of Kiswahili Research, which promotes the use of the language: "We don't have inventors in Tanzania, but this does not mean we don't have educated people. We do, but we can't apply the theory to help us create new things. We learn theories in English but we don't understand them enough. It is impossible to apply and use the knowledge."

It is estimated that between 50 million and 80 million Africans speak Kiswahili. Most of them live in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some southern African refugees who lived in eastern Africa in the 1970s and 1980s took the language back home to Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia. In Oman, Kiswahili is the second most common language after Arabic, from which it draws significantly.

Kiango and his institution see no reason why Kiswahili should be dropped as a medium of instruction in schools. Using the more familiar language will help children learn and understand the subjects better so they can apply that knowledge effectively, he says. "English and French should be taught, but properly, with qualified teachers and teaching aids,"

he adds. "We can't have it any other way."

He points to countries such as Japan and Finland, where tuition is conducted in local languages — and which have benefited tremendously from local inventions that have gone global. Why can't we be proud of our language, which is spoken by more than 90 percent of the population? Why should we continue embarrassing ourselves like the beauty queen, who crammed the answer to the question but, even then, failed to say it the right way?

Minister for Education Joseph Mungai is adamant that English is here to stay as the language of instruction in secondary schools. If that is so, why not apply the policy across the board then, from kindergarten to the highest possible level?

EDITORIAL

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Virginity at a premium, but at what cost?

From Malawi comes the news of the “virginity soap”. If it sounds like a mirage, it is because that is exactly what it is. But that has not stopped the firm that is marketing it. Neither has it gone bust, so we can only assume that someone somewhere is keeping Prime Touch in business.

It bears repeating: women cannot hope to restore their virginity after their first sexual experience. Period. With that off our chests, we can analyse the whole concept of “virginity” and why women should feel compelled to spend at least US\$8 on a small bar of soap that offers to “tighten vaginal muscles, giving a satisfying sexual experience”.

The virginity fad is sweeping right across the continent. Fuelled by fears arising from the HIV/Aids pandemic, the return to virgin ways movement is not necessarily a bad thing. Girls are being encouraged to remain chaste until they marry, with rewards and certificates on offer in countries as varied as South Africa, Swaziland, Ghana and Zimbabwe.

Yet there is an element of double standards even here: the focus appears to be on girls, who would traditionally not even be as sexually adventurous as boys. We have a situation where girls are subjected to the indignity of having their private parts probed by strangers in the name of checking their status; there is no equivalent for boys. How this will safeguard the next generation against HIV is open to conjecture.

The pre-occupation with virginity gets even more ominous. In some parts of Africa, there is a belief that having sex with a minor will cure men of Aids or, at least, ensure that their ever-younger “partners” will not have been infected yet. This has translated into horrendous assaults on infants by men old enough to be their fathers and grandfathers.

Now we can only assume that the older women are fighting back. If it is virgins they want, goes the thinking, they will get them. Not too long ago, it was an outbreak of “dry sex”. Women would insert herbal concoctions, some of the ingredients even said to have been corrosive, to ensure maximum pleasure for their men. While it is remotely possible that the women could get some form of satisfaction themselves, the whole business is designed essentially for the benefit of their men. Indeed, women often suffer some form of injury or another due to the lack of lubrication.

At one level, it might be possible to explain why women would want to hang on to their men: a man who does not stray may mean they can avoid HIV infection, a pandemic that has been fuelled in Africa largely by men. At another level, it is saddening to see women reduced to such a pathetic situation as to resort to spending money on useless commodities in the hope that they can reverse nature over and over again.

And that is precisely where the problem lies: according to medics, the so-called claims to tighten vaginal muscles are one big hoax. The soap is nothing more than that - just a common soap which may not even stand up to the “herbal” test.

In that sense, it joins a myriad other products, conveniently targeting women, which claim to restore our skins to the “fair and lovely” standards of our youth. African women invest huge sums of money on skin lighteners on the understanding that the whiter you are the closer you are to the international beauty standards that are reinforced time and again by beauty contests. The fact that they could be ingesting slow acting poisons that will cause internal damage is of no consequence.

Even men have joined women in worshipping beauty and perfection, never mind the fact that some of the products they are spending huge sums on are little more than basic concoctions at best and pure poison at worst. There is little difference between the woman who spends money on the slimming belt, the facelift or breast-enhancement and the woman who buys the “virginity soap”. The worst part of it is that there is little that we can do to stop adults hell bent on a destructive - or at least wasteful and humiliating - course of action.

POINT OF VIEW

It's a stark choice for Africans

By Wezi Ng'ona, Malawi

Two decades into public sector reforms in Africa, poverty remains as deeply rooted in rural areas as ever, says the Economic Commission for Africa. Most countries have deep pockets of chronically impoverished families due to poor planning. Worse still, this poverty is handed down across the generations, according to the organisation's economic report for 2003.

As in several countries, including Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia, up to 80 percent of Malawi's population lives on less than a dollar a day and cannot afford basic needs. Not that these depressing statistics are enough to shake the political leaders of Africa: On September 27, President Bakili Muluzi shocked the nation when he coughed up enough money to send all football fans to cheer the national team in a match against Zimbabwe in Blantyre.

Muluzi paid up to US\$22,000 to the Football Association of Malawi to enable fans enter Chichiri Stadium free of charge to watch the first leg of the international match. Two days later, a tree snapped and fell on pupils learning under a tree in the capital, Lilongwe, killing two girls on the spot and injuring seven others. There was a resounding silence in the presidential quarters.

Children in many of Malawi's primary schools continue to learn under trees because there are not enough classrooms to cater for pupils enrolled under universal free primary education.

A week after, second vice-president Chakufwa Chihana made a valiant effort to outshine his boss. When a group of people visited him to remind him of a promise to get them jobs, he bought them crate upon crate of beer so they could stop worrying and make merry. They eventually sobered up enough to complain to the Press.

Human rights activists responded with a volley of criticism, accusing African governments of lacking vision and policies to combat the continent's chronic poverty and hunger and HIV/Aids. Leaders, they argue, focus on appeasing sections of the community in order to gain political mileage.

Seodi White, lawyer and national coordinator of the Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Trust, says: “It is high time African leaders learnt to respond to people's needs. For example, although we know that HIV/Aids has no cure, it can

be prevented. But how can Africa prevent HIV/aids if the funds are misused or misallocated?”

Makoko Chirwa, executive director of Women's Voice in Malawi, is even more critical: Muluzi's money would have served a better purpose, she says, had it been spent on constructing classrooms and buying drugs for the sick. “See what is happening in hospitals. People are dying because there is no medicine. The money our leaders are spending on football matches and beer could be channelled into easing the plight of those living with Aids by buying anti-retrovirals.”

Unemployment is rampant in this country, leading to a rise in crime rates and poorer households. Rather than a systematic policy approach, though, the president and his men prefer the charity approach, saying every so often that political leaders “need to wear a human face” by giving handouts to the poor. “Who are you to tell me to stop helping people?” Muluzi is fond of asking rhetorically. “I will continue supporting beggars and those in dire poverty.”

Children in many of Malawi's primary schools continue to learn under trees because there are not enough classrooms to cater for pupils enrolled under universal free primary education.

But there are those who dismiss such sentiments as a placebo rather than a cure. Not even the new generation of African leaders can escape such accusations, says Emmie Chanika of the Civil Liberty Committee. “Look at what is happening in Africa: politicians who were fighting against slavery and dictatorship have now turned into dictators.”

Through the taxes they pay, Africa's women are paying for posh cars for politicians, yet they themselves cannot afford food and other basic necessities for their children. African leaders' priorities are often questionable: the

Zimbabwean government raised millions of local dollars to charter a plane to send the national football team to Mali after the squad missed a connecting flight.

The same country hosted the “Miss Malaika” beauty pageant, with the information minister in the forefront of fundraising campaigns for the event — and this is in a country facing a political and human rights crisis. Nigeria preferred to put its money in the All Africa Games rather than in alleviating the suffering of women in oil-producing communities despite a high profile “hostage” campaign that made international news.

The choice for Africa is stark — either bring to heel leaders who do not stick to their election pledges and instead turn themselves into demigods or face yet more generations of people languishing in poverty, disease and ignorance.



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ZIMBABWE

Subsidies undercut African farmers

By Sibongile Ncube

COTTON is king in the remote village of Gokwe. It is the mainstay of this rural community living 400 kilometres southwest of Harare. Cotton pays for education, food and medical care; it also helps build roads, boreholes and other infrastructure.

Back in the days when exports meant something, production expanded to include the majority of local farmers and Gokwe was flush with money. Sithembile Dube continues to produce 25 bales of high-grade cotton every season, oblivious of the trade talks on heavy cotton subsidies that have steadily eroded the international prices of the crop. The 45-year-old mother of six has been working the land for ever-diminishing prices — thanks to the manoeuvres of the developed world, led by the United States, that have created an unfair playing ground for Africa's agricultural exports.

The collapse of cotton prices on the world market — they have dropped 54 percent since the mid-1990s — threatens the existence of communities such as Gokwe. "The prices are too low for us to make a decent living and give our children all that they need, such as school

fees and uniforms," says Dube. "We can't meet all these needs."

According to labour statistics issued by the World Bank and other institutions, 42 percent of the economically active population involved in agriculture in Africa is female. But the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) suggests that women's role is underestimated since there is a tendency to register women in farming households as housewives even when they carry out a wide range of productive activities over and above their domestic chores.

Farming subsidies and agricultural protectionism have been the thorniest issues in negotiations leading up to the proposed new round of global talks to remove trade barriers and liberalise the agricultural industry.

Crop subsidies have been blamed for historical lows in various crops prices on the world market as sellers outside America depress their prices in order to match the subsidised bids from US farmers.

Subsidies have further depressed agricultural activity in southern Africa, where most farmers export beef, cotton, maize, coffee and wheat to markets within the European Union. But why are farming subsidies such an issue?

Phasing out trade barriers on agricultural products has left some developing countries vulnerable to dumping even as the West maintains its subsidies and protects its farmers. The subsidies are meant to keep producer prices low and benefit consumers down the line, but the US regularly uses them to shelter less efficient domestic producers from foreign competition.

With Africa suffering multiple burdens such as food insecurity and reduced capacity to utilise the continent's agricultural systems, an integrated response from governments in the developing world and the industrialised nations is required if the continent is to forge ahead. Most African economies depend on agriculture, and the Agreement on Agriculture is not in the best interests of local farmers.

Women provide 80 percent of the labour force on those farms. Farming employs some 70 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's workforce and generates an average 30 percent of the region's domestic product. Yet rural Africans are among the poorest people in the world.

Doing away with farming subsidies in the developing world and Africa in particular would mean leaving the majority of women farmers to manage on their own



CASH CROP: The collapse of cotton prices on the world market threatens livelihoods in rural Africa.

when their counterparts in the developed world continue to get them would not make sense.

In the past three years, the US has provided an additional US\$26 billion to its 900,000 farmers; it has also promised to pay an additional US\$170 billion in the next 10 years under the new Farm Bill. It is against this backdrop that the anti-subsidy demonstrations took centre stage at the WTO meeting, where a Korean farmer stabbed himself to death to demonstrate the negative impact of subsidies on farmers in the developing world.

Because they are powerless to face this unfair competition, says Eddie Mwenje of the National University of Science and Technology, subsistence farmers like Dube have suffered depressed prices and high costs of production, resulting in

loss of income.

US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick has repeatedly told the media that the US is not doing anything illegal but simply taking advantage of the limits set in the WTO agreement.

"If you want us to change, sit down at the table with us," he told the United Nations publication *Africa Recovery*.

With production in much of Africa hampered by poor soils, erratic rainfall and acute under-investment in rural infrastructure and inputs, farmers do not stand a chance of excelling on the world market.

If Africa is to keep pace with modern technology, governments must come up with new farming systems that are farmer-led to help improve agricultural outputs.

By Ruth Omukhang'o

IT is two o'clock and Milka Njeri is sitting on an old sack in one of Nairobi's back streets. She keeps an eye on the neat pile of vegetables and fruits before her, patiently waiting for customers to arrive. There is an awful stench from the public toilet across the street and the muddy puddles, but Njeri takes it all in her stride.

All she cares about at this moment is being positioned strategically to catch the flow of workers leaving their offices to go home. "It will take me only a short time to sell all my vegetables, then I can leave for home too," she smiles, glancing at four-year-old Evans, who accompanies her on these daily tours of duty.

Njeri, a single mother of three, is looking to make an average Sh1,000 a day (about US\$12.8), which should be enough to pay her rent and feed the family.

Even though it will be two hours or so before the customers arrive, fellow hawkers have already lined up their merchandise on both sides of the street, leaving enough space for the buyers to pass through as they pick whatever they need. It is all here, from electrical gadgets to

The cat and mouse games over — but for how long?

KENYA

vegetables and clothes.

For women like Njeri, being in this part of town has its virtues: they will not be harassed by Nairobi City Council officials. The former civil servant was retrenched about four years ago and she chose to invest her meagre retirement package in petty trade. Before relocating to this street, along with 6,000 others who were thrown out of the central business district, it was a hectic life trying to close a sale and playing hide-and-seek with the council officials. "I lost a lot of money in the old days," she says. "I had to bribe the officials in order to continue selling or risk ending up in their smelly, dark cells."

When the National Rainbow Coalition government came to power earlier this year, it promised to restore Nairobi to its former glory as the "City in the Sun". This

should have brought it into direct conflict with the masses of hawkers who had invaded even the central business district, forcing pedestrians out of the pavements and into the roads and leaving mounds of rubbish behind them when they left for the night. As in many African countries, where hawkers do not have permanent sales sites, the city was filled with all manner of moveable items, adding to the never-ending traffic jams and compromising the security of residents.

The new government's move to relocate the hawkers to the back streets and alleys initially met stiff resistance from petty traders afraid that no one would venture into streets where their security was not guaranteed. But city residents applauded the directive and the move was made.

Despite a long history of clashes between town and city authorities in Kenya, there has never been a policy to legalise and govern infor-

mal trading activities. There is no framework to facilitate dialogue between local government and vendors, even though an ever rising number of Kenyans have been pushed into the informal sector by high unemployment and an economy growing at no more than two percent in recent years.

Says 45-year-old Esther Wanjiku: "The trick is to choose a busy street and build a solid customer base. I used to know all my customers by name and I would even deliver what they needed to them at work."

With the relocation downtown, she has had to start from scratch. Hawkers anxious to keep their businesses going have now resorted to making their own security arrangements in order to lure customers to the streets and alleys east of the city centre that once had the unsavoury reputation of death and violence traps. The hawkers have pooled resources to ensure that no one is harassed and that

there is some lighting being brought to the alleys by arrangement with the city council.

But while the hawkers are quietly optimistic that they will be able to work out a healthy relationship with city authorities, credit remains a major problem because of the uncertain nature of their locality. The women have formed small units of five to 10 members, popularly known as merry-go-rounds, through which they save money "for a rainy day" on a daily basis.

Jane Nyambura, who once suffered a broken arm in a skirmish with council officials, is just grateful that she has a sort of permanent base from which to work and that the cat and mouse games with the officials are finally over.

According to City Director of Social Services and Housing Benson Gachuhi, the council ultimately hopes to build big markets close to the city centre where the hawkers will be expected to move. The only problem so far is the familiar chorus from African administrators: this dream will only come to pass when funds become available. Nairobi residents can't help wondering how long the cosy relations between these perennial "enemies" will last.

ZIMBABWE

Caring for sick and dying: who should pick up bill?

By Margaret Kirunda

HOME-BASED care has been touted as the most amazing intervention in the care of people living with Aids. It reputedly has the amazing ability to cut costs while ensuring quality care and support for the sick. What we don't hear of is its negative impact on the lives of women as the primary home caregivers. Now comes the truth: as the Aids pandemic rages on, thousands of women caring for the sick and dying are virtually trapped under the enormous burden of home-based care.

Home-based care is extremely demanding, meaning that women cannot carry out any economic activities while caring for the sick. Consequently, home-based carers have been made even poorer through loss of income. Tombizodwa Revesayi, care coordinator at the Midlands Aids Service Organisation, says: "I have seen many women who used to engage in the lucrative cross-border trade become poorer and poorer because they are stuck at home caring for a sick relative."

Taking care of a terminally ill person is a 24-hour job seven days a week and should not be trivi-

alised, she adds. Zimbabwean women are losing between two to five years of their economic and social life to home-based care. What this has meant in real terms is that all the gains made through the economic empowerment initiatives in the UN Women's Decade are rapidly being eroded.

In rural Zimbabwe, home-based care has led to women farmers, who perform 70 percent of farming work, reducing the amount of land under cultivation. Management standards have dropped significantly and homesteads are losing prized livestock. There is less money for buying inputs.

Because of the high costs of caring for the sick at home, rural households are pushed into slaughtering and selling livestock, sometimes even including heifers. Women who were self-reliant only five years ago are now living on charity and food donations from non-governmental organisations and neighbours. How can home-based care be cost effective when it is women who are picking up the bills?

Besides making women poorer, home-based care has a great physical and psychological impact on women. They can expect to suffer

burn out with no relief. "Taking care of the ill is very stressful for the woman and if she is not well herself, this could lead to the rapid deterioration of her own health," says Viola George of the Matabeleland Aids Council based in Zimbabwe's second city, Bulawayo. When under pressure, she says, women tend to postpone their personal needs to provide critical care for their family.

Under normal circumstances, women would probably carry the burden of care without complaint. But we are dealing with a pandemic and, as it progresses, many people become bed-ridden. In the high-density suburb of Mkoba in Gweru, which is about 280 kilometres south of Harare, one out of three households has at least a family member living with HIV/Aids.

Who decreed that nursing the sick must be the responsibility of women? The national aids policy certainly does not say whose responsibility it is to care for the ailing. The relevant section vaguely refers to what ought to happen to a person living with HIV/Aids. It is this lack of clarity that has misled Zimbabweans into believing that it is women's sole responsibility to carry the burden of care. Says

George: "Women tend to feel that taking care of the ill at home is their responsibility because that is what society expects of them. Men tend to take advantage of them and do not play their part. In most instances, the man is usually there as a mere observer."

This attitude angers Daniel Mandondo, chief executive officer of the Family Counselling Trust in Mutare, 263 kilometres east of Harare, who told *Africanwoman*: "We can't have women doing this alone. With the increased workload, men have to start being seriously involved in caring for the sick." Fact has recruited six male volunteers for its home-based care programme.

Women carers have cause to worry about the risk of getting infected, says Daniel Motsatsing of the Botswana Network of Aids Service Organisations.

"The risk of infection is there, especially among the elderly who view using gloves on their child as tantamount to shunning them," he says.

It is not only the elderly who are affected. Martha Dube, a student at a local university, says she could not wear gloves, even when washing soiled linen, because she feared it would offend her mother.

ZAMBIA

This pill will only hurt women

By Grace Zulu

MORE than any other group, Zambian women have paid an inordinately high price for the country's debt burden arising from loans totalling US\$7.2 billion taken out between 1960 and the 1980s.

The debt has meant that the government has cut its commitments in areas such as health, sanitation, water and education. Due to the massive debt repayment, 80 percent of Zambia's population of 10.5 million, the majority of them women, live in poverty.

One of the most pressing needs for women is water, which is currently not available to 20% of the population. Women must travel long distances to fetch water, but the government is unable to allocate any more funding for such projects because it is tied up with its commitments to the international lending community.

Jubilee-Zambia, hosted by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection is campaigning for cancellation of the country's debt, says Zambian women have borne the brunt of the cuts in budget allocations. Charity Musamba, the debt project coordinator at Jubilee-Zambia, says the poverty reduction strategy was allocated 420 billion kwacha (\$870 million) in this year's budget but only 110 billion kwacha (\$23 million) released.

According to Jubilee-Zambia, debt servicing deprives women of the chances of a better life because the government can't implement programmes meant to boost their status. Even where women are the majority and most vulnerable, their needs are unlikely to be taken into consideration.

Despite full privatisation of nearly all of Zambia's parastatals and massive job losses as the government struggles to appease the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Paris Club, the country is unlikely to make much progress without debt relief.

Women have been forced into the streets in an attempt to bridge the shortfall in family incomes: some have resorted to commercial sex, according to Musamba.

She adds: "The government has continued to service its debt because it hopes to remain in the good books of the creditors. What they don't realise is that the debtor-creditor relationship always comes with conditions. These policies have had a negative effect on women, and this is why Jubilee-Zambia is campaigning for total debt cancellation."

MALAWI

No more excuses, Muluzi told

By Pilirani Semu-Banda

WITH Malawi's third multi-party elections set for May 2004, women's lobby groups have already started jockeying for positions — their aim to edge closer to the Southern Africa Development Community target of at least 33 percent women's representation in leadership and decision-making by 2005.

The women are pointing to the fact that the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development was signed by heads of state and government during a meeting in Blantyre as good enough reason for Malawi to take clear steps to achieve the target. The fact that President Bakili Muluzi was the SADC chair at the time makes the campaign a personal challenge as far as the lobbyists are concerned.

Right now, they are pretty angry with him for what they see as an attempt to abandon a project he committed himself to with pomp and fanfare. The controversy kicked off when he was asked to say how he would ensure that Malawi attained the target before the deadline. Mu-

luzi responded that there was not much he could do because he was limited by the law.

Since 1993, he said, he had been demanding that — as in Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe — the constitution should empower him to nominate 20 Members of Parliament from special interest groups, including women. "You have denied me that right, and what I am saying is that we should revisit that provision to let me have the power to nominate MPs," he said. "We will then have more women."

The opposition and civil society have dismissed this on the grounds that it would amount to returning to the one-party state of the 30 years between 1964 and 1994. They are in turn accusing Muluzi of flimsy excuses to justify his government's failure to empower women in line with SADC commitments.

Ngeyi Kanyongolo, chairperson of the Women Lawyers' Association, says empowering women involves more than just nomination to parliament; the president also has powers to appoint them to positions such as Cabinet ministers,

diplomats and board members in parastatals. "There is no excuse because the president has the discretion to appoint women to all other posts but MPs," Kanyongolo adds.

Tinyade Kachika of Women and Law in Southern Africa is "sceptical of the criteria the president would be using if he were given such powers. We can't leave everything in the hands of the president."

She says affirmative action should begin at party level, with a percentage of posts dedicated to women through party primary elections to pave the way for them to contest parliamentary polls.

The opposition Malawi Congress Party's legal adviser, Edwin Banda, argues that Muluzi would only use such powers to appease a few women rather than empower women in general. What is required, he suggests, is a deliberate policy on promoting women, which he considers to be totalling lacking right now.

Malawi is far off the regional target. National Gender Director, Isabel Matenje, says the country has achieved only 8.8 percent repre-

sentation of women in politics. The public service sector has fared no better at 9.62 percent. Malawi has only 16 women MPs out of 193, four ministers out of 31 and four deputy ministers out of 15. There are only four women chairs of parastatal boards out of 44. A progress report by the ministry of gender says there are three women heading diplomatic missions out of 17 and five principal secretaries out of 52.

Kethusegile-Juru, the technical adviser on gender at the SADC secretariat in Gaborone, Botswana, says women are not fairly represented in decision-making positions in most African countries. "There is some progress, but still a lot to be done," she says.

So far, only South Africa and Mozambique have attained the target. Mauritius is hard on their heels with 31.6 percent. Rwanda has just joined the elite club of countries that have set their sights on equal representation: in its October election, 39 women were elected to the 80-member parliament, bringing the country up to standards set in Scandinavia.

By Rebecca Kwei

ON a bright Monday morning, a woman confidently reported for work as a secretary in a law firm. Before the day was over, her boss had wiped the smile off her face: he pinched her bottom when she took some documents into his office. He stroked her breast the next day. Each day brought new forms of manhandling. She objected without fail. When she went to his office on Friday with his files, he told her to sit on his lap. She would not. She asked him whether that was why he had employed her. He told her to just give in. She collected her bag and went home instead.

This is the story of a woman interviewed during a survey of sexual harassment in Ghana by the African Women Lawyers Association (AWLA). Going out to work or school presents a major challenge for many women: they must contend with unwelcome and inappropriate touching, suggestive comments and lewd and risqué remarks — all of it unendurable.

Sexual harassment is a pervasive problem across the globe, cutting across the lines of income, class and culture. Though there is no empirical data and statistics on the extent of sexual harassment in

GHANA

Unwanted, unwelcome and most annoying

Ghana, anecdotal evidence suggests that it is widespread though it goes unreported. The only case to go public in the country's history came in 1999, when the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice ruled that the managing director of Fan Airways was guilty of sexually harassing a former employee. He sacked her when she refused to give in to his sexual demands.

AWLA's survey, which involved 440 workers and 349 students, indicated that the majority of Ghanaian women in the formal workplace and academic environment experience one form or another of sexual harassment. Predictably, the majority of the harassers are men and most of the harassment involves comments on physical appearance.

Said one of the respondents: "Instead of just saying 'you look sharp', they will make very per-

sonal comments like 'hey, look at your buttocks! Aren't they getting big!' or 'hey, look at your breasts!' Sometimes your colleagues and supervisors will pat your bottom. If you try to be principled and object, you are ridiculed."

While the majority of the respondents said sexual harassment had no effect on their productivity, they nonetheless suggested that severe consequences could occur if they resisted sexual harassment. Some of the reactions include victimisation, marginalisation, delayed promotion, sabotage, transfer and dismissal. Some respondents also said their experience of sexual harassment had led to loss of concentration and interest, low academic performance and other unforeseen effects.

"I keep my distance from male colleagues now because I don't want to risk any misinterpreta-

tion," said a woman who had been harassed by her former director. "I do not accept invitations to lunch or anything. It has affected me socially and made for a very uncomfortable work environment."

Even if women were to report the matter, they would get little relief since few African countries have sexual harassment policies. They could also face a "her word against his" situation. Where someone in management believed her report, she could still come up against the belief that it is "no big deal".

The situation is very different in developed countries. *Awake* magazine reports that a US jury awarded a young secretary, Rena Weeks, \$50,000 in compensation for her emotional distress plus \$225,000 in punitive damages from her former boss. And that was not all. The jury ordered the firm Weeks worked for to pay \$6.9 million for failing to

solve the problem.

Says Ato Dapatem: "Sexual harassment is a serious issue, especially in closed-in offices and stringent laws should be put in place to stop it. By our upbringing, people believe women are there just for men's pleasure; women themselves also feel shy about reporting harassment. I don't buy into the idea that the dresses some women wear leads to their being harassed."

Ken Attafuah, executive secretary of the National Reconciliation Commission, argues that those who believe they have been subjected to sexual harassment have a responsibility to protect themselves and stop it happening to others.

Human rights activists in Africa often face the criticism that they have imported foreign ideas from the West. It is a view that Betty Mould-Iddrisu, chairperson of AWLA, does not agree with. Sexual harassment is a human rights abuse, she says, and there is need for advocacy to drive the point home. But to many others, no amount of awareness, court cases and hefty awards is going to eliminate sexual harassment. What is required is a "change of heart". How to achieve that should keep all women and men of goodwill busy for quite some time.

There's everything in a name

By Lifaqane Nare

IT all began with an ordinary woman in Harare who got tired of her government's hypocrisy. When Violet Mutyamaenzi went to the Harare registry to record the birth of her newborn, she was told she had the wrong surname. How could the surname she had used all her life suddenly be wrong, Mutyamaenzi wondered?

Women in Zimbabwe are up in arms over officials in registration offices forcing them to change to their husbands' surnames before they can be given new documentation such as passports and birth certificates for their children.

What's in a name? Everything, say the women caught up in this dilemma. They have now come together to serve the Government with a class action suit to stop its officials from forcing married

women to change their surnames as a condition for getting identification documents. The suit, currently in the High Court, has been made with the help of the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association. The group was formed in response to a rise in domestic violence and other forms of abuse of women. There is no law in this country that protects women from abuse and discrimination.

Emilia Muchawa, the director of the association, says the government has no legal justification for this kind of discrimination against women. "As far as we are concerned, there is no law that requires women to change their surnames against their will," she adds. "This is an administrative requirement that male registry officials are turning into law."

The law smacks of the colonial undertones that categorised black

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women as perpetual children who never achieved the age of majority. The African woman could presumably not handle anything without the man in her life being there to vouch for her and act as her guardian — be it brother, son, husband or father.

In an interesting case, a man signed an affidavit stating that he did not want his wife to use his surname. Did the registry officials care? No, the woman still had to change her surname. Despite all the conventions they have signed to end discrimination against women, many African countries continue to short change women. Despite all the teas and lurches that have been eaten in the name of women's equality and all the speeches made at campaign rallies against domestic violence, little or

nothing has changed. Why should the campaign against domestic violence not be turned into a political gimmick, after all? Women comprise more than half the voters in many countries and it is only prudent to make the right noises in their direction.

In cases where there are laws, there is no mechanism to ensure that it is followed. According to Wozani Moyo, a lawyer with the ZWLA, the law allows a woman to retain her maiden surname but falls short of protecting women from overzealous registry officials.

"Provisions of Section 10c of the National Registration Amendment regulations of 1979 do not compel women with registered marriages to change their surnames to those of their husbands if they do not wish to do so," she says. "This administrative requirement is totally unconstitutional because it treats

women as second class citizens and denies them the right to express themselves."

In most African traditions, the question of surnames does not even arise: married women are either identified by reference to their homes or clans of origin or by their fathers' or children's names. In Muslim culture, women have the right to retain their original surnames if they should choose to do so. Moreover, many women prefer to keep one surname for professional purposes. Whether they choose to go with two names, three names or even a multiple choice scenario, women have the right to decide what they will respond to. No one, not even officious bureaucrats in government offices, should be allowed to take away women's right to an identity of their choice. It's time for women to join Mutyamaenzi and say "No".



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It's not just a piece of leather

Football helps boost girls' confidence and determination to succeed

By Kwamboka Oyaro

ABOUT 200 schoolgirls in an assortment of football gear are running around a pitch in the hot afternoon sun in Kilifi on the Kenyan coast. The warm-up has been slow-paced but this is the real thing and the competition is keen. The pitch erupts in excitement as a goal seems to be in the offing.

The girls are part of a project started three years ago by the British Council with the intention of empowering girls in a region where early marriage is the norm and academic excellence is not considered too important. Grinding poverty and lack of female role models have also contributed to the poor performance in national examinations.

The largely Islamic community here requires that girls maintain a certain decorum in dressing and soccer gear — or “men’s clothes” —

are just some of the challenges the teams had to deal with before the project could take off.

“We told concerned parents that their daughters could wear skirts,” says Sarah Forde, of the Moving the Goalposts project. “They had no problem after that.”

The girls have since undergone a transformation of sorts, gaining the confidence to speak up in public and also to articulate their rights. “When people tell me not to play a man’s game, I ask them why they think a girl’s work is just domestic chores,” says Elipina Kadzo of Fumbini Primary School. “Girls have a right to do what they like doing. They can also become international stars like David Beckham.”

The teams prepare rigorously for the girls’ annual tournament. Each of the 10 or so participating schools presents two teams — the junior and senior, covering lower primary (up to 10-years-old) and upper pri-

KENYA

mary (12 and above). This year, the championship was held at the Kilifi Institute of Agriculture football pitch.

Winning a match may be exciting, but the girls are just as intent on building their confidence and power. When Katikiriene beats Fumbini through a post-match penalty after finishing 1-1, Fumbini’s disappointment is momentary and soon they are singing victory songs as hard as everyone else on the pitch. Being number two is not so bad, and next time they may just take the trophy home.

Football’s greatest appeal is that it can give power to children, girls as much as boys, says Brandi Chastain, a US football star who has become a role model for millions of girls. Football boosts girls’ self esteem, making them understand that they have a chance to be “pow-

erful and strong, and that those are perfectly fine qualities for a woman. They learn to explore themselves through football”.

Chastain says: “It is only within the set-up of a football team that girls can be told that it is okay to be afraid — afraid to fail or afraid to succeed. It’s important for young people to know that, and to know that they can successfully overcome the fears that may otherwise hold them back.”

Apart from honing their competitive instincts, football also encourages girls to be physically active as a lifelong habit that enhances physical and mental well being.

These days, Kadzo and her teammates find it much easier to organise their time. “I don’t want my mother to get an excuse to deny me the chance to play, so I wake up early each day and finish my chores before the other girls,” says Lauzi Mwalaa.

Fatuma Kauli speaks of her standard four classmate who died giving birth. “A teacher cheated her and she slept with him,” she confides. “Now she is dead.”

Members of the team are lucky to benefit from the sex education that has been turned into a major political issue in this country. During intervals, they are taught about HIV/Aids and other social problems. Here, sex is spoken about freely through drama.

At South Africa’s Athlone High, the girls’ soccer team captain, 12-year-old Gayna Fritz, speaks of how football has given girls a boost in confidence. There is a story of the determination to succeed. When the team was formed in 2002, the girls had no coach or equipment. But they motivated each other and were able to beat all the teams that challenged them. “If we set our minds to something, we can achieve our goals,” she says.

Black Queens fight way to the world finals

From Page 1

ceived enough funding to ensure adequate training. A few days to the world tournament, the managers were compelled to launch an appeal for funds. The response was remarkably low. But even the very fact that they had to do so was an insult in itself. Before then, they had organised a series of road shows and some friendly matches to boost their meagre kitty, but there was little to show for their efforts.

In contrast, the government doled out more than US\$26,000 to be paid to the Black Stars as bonuses in their “must-win” African Cup of Nations qualifier against the Cranes of Uganda in Kumasi in June. The Stars could manage only a 1-1 draw. They were promised close to 40 million cedis each should they win the return leg of their encounter with Rwanda in July in Kigali. Alas, the money remained safely in the government’s coffers.

Fuming after Ghana was kicked out of the World Cup, “grandma” Sackey (34) lashed out at officials of the Ghana Football Association, describing them as ineffective and inefficient and lacking what it takes to transform the game. “All they are interested in is interfering in issues which fall outside their domain,” she told *Africawoman*, apparently referring to alleged interference with Coach Oko Aryee’s training programme in the US.

Sackey — who has been in volleyball, basketball and handball

and only turned to football when she broke her arm — has rescinded an earlier decision to retire and has offered to help the team qualify for the Olympic Games in Athens next year.

Despite the lack of support from the government, the women footballers have been rewarded amply by football: Sackey, Adjoa Bayor, Kulu Yahaya, Baselia Amoah-Tetteh and defender Elizabeth Baido are all on scholarships at the Robert Morris University in Chicago and Belinda Kanda is at the University of Ghana. The six-foot tall Mimi Osei-Agyemang, daughter of an old footballer and now a business tycoon in the US, is a fresh graduate of the Columbia Medical School.

The rest of the 18 members of the squad barely have junior secondary education and look up to soccer as their sole vehicle to financial success. Women’s soccer is still in its infancy in Ghana, however, and it is only at international competitions like the World Cup that they can hope to get any cash.

Deputy Minister for Education, Youth and Sports Joe Aggrey, a veteran sports journalist and avid critic of former sports authorities, now reckons that more money needs to be pumped into revitalising the sport. “After what I saw in America, I am more than convinced that women’s football has a future in Ghana and we need to pay more attention to it,” he says.

Aggrey argues that the government cannot possibly shoulder the



RAISED EXPECTATIONS: Despite its potential, women's soccer is still considered a "fringe" game in Africa.

costs of any sport, at best being able to provide some money for international competition. But the Ghana Football Association can make women’s soccer more attractive by securing corporate sponsorship to run a regional league as a certain means of throwing the net further to embrace more talent. It is a proposal that was first made by Emmanuel Kwesi Afranie, head coach of the 1999 World Cup squad, after a humiliating first round exit. But little came of it. The women’s soccer league takes place only in Accra, Kumasi, Sunyani and Takoradi — all major towns.

The Queens remain the only Ghanaian team to have participated in a prestigious international event — something that has eluded the Black Stars since independence in 1957.

They were on the verge of winning the African Women’s Cup for the first time early this year in Warri, Nigeria, after beating the host and bitterest rival by a lone goal in the preliminaries but eventually losing to the same side 0-2 in the final match.

That performance — particularly from Sackey and goalkeeper Memunatu Abiba Sulemana, who is rated third best in the world —

raised expectations that the Queens would at least scale the first round at the world event.

“They would have done better had they been given the needed push to play more friendly matches before the tournament,” said Nana Gyamfua, who was getting ready to leave for greener pastures in the US. “Most of my colleagues are young mothers with no jobs and no education. For them to put up this performance was commendable.”

The principal loser in the rise and rise of women’s soccer is netball, which has died out completely as women set their sights on the more lucrative game. Not that the authorities seem to care enough to invest more in women’s soccer.

To be fair to the Black Stars, they won the African Cup of Nations four times. But it is a feat that has been equalled by Egypt and Cameroon. Their attempts to book a place in the World Cup have borne no fruit, making it even harder to explain why the football association will not put its money where its mouth is — with the Queens.



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