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# Africa Renewal



United Nations  
Department  
of Public  
Information

**SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT**

**A path to  
a cleaner,  
productive  
future**

*Africa Renewal at 25*



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Formerly 'Africa Recovery'



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Africa is losing 4 million hectares of forest every year, twice the world's average deforestation rate.

Redux / REA / Gilles Rolle

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A child walks to gather water near Mbale, Uganda. Panos / Sven Torfinn

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# Africa Renewal at 25: keeping up with a dynamic continent



## UN magazine devoted to Africa's progress

 **By Kingsley Ighobor**

**T**wo *Africa Emergency* debut newsletters, neatly kept in the New York offices of the UN magazine *Africa Renewal*, provide a snapshot of Africa in 1985. That was before the internet, when many newsrooms were noisy with the clacking of typewriter keys. The 16-page newsletter was printed in black and white, except for the *Emergency* on the masthead, which appeared in green.

Fast-forward to 2012. *Africa Renewal* is published in English and French, with about 40,000 copies of each edition distributed worldwide. All pages are semi-glossy and in full colour. The magazine's website — [www.un.org/africarenewal](http://www.un.org/africarenewal) — attracts 60,000

monthly visitors on average. Nearly 20,000 follow its Facebook and Twitter pages.

There is a sombre feel to the first edition of the old newsletter, which appeared in April 1985 and was a predecessor of *Africa Renewal*. Two cover photos feature a total of 15 people, all with grim faces. One is of Julius Nyerere, the late Tanzanian president, whose exclusive interview featured in the edition. The stories are mostly on drought and famine: Africa was facing a severe humanitarian crisis, and the newsletter was part of the international relief operation.

The UN had set up the Office of Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA) to coordinate humanitarian efforts after drought began in Ethiopia and spread to 20 African countries. It was a “massive famine, the worst ever in African history,” recalls Salim Lone, who worked as an editor under *Africa Emergency's* editor-in-chief, Djibril Diallo. The OEOA's newsletter aimed to

*Africa Renewal then and now: The first issue of Africa Recovery, and the first colour edition of Africa Renewal.*

 Africa Renewal / John Gillespie

present complicated issues in a language that anyone could understand. “It gave information that people were not used to getting from the UN: easy to read, easy to understand.” (See page 5)

### From emergency to recovery

The evolution of the publication reflects the trajectory of the continent. As the drought receded and it became increasingly clear that the real challenge was promoting Africa's long-term economic and social development — its “recovery” — the UN closed the OEOA and the General Assembly held a special session on African development.

But since the *Africa Emergency* newsletter had developed good links with the media, governments, non-governmental organizations and others,

many thought it would be useful to have a similar publication. As a result, *Africa Recovery* was launched in 1987.

An editor's note in the first issue, in April 1987, explained the new magazine's outlook: "Clearly emergency is no longer the continent's prime concern," wrote Mr. Lone, who stayed on as editor. "The focus will now be on the continent's recovery and development efforts."

### Readership strategy

Over time *Africa Recovery* began to resemble a magazine more than a newsletter: additional pages, with a dominant feature story and other articles on a range of topics. Initially stories were mainly on economic, social and humanitarian issues. As a publication of the UN, which is composed of governments, it was difficult for the magazine to deal with "sensitive" political issues such as coups and rights abuses. "It was more acceptable to deal with other things," recalls Ernest Harsch, who first joined the magazine in 1989 and became managing editor in 2001. Besides, it was fruitless to try competing with the mainstream media in chasing breaking news stories.

More notably, adds Mr. Harsch, *Africa Recovery* was not interested in the kind of "sexy" stories favoured by the major media, which tended to dwell on famines, disasters, wars and other topics that sensationalized the negative aspects of Africa's complex reality. Instead, the magazine concentrated on Africa's challenges and the very real efforts made by Africans and their partners to improve people's lives.

The magazine was able to get a good slice of the African elite audience, particularly the media, decision-makers in government, academics, civil society activists and so on. It was "a breath of fresh air," Mr. Harsch remembers, "and it worked well for us."

As African countries moved towards greater democracy in the 1990s, political topics became easier to cover as well.

In 2004 the magazine's name changed to *Africa Renewal*. In a message to readers, former under-secretaries-general Shashi Tharoor (communications and public information) and Ibrahim Gambari (the Secretary-General's special adviser on Africa) justified the new name: "Most countries [in Africa] now have democratically elected governments.... African leaders have devised a forward-looking plan, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)."

They continued: "By changing its name to *Africa Renewal*, the publication seeks to identify itself more squarely with Africa's new dynamic of initiative and rebirth."

The magazine continued to expand its coverage of Africa's development agenda, highlighting the work of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, NEPAD and the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, among others. When NEPAD marked its 10th anniversary in 2011, *Africa Renewal* set up a web page on the celebrations. The magazine has printed special editions on children, HIV/AIDS and women, as well as pamphlets, flyers and other information materials.

### Modernization agenda

The internet and mobile communications technologies now make multiple sources of information readily available to readers, notes Margaret Novicki, chief of the Communications Campaigns Service of the UN's Department of Public Information. Consequently, she says, "*Africa Renewal* must go with the flow."

Parvati Heather McPheeters, who created the magazine's first website in early 1997, says that at the time "the goal was to give access to a few more readers, by dozens, not thousands."

The current website has impressed Ms. McPheeters, who left the magazine in 2006. "I am gratified I had been part of setting up the infrastructure."

The current editor-in-chief, Masimba Tafirenyika, joined the team in 2009 and has been pushing to ensure that "we are not left behind in a changing world." According to Mr. Tafirenyika, "We were behind the time with a black-and-white publication. We needed to change our style, layout and content. We want our publication to stand out." While the expenses of full-colour publishing were once prohibitive, advances in technology now mean that the costs of a colour magazine are not so different from those of a black-and-white publication.

One of Mr. Tafirenyika's first goals was to broaden the magazine's appeal. "It is important to appeal to the youth, women, civil society and others." To accomplish that, "our writing style has to be less academic and more accessible. The layout must be appealing and our choice of stories must be dynamic — in line with changes in society."

Writers, editors and other colleagues jumped with joy in August 2010 when the first colour, semi-glossy pages were printed. "It was a milestone moment for the magazine. I was very proud of the team," says Ms. Novicki.

Information and communications technologies are advancing rapidly, and the magazine is ready to plug in. "As internet connectivity and mobile access improve, especially in Africa, we would like to be able to deliver our products in various formats and for different platforms, including on tablets," says Mr. Tafirenyika.

In addition, relationships with more than 250 different English and French online and print publications, mostly in Africa, ensure that *Africa Renewal's* articles are reprinted and

## INTERVIEW

# Looking back after 25 years

Interview with founding editor Salim Lone

**S**alim Lone, who edited *Africa Recovery* during its first decade, looks back at the magazine's early days. At his home in Nairobi, Kenya, he spoke with *Africa Renewal's* managing editor, Ernest Harsch.

**Africa Renewal** *Africa Recovery* was a UN publication, about Africa. Did you report about what the UN was doing there?

**Salim Lone** We didn't have that much about the UN in *Africa Recovery*. If it did something important, then obviously we covered it, but it wasn't all about the UN. There would be no interest in that.

**AR** How different was the general media landscape back in the 1980s and 1990s, compared with today?

**SL** Dramatically different. For example, broadcast media was entirely under the control of governments, in every African country.

that they reach a wide and diverse audience.

### Commendations

Independent appraisals in 1991 and 1994 found reader satisfaction well above 70 per cent. In a survey of *Africa Renewal's* online readership last year, 91 per cent of respondents said that they understood Africa's priority issues more after visiting the website.

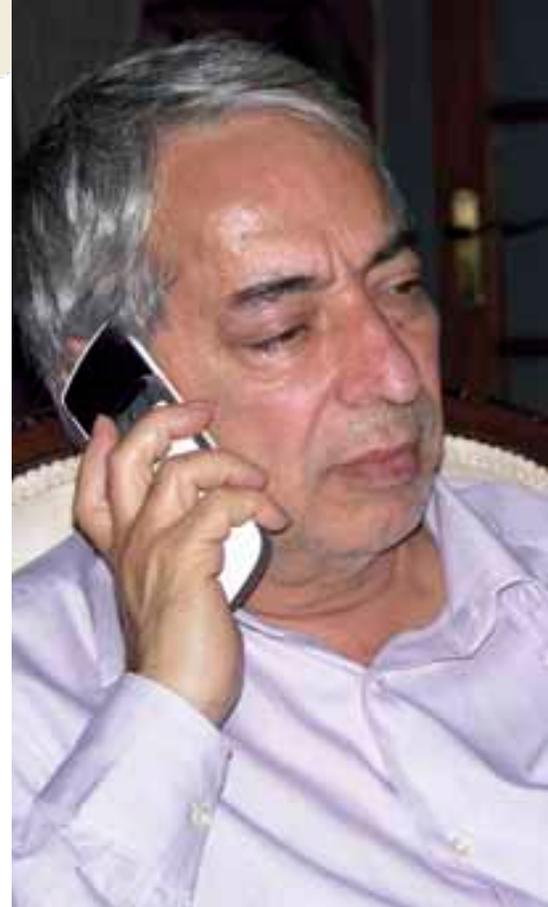
And there were rigid controls over the print media. The amount of self-censorship, triggered by the repression directed at editors and journalists, was immense.

That was one of the reasons that we undertook a number of journalists tours [to Africa]. We requested the *New York Times*, *Economist*, *Financial Times*, others, to send their journalists on UN-sponsored tours dealing not with development in the abstract, but what was really happening at the grassroots. The coverage was excellent. If the media culture in our African countries had been stronger, you would not have needed to bring journalists to Tanzania, Ghana, Senegal. It also helped open up Africa, African leaders in particular, to the Western world. For the media, apart from the magazine, we also had special mailings or supplements, with graphs and charts that the media could republish.

**AR** In hindsight, what did *Africa Recovery* do best, what might it have done better?

**SL** We knew from the responses we had that senior people were actually reading *Africa Recovery*. In Tanzania, the personal adviser to President Nyerere told me that Mwalimu

The August-September 2011 issue of *Udvikling*, a respected Danish development publication, rated *Africa Renewal* as one of eight "foreign high-quality magazines" that provide "vision and perspective on global development." The others included the London-based *Economist* and the US magazines *Foreign Affairs* and *National Geographic*. Referring to *Africa Renewal*, the Danish publication said that "very few



Salim Lone, the first editor of *Africa Recovery*, at his home in Kenya.

 Africa Renewal / Ernest Harsch

[Nyerere] himself would go through it. A number of US senators also wrote letters to us, just to compliment. There was so much more we could have done. But we had no resources. We had a very small staff.

**AR** What about *Africa Renewal* today?

**SL** I realize how completely it has changed, to reflect the debates and developments that take place now. That's fabulous. 🌍

international publications can match the way this quarterly magazine covers Africa in many ways."

As *Africa Renewal* celebrates its 25th anniversary, Ms. Novicki cautions that "although the magazine has already achieved a lot there is still work to be done. We can't rest on our laurels." For Mr. Tafirenyika and his team, there is only one way to go — forward. 🌍

# Malian women create beauty — and profit



*After the bazin fabrics are dyed, they are hung out to dry.*

 Redux / Contrasto / Riccardo Venturi

but sometimes silk or wool — from Germany, the Netherlands or China. Then they cut it to standard sizes. Next they knot tissues tightly into parts of the fabric so that those parts remain undyed when the cloth is dipped into buckets of pigment and fixative. When the fabric emerges it bears coloured spirals, rings or patterns. So it will have a glittering appearance, it is then soaked in a starch solution and hung on fences to dry.

“To hand-dye a bazin takes a lot of real effort,” says Djénéba Diarra, who lives in Badalabougou West, the neighbourhood in Mali’s capital famous for high-quality dyeing.

Maureen Gosling, a US filmmaker, is collaborating with Maxine Downs, an anthropologist, to produce a film on bazin called *Bamako Chic: Threads of Power, Colour and Culture*. According to Ms. Downs, they want to show how “self-empowered African women turned their artistic creativity and resourcefulness into a force for alleviating their own poverty.”

Ms. Downs visited Mali several times to meet some of the women in the burgeoning industry. “When I went to Mali, I was shocked by the women’s resilience, their ability to create something out of nothing. I was instantly impacted by the amount of cloth dyers that I saw,” she told *Africa Renewal*.

Maliens have historically been good at making fabric and used to compete with Yorubas in Nigeria. In the 1960s, when synthetic dyes arrived in West Africa,

## Hand-dyed fabrics win praises, capture markets

 **By Kingsley Ighobor** and **Aissata Haidara**

**H**and-dyed polished cotton — called *bazin* — is the mainstay of Malian fashion. The blind singers Amadou Bagayoko and Mariam Doumbia extolled the fabric in a song released in 2005, “Beaux dimanches” (“Beautiful Sundays”). The song’s scintillating lyrics include the lines: “Sunday in Bamako is the

wedding day / Men and women put on their best boubous / The bazins are waiting for you / This is the wedding day.” It became the hit song on an album that won two prestigious British Broadcasting Corporation awards the following year, including one for best “world music” album.

There is an engaging paradox in two blind people singing about the beauty of bazin, and the floral patterns and alluring colours that make young women look so elegant that bachelors hastily vow marriage.

### Production process

Hand-dyeing bazin can be labour-intensive for the women who produce it. First they import the fabric — mostly cotton,

Maliens learned how to use colorants on fabrics to reflect their aesthetic tastes. Nigerians have since established a niche for themselves in embroidery, allowing Maliens to claim the bragging rights for high-quality hand-dyed fabrics.

## Growing industry

Bazin, Ms. Downs elaborates, is not just a fashion statement. The women make a profit. And the industry has turned them into a close-knit social group, with a common socio-economic purpose. "It is like a collective enterprise, very communal. The women work with their children, friends and other family members to dye the fabrics. They hang them on their neighbours' fences to dry, turning the whole community into a huge advertisement," she says.

The involvement of textile importers, dye sellers, tailors, bankers and, ultimately, consumers further enlarges the industry. This is good news for a country ranked by the World Bank as one of the poorest in the world. Life expectancy is just 51 years, while the average gross domestic product per person is \$691. The country ranked 175 out of 187 countries in the UN Development Programme's 2011 Human Development Index.

The bazin industry is still informal. There is no registration of those involved, according to Hannah Larsson, who has studied textile dyeing in Mali. However, the entrepreneurial successes of the women depend on micro-loans from non-governmental organizations such as the US-based Freedom from Hunger. The group's Saving for Change programme in Mali, which began in 1989, has so far reached more than 350,000 Malian women, with cumulative financing of nearly \$7.5 million.

Some of those women are in the bazin business, according to Christopher Dunford, a senior research fellow with the NGO. The programme provides affordable credit and saving services, while repayment terms are flexible. To access the loans, Mr. Dunford adds,

groups of women come together to overcome their limited collateral. "They are like joint solidarity groups. They vouch for each other and they jointly repay the loans." The NGO channels all micro-credit support through local credit institutions, which also help organize the women into groups.

## Shaky markets

As good as the business appears today for Malian women, they fear that a moribund indigenous textile industry could hold back progress. Mali's two leading textile companies, Comatex and Batexci, both privately owned, are gasping for breath as they face competition in their own market from cheaper and better products from Europe and Asia.

In addition, depressed world cotton prices have made it difficult for West Africans to compete internationally. Cotton production in Mali declined from 600,000 to 240,000 metric tonnes between 2004 and 2011, and cotton growers are paid as little as 30 cents per kilogramme. Less than 2 per cent of Mali's cotton is processed locally, with the rest exported to developed countries and Asia, where it is processed and resold to dealers, including West Africans.

There are also health and environmental concerns about bazin production. "The women continue to develop respiratory illnesses. They are exposed to sulphur that they use to help colours stick to the fabrics," Ms. Downs notes. The leftover colour baths are discarded in the Niger River, street gutters or soakaway pits in housing areas, causing the "transport of a substantial amount of compounds to surface water and groundwater," Ms. Larsson writes in her study of Malian textile dyeing. The government's environmental agency has had little success in dealing with the environmental impact of hand-dyeing.

## Sub-regional opportunities

As bazin's popularity spreads beyond Mali's borders, the women are

motivated to work even harder. Many are already exporting to countries such as Senegal and Nigeria, and more traders from other countries are coming into Mali to make purchases. "In Mali, you come into the market and you will hear different West African languages," says Ms. Downs.

It makes good business sense to set sights on the enormous West African market of 252 million people. West Africans are proud, traditional dressers. The leaders of Nigeria, Mali, Liberia and other countries often wear traditional attire at official functions, for example. A variety of fabrics and styles feature regularly at weddings, red carpet events and in African films. At the UN General Assembly in October 2011, Mali's Prime Minister Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé was the centre of attention in a flowing bazin.

Increasing demand for bazin has triggered innovation, as Malian women introduce more exotic colours and products of higher quality. But the challenge is that a fast-growing and profitable business may attract people with more interest in profit than quality. "Why can't these women just get machines that will support production?" asks Oumar Damba, a Bamako-based fashion designer.

Not so fast, cautions Ms. Downs. Machine production may affect the unique character of the bazin designs and, perhaps, the style consciousness of the producers. "Since the 1960s, there has been the question of whether the hand-dyeing industry can be modernized. It is hard for me to answer that question," she adds.

As Malian politicians campaigned for the April 2012 presidential election, there also seemed to be a contest over which one could wear the best bazin on billboards, on posters and even in Facebook pages. Meanwhile, Malian women are smiling all the way to the bank. 

# Bid to end subsidy stirs protest in Nigeria

Unrest highlights problems of mismanagement and corruption

 By Yemisi Akinbobola

**N**igerians have never been shy about public protest, even during the days of dictatorship. So when the government of President Goodluck Jonathan welcomed the country into 2012 by announcing the removal of a petrol subsidy — more than doubling costs at the fuel pump — the subsequent nationwide protests could have been anticipated.

With 37.2 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, Nigeria has the second-largest reserves in Africa (after Libya) and is the continent's largest oil producer. Yet Nigeria is the only member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries that needs to import refined fuel, and often suffers scarcities. The ordinary Nigerian by no means feels rich: divided among nearly 160 million people, the gross domestic product (GDP) averages just \$1,695 per person annually.

Prior to the subsidy's removal, the pump price of fuel was 65 naira (\$0.40) per litre, against a landing cost of N139. The government therefore contributed a N73 subsidy, for an annual total of N1,200 billion (US\$7.6 billion), or 2.6 per cent of the country's GDP. In effect since 1973, the subsidy was regarded by a majority of Nigerians as one of the few benefits they enjoyed as citizens of an oil-producing country.



It was therefore not surprising that on 9 January, a week after the announcement of the subsidy's removal, industrial strikes and demonstrations spread nationwide. That reaction prompted the government to bring down the new petrol price from N141 to N97, still higher than the old price but retaining a partial subsidy.

## Reform needed

Despite the widespread condemnation, most economists, both in Nigeria and abroad, believe that removal of the subsidy is a necessary step towards long-needed reform, since the country can no longer sustain the cost.

Political analyst Garba Sani points to the colossal sums spent on the subsidy, N3,700 billion (\$23 billion) in 2006–2011

*With consumer prices already high, many Nigerians protested when the government abruptly announced an end to petrol subsidies, nearly doubling prices at the fuel pump.*

 Panos / George Osodi

alone. As an oil-producing country, he adds, Nigeria should not be importing — and subsidizing — refined oil.

According to Professor Akin Iwayemi, an expert in energy, environment, infrastructure and development economics, government interference in the oil industry has prevented its being “run in a profitable manner.”

A report by Renaissance Capital, a leading investment bank that focuses on emerging markets, argues that

removal of the fuel subsidy, combined with other reforms in the power sector, could increase global investors' interest in the Nigerian market. Potentially, it suggests, Nigeria could become one of the world's top "frontier markets."

### 'Just the spark'

With the experts' positive view of the subsidy removal, why was there so much resistance among ordinary Nigerians? Because of years of anger and discontent with government performance, answers Denja Yaqub, the assistant general secretary of the Nigeria Labour Congress.

"All sectors have problems in Nigeria, so the subsidy removal was just the spark that Nigerians needed," says Mr. Yaqub.

Many point to corruption. In 2011, Transparency International ranked Nigeria as among the 40 most corrupt nations in the world. The oil industry in particular is notoriously corrupt, notes Renaissance Capital.

Despite the promise of the transition from military rule to democracy in 1999, trust also remains a major problem, argues Mr. Sani. Those governing the country seem "incapable of addressing the social and economic injustices that they have inherited."

Nigeria now has democratic structures, adds Mr. Yaqub, but corruption and mismanagement within the legislative bodies mean they do not adequately perform their democratic duties. "They are constitutionally set up to check each other, but they are all behaving the same way: corrupt, undemocratic, irresponsible and absolutely reckless."

This corruption, unaccountability and lack of transparency have now been coupled with the government's apparent inability to tackle increasing religious intolerance, including the attacks of the Islamist sect Boko Haram. All this contributed to the resistance the authorities met when they announced the removal of the fuel subsidy.

### Importance of strategy

While President Jonathan may have had the best of intentions for Nigeria's economic future, observers argue, his government lacked an effective implementation and communication strategy. Subsidy removal may have been the right move, but it was done in the wrong way, and at the wrong time: the country was still recovering from multiple bombings by Boko Haram on Christmas Day.

Mr. Sani argues that it would have been better to remove the subsidy in phases, while at the same time refurbishing the country's four dilapidated oil refineries. Since 2000 the government has spent \$1.78 billion on maintaining the four refineries, with very little to show for it. They operate at less than a quarter of capacity, and are 30 years behind modern standards. Some maintain that the money used on the fuel subsidy could have been better put to building new refineries and thus ending the need to import refined petroleum.

In addition, tackling corruption and mismanagement within the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation would have helped make removal of the subsidy a more acceptable proposition to the populace.

"If they can simultaneously fight [corruption] as well as increase refinery capacity and withdraw the subsidy gradually," says Mr. Sani, "the country would have then set up a solid foundation for a permanent removal of the subsidy, a permanent capability of domestic production and a more stable economy."

According to Thomas Sterner, an expert in environmental economics, getting rid of corruption within the industry may not be easy because of the powerful interests involved. Urban elites directly benefit from the petrol subsidy, he argues, as do smugglers and oil companies such as Oando, which took in \$1.4 billion from the subsidized fuel imports last year.

The next time the government contemplates removing the subsidy, it must be

"more careful," argues Mr. Sterner. "You need to have a strategy, and say, 'We are moving the money immediately. We will use it on health or education or something else.'" That, he says, would make it harder for the beneficiaries of the status quo to say that removing the subsidy hurts the poor.

### Democratic participation

Beyond the subsidy issue as such, political observers have recognized the significance of the mass demonstrations against its removal as an indicator of how far the country has come in terms of democratic participation.

Taiwo Obe, an editor, notes that while Nigerians also protested under the dictatorship, today there are fewer injuries, deaths and arrests. The media is also freer, he adds, with private broadcasters like Channels TV giving extensive coverage to the protests. Ordinary people too are better able to make their voices heard through social media platforms.

Perhaps most significant was the unity among the demonstrators, especially given the reports of increasing religious intolerance. "We all witnessed the fact that the north-south divide was not an issue," observes Mr. Sani. "The Muslim-Christian divide was not an issue. Nothing was an issue other than the issue at hand. Muslims were protecting Christians in their churches, and Christians were protecting Muslims on Friday while they were praying."

And in a sign that the government is moving towards a longer-term strategy to win public acceptance for the subsidy removal, President Jonathan inaugurated the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment (SURE) programme in mid-February. The programme is intended to monitor the funds saved from the subsidy removal and manage their investment in public works projects that may generate 370,000 new jobs, especially jobs for women and youth. 



TWENTY YEARS AGO WORLD LEADERS GATHERED in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for a ground-breaking summit on environment and development. In June 2012, they will meet there again for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, known as “Rio+20.” The stakes for Africa are enormous. In this special series, *Africa Renewal* looks at the key issues that will shape the future Africans want.

# To Rio and beyond: Africa seeks sustainable solutions

Paving the path to “the future we want”

 **By Masimba Tafirenyika**

It is rare for a head of government to be greeted with applause at the very beginning of a speech before the United Nations General Assembly. But that’s what happened last September when Prime Minister Jigmi Thinley of Bhutan took the podium and signalled his intention to talk about “happiness.” The prime minister’s seeming change of subject from the discussion of global crises immediately provoked the audience’s curiosity.

After a brief pause for effect, Mr. Thinley complained that the annual ceremonial debate had become a mournful discussion of promises broken, endless conflicts, depleted resources, new diseases and threats of economic ruin. Instead, the Bhutanese leader preferred to talk about promoting happiness and

well-being as a global objective, with minimum conditions for human survival and development.

It was Bhutan that convinced the UN to adopt a resolution on “Happiness: a holistic approach to development.” The resolution commits nations to create “the necessary political, social and economic conditions to enable the pursuit of happiness by citizens within a stable environment.”

The desire of the prime minister — and of humanity — for a better future will dominate the agenda in June when more than 50,000 people converge on the Brazilian capital, Rio de Janeiro, for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Dubbed “Rio+20” — following a similar conference in the same city 20 years ago — the gathering will give participants a rare opportunity to agree on a new approach for achieving a prosperous and sustainable future.

But what exactly does “sustainable development” mean? The most widely accepted definition was crafted by the Brundtland Commission, which defined it as “development that meets

the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The report of the commission — named after its chairperson, former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland — strongly influenced the debate at the first Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. The leaders at the then biggest-ever political gathering agreed to set up new global standards to stop nations from destroying irreplaceable natural resources and polluting the planet. They accepted that human behaviour had to change to prevent more divided societies, increased poverty and worsened environmental damage.

## **Footing the bill**

As recently noted by *The Economist* magazine, that summit acknowledged “that environmental protection had to be part of the promotion of development rather than a check on it; that poverty eradication was a part of the process; and that while all the world’s nations had a responsibility to protect the environment, rich nations that had done more damage had a different sort of responsibility — one that developing

countries thought should include a willingness to foot some of the bill for keeping development clean.”

What are the pressing issues for Africa at Rio+20? First, let's start with poverty. Nowhere is it more acute than in Africa, where new challenges are giving rise to new diseases, worsening hunger, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, and youth unemployment.

Climate change is another hot-button issue. UN studies show that Africa's climate is warming faster than the global average, significantly compromising its development possibilities. The continent's low capacity to adapt threatens food and water supplies, especially in the Sahel region and in central and southern Africa.

### Green economies

Another pressing issue is the much-talked-about move to green economies, which would emit less carbon and use fewer resources. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the transition to green economies is being “driven by concerns about climate change, air pollution and energy security” and by a desire to create jobs in new industries. Africa fully supports green economies, but is concerned that wealthy nations might use the global transition as an excuse to impose trade restrictions or not to fulfil their commitments to poor countries.

An issue of particular interest to Africa is renewable energy. About 3 billion people on the planet — many of them in Africa — lack access to electricity. They are forced to use wood, coal or other unhealthy materials for cooking or heating homes, which expose them to harmful smoke.

Already some African governments have adopted “smart and forward-looking” energy policies. Kenya has an ambitious green-energy programme to increase the production of energy



from geothermal, wind and bio-fuel power. Uganda is promoting an organic agriculture initiative that has attracted thousands of farmers and increased exports of organic products. Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is pursuing a Sustainable Energy for All initiative and has asked the world to improve energy efficiencies and double the share of renewable energy in the energy mix by 2030.

More than a dozen issues are up for discussion in Rio, including food security, access to clean water, sustainable cities and protection of the environment. African governments have agreed to adopt common positions and to speak with one voice in Rio.

### ‘Economies are teetering’

The challenge in Rio will be to craft measures to ensure that the poor and vulnerable benefit from economic prosperity. To that end, a UN report released early this year has attracted global interest. The report, “Resilient

*Ensuring safe drinking water is a top priority for Africa, since about 340 million people across the continent now lack access to it.*  Africa Media Online / Guy Stubbs

People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing,” is intended to chart a new path to sustainable growth. Unprecedented prosperity, it says, has put the planet under unprecedented stress. It warns that multiple crises across the world have made sustainable development more important than ever.

“Economies are teetering, ecosystems are under siege, and inequality — within and between countries — is soaring,” notes the report, which was compiled by the 22-member High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability appointed by the UN Secretary-General and headed by South African President Jacob Zuma and his Finnish counterpart, Tarja Halonen. The panel blames the current economic crisis on narrow speculative interests that have “superseded

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# Africa's priorities for sustainable development



In preparation for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio, African heads of state and ministers have been meeting on a consensus response. Africa's priority areas — some highlighted below — show a mix of challenges and progress.

## AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION & FOOD SECURITY

Increasing commitments to agricultural productivity

Agriculture employs 60 per cent of Africa's labour force, while three-fifths of farmers work at a subsistence level. Efforts in many African countries to increase agricultural

production have not guaranteed food security. Africa still relies on rain-fed agriculture, making it vulnerable to harsh weather conditions, including climate change. Africa's food insecurity has been further worsened by the threat of rising food prices caused by increased incomes in countries such as China, India and Brazil, the growing use of land for biofuels and the subsidies rich countries offer their own farmers. African leaders need the developed world to increase its commitments to assist agricultural productivity and food security in the continent. They have committed themselves — through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), adopted in July 2003 under the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) — to allocate at least 10 per cent of national budgets to agriculture. They

*Under a sustainable forestry programme, a logger cuts down a tree in the Ndoki rainforest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Slowing deforestation is a high priority in Africa.*  Redux / REA / Gilles Rolle

also aim to boost growth in agricultural production to at least an average 6 per cent a year. Countries, such as Sierra Leone, that have increased budgetary allocations have improved their productivity.

## INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Action to boost manufacturing

Africa's industries — manufacturing, mining and construction — are weak. The sector currently employs only 15 per cent of Africa's workforce. The share of manufactures in Africa's

exports fell from 43 per cent in 2000 to 39 per cent in 2008. Labour-intensive manufacturing such as textiles, fabricated metals, apparel and leather products declined from 23 per cent of all manufacturing in 2000 to 20 per cent in 2009. African leaders in February 2008 adopted a Plan of Action for the Accelerated Industrial Development of Africa. South Africa, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have made improvements.

## WATER

Providing access to safe drinking water

Africa is a dry continent, second only to Australia. Around 340 million Africans have no access to safe drinking water, about 40 per cent of the world's total. Estimates indicate that only 26 out of 54 African countries will meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the percentage of the population without access to safe drinking water by 2015. Uneven water distribution is one problem. Central Africa accounts for 48 per cent of Africa's internal water supply, while North Africa has

only 1.25 per cent. The infrastructure capacity to provide safe water is also uneven: although 90 per cent of people in North Africa have access to safe drinking water, only 61 per cent of people in sub-Saharan Africa do. Gambia and Cape Verde, however, provide clean water to 80 per cent of their populations. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), harvesting rainwater could provide water for half of all Africans.

## HAZARDOUS WASTES

For environmentally sound management

Africa's infrastructure and land use planning are unable to cope with the rapid growth of urban areas (currently 3.5 per cent per year), adding to the discharge of wastes in water and other uncontrolled places. African leaders have asked the international community to support the transfer of knowledge and technology for environmentally sound management of wastes. They also want support to strengthen capacity to control imports and exports of wastes into and within

Africa. Many African countries have met their commitment under the Dakar Declaration to ban leaded gasoline. The International Atomic Energy Agency is helping some countries to safely manage radioactive wastes, especially with the discovery of uranium in a number of African countries. Gambia, Nigeria and Senegal, among others, have started implementing the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals, to help standardize the handling of chemicals.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Protecting an especially vulnerable continent

In Africa climate change is hindering progress towards sustainable development by contributing to reduced rainfall, hotter temperatures, flooding and the spread of water-borne diseases such as cholera. Africa accounts for only 2-3 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions. Africa's biggest contributors are South Africa, Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Nigeria. While it contributes relatively little to global greenhouse gas emissions, Africa's low adaptive capacity makes it more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. If greenhouse gas emissions are not curtailed, scientists agree, average global temperatures could rise 4-5° centigrade within a century, which would be calamitous, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Currently the Horn of Africa is facing its worst drought in over 60 years.

*Jacques Diouf, then director-general of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, addressing a World Food Day ceremony: African countries are pushing to increase agricultural productivity to feed their growing populations.*

FAO / Alessandra Benedetti

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## ENERGY

Enhancing the efficient use of energy resources

Of the 1.4 billion people worldwide without access to energy, 40 per cent are in sub-Saharan Africa. The continent's energy development lags behind the growth of its population and socio-economic needs, according to a NEPAD report. Africa, with 13 per cent of the world's population, produces 7 per cent of global commercial energy, but consumes only 3 per cent of it. "Thus, most of the commercial energy it produces is consumed elsewhere," states NEPAD. In sub-Saharan Africa, traditional fuels, such as firewood, constitute two-thirds of energy consumption. African leaders have endorsed a 10-year programme on sustainable consumption and production to enhance the efficient use of energy resources.

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Africa is the fastest growing tourist destination in the world

About 7.7 million people are employed in Africa's tourism and travel sector, according to the UN World Tourism Organization. In 2004, NEPAD approved a Tourism Action Plan to make Africa the "21st century destination." Most African governments have tourism in their development strategies, including marketing, research and development, and codes of conduct for tourism. There are plans to invest in major projects likely to generate spin-offs and enhance Africa's economic integration. Tourist arrivals in Africa grew 8.8 per cent in 2009-2010, the highest rate for any region. Morocco, Angola, Cape Verde, Madagascar, Egypt and South Africa are recording double-digit growth,

while Tanzania and Mauritius are not far behind. However, tourism slowed in North Africa due to recent political developments.

## GENDER EQUALITY

African women's involvement in politics is increasing

Twenty-nine African countries have ratified the protocol of the African charter promoting women's rights. All but 10 African countries have adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The AU launched in October 2010 the African Women's Decade. In addition 18 of the 28 countries where female genital mutilation was widely practiced have outlawed it, with a goal of totally eliminating it by 2015. African women's involvement in politics is increasing. In 2008 Rwanda elected a majority of women to its lower chamber of parliament, the highest worldwide. Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, was elected in 2005 and then re-elected in 2011. Despite such gains, only 76 girls for every 100 boys are enrolled in colleges and universities in Africa, 91 girls for every 100 boys in primary schools and 79 girls for every 100 boys in secondary schools.

## EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Many countries are on track to achieve universal primary education

Many African countries are on track to achieving the MDG target of universal primary education by 2015. Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and Tanzania have abolished school fees for primary education. However, 30 million children,

mostly girls, still have no access to education and there is an acute need for more trained teachers. At the tertiary levels, enrolment is just 6 per cent, while up to 40 per cent of faculty positions are vacant.

Many African countries face a high prevalence of malaria, HIV/AIDS and non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular ailments. In 2008 Africa accounted for half of the world's 8.8 million child deaths. But there is also good news. Since 1990, under-five mortality in sub-Saharan Africa has declined by 22 per cent. In 2008, some 76 per cent of one-year-olds were immunized against measles, compared to 58 per cent in 1990. Mozambique has achieved a reduction in infant mortality of more than 70 per cent, Malawi of 68 per cent and Niger of 64 per cent. Burundi, Cape Verde and Egypt have also registered impressive progress in reducing infant mortality.

## ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION

Safeguarding forests and natural habitats

Africa is losing 4 million hectares of forest every year, twice the world's average deforestation rate. While deforestation may increase agricultural land, it also leads to only short-lived agricultural productivity as land nutrients are depleted. Approximately 50 per cent of Africa's eco-regions have lost 50 per cent of their areas to degradation, cultivation or urbanization, according to UNEP. Africa still has over 2 million square kilometres of protected areas. Nevertheless, the continent's coastal areas continue to confront problems associated with oil and mineral extraction, uncontrolled fishing, mismanagement of mangrove forests and coastal development. Forest trees are being used to build shelters and for charcoal, destroying the habitats of many species. 

## INTERVIEW



# 'Only our collective voice will be heard'

Interview with  
Kumi Naidoo,  
executive  
director of  
Greenpeace  
International

**F**rom the struggle against apartheid and poverty in his native South Africa, to helping lead Greenpeace, one of the world's foremost environmental advocacy groups, Kumi Naidoo sees less of a difference than a continuum. "An activist is an activist," he explains to *Africa Renewal*. In advance of the June 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development — also known as "Rio+20" — we asked Mr. Naidoo, who became executive director of Greenpeace International in 2009, to reflect on a few of the more pressing issues affecting Africa. (For the full interview, see *Africa Renewal* online.)

**Africa Renewal** Twenty years ago, the first Rio summit emphasized that environmental protection and economic development are complementary, rather than counter-posed priorities. How significant was that shift in perspective?

**Kumi Naidoo** Rio 1992 ended the false dichotomy between environment and development. Governments pledged to make development work for all, including for future generations. This was a breakthrough and remains our real global challenge: to deliver decent lives for all within the



ecological boundaries the planet sets for us.

Key environmental agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing have been agreed since Rio. Last year investments in renewable energies overtook investments in old fossil fuel technologies for the first time.

At Rio [2012] governments must listen to the people, not the polluters, otherwise they are bound to fail the world. It's a very small but powerful group of players who gain from the current destructive status quo that is holding us back.

*Kumi Naidoo, fighting for the environment, development and people's empowerment.*

 Greenpeace

To be credible, Rio+20 must support an energy revolution based on renewable energy and energy efficiency and providing access to energy for all. Governments and businesses must commit to zero deforestation by 2020 and governments must upgrade the UN Environment Programme to specialized agency status.

**AR** Rio+20 will seek to popularize the notion of the "green economy." What might that mean for Africa?



*A solar power panel in Cape Town: Developing South Africa's renewable energy industries could create nearly 150,000 new jobs by 2030.*

 Africa Media Online / Ed Suter

**KN** The fair green economy we want is one that provides sustainable livelihoods for all while fully respecting ecological limits — our planetary boundaries. In a truly green economy, the economy will be a mechanism to deliver societal goals, and economic growth as an end goal in and of itself will be abandoned.

The green economy is not only an opportunity for African countries, but a necessity. Africa is at the frontline of climate change. One can already see the impacts: drought, conflicts in areas such as the Horn of Africa, increased migrations, food security compromised . . . We can no longer sit back and watch it happen.

Climate change can be an opportunity for Africa; it doesn't have to remain a threat. There is huge potential for building new industries across Africa. We are blessed with vast renewable energy sources such as sun and wind. The wealth is simply amazing. In South Africa 149,000 direct jobs could be created by 2030 — 38,000 more than in the current government's plan. That's the kind of decisive action — leading to wins for the planet and the poor alike — that a green economy could deliver.

**AR** Desertification and land degradation are particular concerns in Africa. Are they getting enough attention in international discussions of sustainable development?

**KN** No, they are not given sufficient weight. You can see that when you look at the pitiful budget and capacity of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. Greenpeace calls for sustainable agriculture that

works with the land rather than against it, which avoids degradation. Greenpeace works in the forests — including with indigenous peoples — to show that development is possible without deforestation and degradation. Also without proper governance — land use planning — and regulations and law enforcement, the problem of desertification cannot be addressed properly.

**AR** At international conferences on the environment, African delegates often raise the need for financial support to help them adapt and change. Do you see this happening?

**KN** Social and environmental protection needs additional money, and it is high time governments provide it. Developed countries have indeed broken many aid promises. That is shameful, especially when you consider how much money they could easily find when they decided they needed to bail out their greedy banks.

**AR** Can Africa become more than a bystander in the international discussions on climate change?

**KN** The tragedy about this whole issue for somebody like me — coming from Africa — is that the people who are least responsible for climate chaos are the ones who are paying the first and the most brutal price. Climate change in Africa is contributing to the creation of more deserts, starvation and water scarcity.

Our continent needs to take leadership in the international negotiations, nationally and regionally. Our political leaders need to understand and accept that other nations' actions will impact their own people at home, and they need to be clear and not compromise our right to a future.

**AR** How can global management of the environment be strengthened?

**see page 19**

## INTERVIEW



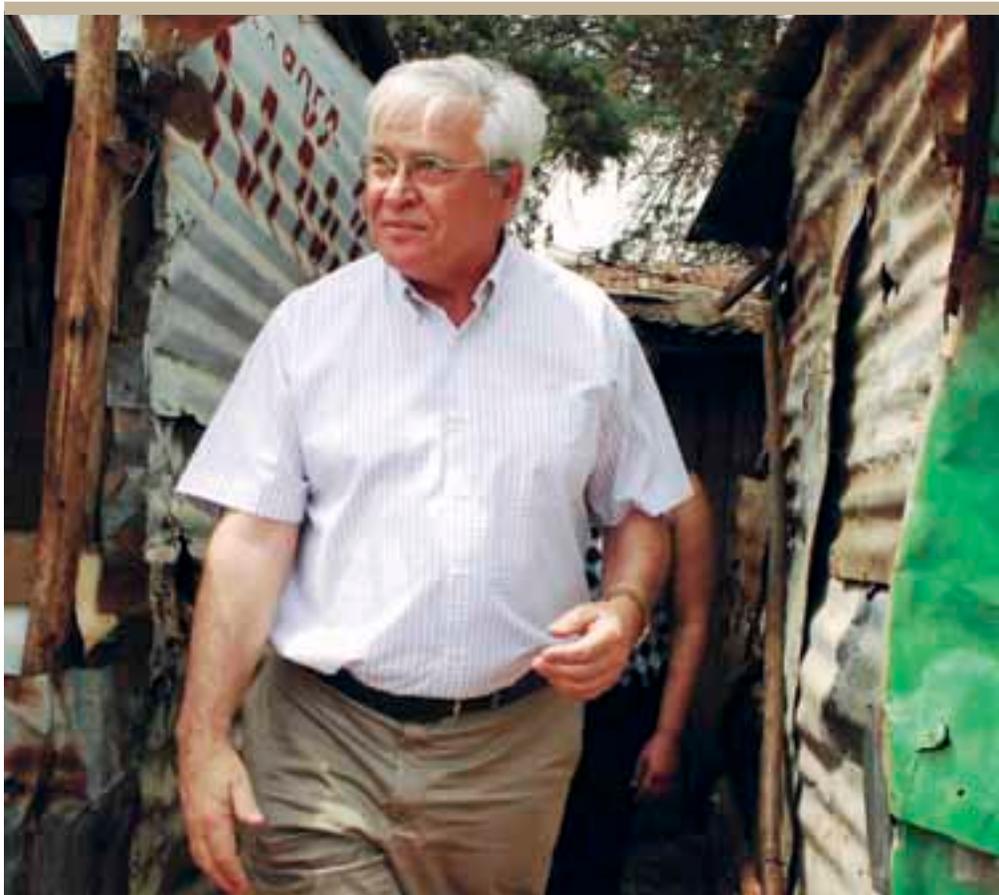
# For sustainable cities, Africa needs planning

Interview with  
UN-Habitat's  
Joan Clos

**A**frica's cities are growing very rapidly. By 2009 some 395 million Africans — nearly 40 per cent of the continent's population — lived in urban areas. That number is projected to triple to more than 1.2 billion, or 60 per cent of all Africans, by 2050. For the United Nations Human Settlements Programme — known as UN-Habitat — that growth represents a dual challenge: helping Africans to better harness the productive potential of their cities, but also to cope with the increased demands for municipal services and decent housing, so that more and more people are not obliged to crowd into impoverished slum areas. Joan Clos, a former mayor of Barcelona, Spain, and since 2010 the executive director of UN-Habitat, believes that tackling those challenges will above all require more systematic urban planning. *Africa Renewal's* managing editor, Ernest Harsch, spoke with him at UN-Habitat's headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

**Africa Renewal** How has the exceptionally rapid growth of Africa's cities affected general approaches to urban development?

**Joan Clos** We are seeing an unprecedented pace of urbanization in Africa. We have seen similar movements in other continents before. But what is different in Africa is the speed of the process. The response to that is to improve urban planning,



*Joan Clos, executive director of UN-Habitat, visiting the Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya.*

 UN-Habitat / Julius Mwelu

to plan for city growth. At the beginning, it's usually very difficult. The first waves of migration to the city are unplanned. But it is necessary to introduce as soon as possible urban planning on a massive scale in Africa.

**AR** In some countries in Africa, where urban planning is being attempted, it often seems slow and bureaucratic, and by the time it reaches implementation, things have already changed, growth has outstripped the plans. Can planning efforts really keep up?

**JC** The first step is the limitation of public space in relation to private space. This is something that has to be done by the government, because there is

no other entity. The problem is that if the government is uncoordinated, or it doesn't have the instruments, the speed of planning is much slower than the speed of city growth. The only solution is to speed up the planning process, because you cannot stop in-migration. If it's complex because it involves different ministries, it needs to be simplified. And if it's too dependent on central government, then it should be delegated to the local authorities.

For every "if" there must be a solution. There's no other alternative for proper

city growth than to be planned. If an unplanned city is built, then its reconstruction, the introduction of planning afterward, is much more difficult. It's very expensive, it brings social conflicts. When you see economies, like the African ones, growing at 6 to 7 per cent, there's no excuse. You cannot have such a rate of growth without at the same time putting in place urban planning instruments.

**AR** In some cities in Africa, particularly major ones, there have been efforts to revitalize centre cities, to attract foreign investors and businesses. Sometimes, when this has been done in a top-down fashion, local communities have resisted. How can this be avoided?

**JC** It is a question of the maturity of the political system. In a weak system, sometimes the way they do planning is by authoritarian means, without taking into account the rights of the people. There's no need for practices that don't take care of the affected people. There's room enough

*Construction of a housing project in KwaMashu, the largest poor township near South Africa's port city of Durban.*

 Africa Media Online / South Photos / John Robinson



for everybody to be better off. Urban planning can help generate wealth. And when you generate wealth, there's always the possibility of distributing it. But if someone tries to develop the city and capture all the wealth for himself, then conflict is sure to arise.

There are many examples [of good planning] in Africa, but mostly at the small scale. They are not perfect, but are advancing in a good direction, in Morocco, Mauritius, Rwanda. What we still don't see is a pro-active approach, of national governments developing national urban policies to cope with the challenging future of African cities. Urban planning is not something for tomorrow. It should be there today, this afternoon.

**AR** How does climate change affect urban development?

**JC** The typical unplanned city, which has no streets, no drainage system, or is built on slopes, is very susceptible to climate change. It's very prone to huge catastrophes. The solution to the risk of climate change, again, is urban planning. This is one additional reason why governments will be pushed to do something in favour of urban planning, to protect

the population against climate change disasters.

These are now typically considered to be natural disasters. But in the future they will be seen as a failure of government. In a lot of countries in the world, people at first saw them as natural disasters, but they later on looked at the government and said, "No, no. It's wrongdoing. It's a lack of planning, a lack of foresight by the government." We have seen earthquakes with very high tolls of victims, and similar, even stronger, earthquakes elsewhere, with very few victims. The natural disaster, the quake, is the same. What is different is the outcome.

**AR** Many urban Africans currently are obliged to live in slums. Could you talk about UN-Habitat's approach to participatory slum upgrading?

**JC** In a sense, the slum is a failure of the state. In most slums the state doesn't intervene. Legitimacy inside of the slum rests with the community. If you want to improve the conditions of the slum, you need to establish a dialogue with the community. They are the ones who will understand it, the ones who have the legitimacy to perform it.

When you introduce streets and latrines, and put lights in the streets, immediately you have shops that emerge, you have more economic activities. There's a virtuous circle of self-improvement. Yes, this requires an initial investment. But it also requires dialogue with the stakeholders in the slums, the local community, the structure owners, to agree on the improvements.

**AR** Do upgrading slums and urban planning also involve land tenure reform?

**JC** Yes. Security of tenure is very related to urban planning. First you need to identify the plots. We are advising governments, regional authorities and local governments, through different legislation and land tools, to have a

proper census of urban plots. The next step is introducing urban planning. This includes introducing public space, mainly streets. This sometimes affects existing plots, so you need to readjust land ownership. And that requires a legal instrument — which is lacking in most of Africa — by which a pool of owners can readjust their share of the property in a way that they don't lose value. In every urbanized continent there are centuries of tradition of land readjustment. This is something we need to help introduce and develop in Africa.

**AR** In many African countries there have been moves toward the decentralization of government institutions. How does that relate to urban development?

**JC** I don't like the word "decentralization." It doesn't explain well what is happening. I prefer to say "local government empowerment." The weight of central government is so weak that you

cannot really talk about decentralization. What is new is that national constitutions and national political agreements now allow for the empowerment of local authorities. This allows more forces in society to develop. It empowers local governments to have local taxes, to create local fiscal systems. That requires some kind of inventory of businesses.

With all that, slowly, you see an improvement of the general institutional capacity of the country. I am sure that we will see in the next 10, 15, 20 years in Africa an evolution of local institutions, regional institutions and, of course, central government institutions, which will add more meat to the backbone of the state that we know today.

**AR** What about urban governance?

**JC** This process will also bring an improvement of governance.

Of course, there are going to be scandals, problems. But in general the tendency that I foresee is toward an increased complexity and completeness of institutional relationships and capacities in a more modern state. The only way to fight corruption is to improve your institutions. This is something that will be demanded by the population. Municipal services, as any other good, also need to be financed. I would expect that with the growth of African economies, room will be created for financing urban services.

It's not going to be easy. It's not going to be without conflicts. In the end there will be better conditions of living, and better conditions of freedom and capacity for citizens. The young people in Africa are pushing very strongly. They are going to be a political force. They are going to demand these kinds of changes. 🌍

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## Naidoo interview

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**KN** Today governance gaps created by globalization provide a permissive environment for wrongful acts by companies. At Rio 2012, governments must agree to the development of a global instrument that ensures full liability for any social or environmental damage that global corporations cause. African governments should also call for creating strong regulation and control of financial markets and introducing restrictions on speculators and speculative products to stop harmful practices that lead to rising resource and commodity prices and an accelerated depletion of natural resources, with dramatic consequences for poor people and small economies.

**AR** What if negotiators fail to agree on a suitable successor to the Kyoto

Protocol, which seeks to curb emissions of the "greenhouse gases" that harm the earth's ozone layer?

**KN** The answer is simple: They then will be admitting that governments and political leaders are sleep-walking us into a crisis of epic proportions, putting the future and lives of our children and grandchildren in jeopardy and great danger.

Many citizens in the world, especially young people — I know my own daughter feels this way — are completely disgusted by how governments lack the political will to establish a solid, time-bound process to address the biggest threat our planet faces.

**AR** Do African governments need to pay more attention to their own people?

**KN** A true revolution can only start when governments start listening to the people and not to the polluters.

The power of the people can no longer be undermined. What our brothers and sisters in North Africa and the Middle East have done is a clear example of that. Based on what history has taught us, at the end of the day it is up to the voices of thoughtful, concerned citizens to stand up and resist the lack of action. If there is one thing I have learned about big systemic change, it is the following: Without decent men and women who say that enough is enough, and who are willing to go to prison for it, systemic change won't happen.

There is strong civil society across Africa, and it's getting stronger and stronger. The recent events not only in North Africa but also across the continent have shown the power of people. We need to go beyond the solo approach and work together and lend our voices across all sectors: environmental, human rights, health, education, etc. Only our collective voice will be heard. 🌍



# Towards African cities without slums



## Governments set course towards improving poor urban areas

 **By Kaci Racelma** Rabat

**M**illions of Africans live in slums, and the rapid growth of African cities is compounding the problem. Africa faces the huge challenge of “improving the lives of slum

dwellers, but also preventing the formation of new slums,” says Joan Clos, executive director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

Africa’s housing ministers, who last met in Rabat, Morocco, in September 2011, are well aware of this challenge. Gathered under the auspices of the African Ministers Conference on Housing and Urban Development (AMCHUD), they outlined new policies for housing and urban development across the continent, in line with the “cities without slums” initiative they originally adopted in 2005.

*Poor district in Algeria’s capital, Algiers. Most North African countries have made progress in reducing slum areas.*

 Africa Media Online / Ricardo Gangale

Some slum dwellers fear this may be mostly talk. “I am only interested in being removed from here, to live in a more decent environment,” says Rachid Lashab, who lives in the Essekouila slum in Casablanca. “I am not interested in the many conferences that our leaders attend.”

But in Rabat, the ministers at least laid out broad goals. These included

improving urban planning, making service land (for public buildings) more available, developing industrial, agricultural and crafts towns, and slowing down rural-to-urban migration of people in search of job opportunities.

### **Crowding and disease**

According to estimates by UN-Habitat, 200 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were living in slums in 2010, or 61.7 per cent of the region's urban population, the highest rate in the world. North Africa had another 12 million slum dwellers; that was just 13.3 per cent of its urban residents, the lowest rate in the developing world.

The lack of adequate sanitation, potable water and electricity, in addition to substandard housing and overcrowding, aggravates the spread of diseases and avoidable deaths, according to a recent report of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Slums contribute to low life expectancy. In Mali, for example, more than 80 per cent of the population lacks good housing and average life expectancy is just 51 years, according to the UN Development Programme.

Mali's situation reflects that of much of sub-Saharan Africa. Gakou Salimata Fofana, Mali's former minister of housing, land affairs and planning, urged urgent measures from Africa's housing ministers. "We must take decisive action," she said. "Otherwise there is the risk of having an urban population [in Mali] of about 6 million souls still living in informal settlements by 2020," or nearly twice the current number.

Jugurtha Ait El Hadj, an Algeria-based urban planner, believes that African ministers are on the right course. "Such meetings are especially helpful in that they allow exchange of experiences. But these meetings must be accompanied by concrete steps."

There are many roadblocks to achieving the dream of cities without slums. Algerian Minister for Housing and

Urban Development Nouredine Moussa noted that the expansion of cities in Africa limits the ability of national and local governments to provide security and supply basic social services in health, education, water and sanitation.

### **Climate change**

In addition, notes Mr. El Hadj, climate change will interact with urbanization in unpredictable ways. In 2007 an assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, established by the World Meteorological Organization and the UN Environment Programme, warned that "urbanization and climate change may work synergistically to increase disease burdens."

Slum dwellers also face harsh environmental challenges due to the low quality of construction materials used in buildings and slums, which are located mostly on marginal land. Many slums are vulnerable to accidental fires. In September 2011, for instance, more than 100 people were killed when a leaking petrol pipeline exploded in Mukuru wa Njenga, a densely populated Nairobi slum.

Individual countries' differences in geography, climate, expertise and financial resources will influence efforts to implement any continent-wide urban development plan. In Rabat, the ministers suggested that these challenges can be tackled through effective collaboration and support from international partners, including the UN.

### **Steady progress**

There is some good news. A 2010 UN-Habitat report found that countries such as Egypt, Libya and Morocco have "nearly halved their total number of urban slum dwellers, and Tunisia has eradicated them completely." Ghana, Senegal and Uganda have also made steady progress, reducing their slum populations by up to 20 per cent. In Nigeria, the slum population came down from 75 per cent of all urban residents in

1990 to 61.9 per cent in 2010. In South Africa, the proportion dropped from 46.2 per cent to 28.7 per cent during the same period.

Morocco's urban development model continues to draw a spotlight. In 2004 the government launched its own "cities without slums" programme, fashioning an urban development strategy to enable slum dwellers to have decent homes with access to water, power and sanitation. By 2011 about 100,000 new housing units had been created in different parts of the country. Overall, 37 of Morocco's 83 cities have been transformed, a change that has benefitted more than 1.5 million people. These cities now boast streetlights, drainage systems, safe water, roads, sanitation and other infrastructure. The development of Bouregreg Valley (near Rabat) and other "green areas" is also notable.

Fathallah Oualalou, former Moroccan minister of housing and currently mayor of Rabat, linked the successful urbanization efforts to effective implementation of the road map developed in 2010 in Bamako, Mali, at the third conference of African housing ministers — making the point that such meetings can in fact be useful. The roadmap emphasizes efficiency in land management, sustainable housing, urban transportation and sanitation, among other issues.

Mr. Moussa, the Algerian housing minister, lists other keys to success. These include the efficient and equitable management of land, the enactment of appropriate land laws so that women and other vulnerable groups can have access, and improvements in social conditions in housing projects. The provision of schools, clinics, electricity and sanitation is important, says Mr. Moussa. "We can't design a sustainable development plan without sustainable urbanization," he argues. Urbanization should be controlled, he adds, and efforts should be made "to reduce inequality between the rich and the poor by offering basic services to all people." 



# Community radio gives voice to shack dwellers

With new outlet, Korogocho residents push for reforms

By Ernest Harsch Nairobi

**K**orogocho, a slum in north-eastern Nairobi, had many of the ingredients for a political explosion similar to those that rocked other parts of Kenya in early 2008. It is crowded and very poor and has a reputation for brutal crime. The future looks exceedingly bleak for most of its 100,000 residents. But when a contested election brought violent protests to Mathare and other nearby slums, with hundreds killed and many more displaced, Korogocho remained quiet.

Much of the credit rests with the activists who operate Koch FM, Kenya's first licensed community radio station. As political tensions mounted nationally when the initial results of the election were challenged by the opposition, "people expected Korogocho would explode," recalls Tom Mboya, the Koch FM team leader. To head off such an outcome, station activists quickly went to church leaders and other influential figures to record appeals for calm. The recordings were broadcast repeatedly, several times a day, emphasizing that longtime neighbours had no reason to fight. "Those messages worked," says Mr. Mboya. "That really convinced people, and calmed down everything."

Beyond that, adds Leonard Njeru, another member of the station staff, Korogocho residents responded to



Presenters at the studio of Koch FM, Kenya's first licensed community radio station.

Africa Renewal / Ernest Harsch

radio appeals by donating food, clothing and other goods to help victims of the violence elsewhere. Much of what was collected in Korogocho was delivered to displaced people who had found refuge in a church in Mathare North.

This experience was a very good case of community-based "conflict prevention," agreed a group of experts on conflict and security who visited Korogocho following a meeting organized by the UN's Office of the Special Adviser on Africa.

## A new image

In setting up Koch FM (Koch is short for Korogocho), Mr. Mboya and his colleagues were motivated by a desire to enhance the community's image — to outsiders and residents alike. People from the area — one of the poorest slums in Nairobi, with high rates of unemployment, drug use, rape and

other crimes — often found themselves "stigmatized," Mr. Mboya explains. The Korogocho Primary School even changed its name so that graduates would not so easily be identified as coming from the area.

At first community activists considered producing a documentary film to portray the positive sides of life in Korogocho. But they lacked the funds, and someone proposed another idea: setting up a radio station. "It was simple," Mr. Mboya observes. "You just need a computer, a microphone, a mixer and a transmitter."

But even this simple idea required jumping hurdles. Kenya's broadcasting regulations at the time covered only

public and commercial stations, and licences were very expensive. So supporters mounted a public campaign, and received some positive coverage from other Kenyan media, as well as from the BBC and Radio Netherlands. Eventually the Communications Commission of Kenya agreed to grant a license in December 2006, the first for any community station in the country. Several others, inspired by Koch FM, have since secured licences as well.

A non-governmental organization, Norwegian Church Aid, donated enough money for an old shipping container to house the studio and other facilities. A contribution from the Open Society Initiative made it possible to upgrade the structure and replace an old makeshift transmitter with a more professional one.

For programming ideas the staff went directly to the community. There are now programmes on women and children, youth, health, the environment, HIV/AIDS, political governance and other issues, as well as music by local performers. The guiding principle is “edutainment” — education through entertainment. The station broadcasts around the clock, with presenters operating the studio from 6 am to midnight and recorded music being broadcast automatically during the night.

### Campaigns for change

The interaction between the station and residents has helped change political dynamics in the community. Previously, each of Korogocho’s nine villages still had an office of the youth wing of the former ruling party, at which residents were often brutalized. In alliance with several community groups, Koch FM mounted a public campaign that closed them down.

Each village also was managed by an “elder” appointed by the area chief. The radio station agitated for elections. “As we speak,” says Mr. Mboya, “the representatives of all nine villages are

directly elected by the members of the community.”

Residents had been subjected to a variety of illegal levies. Those who wanted to improve their shacks, such as by putting up a new sheet of iron roofing, had to pay the chief a “repair fee.” Since that amount often exceeded the cost of the repair itself, few residents had any incentive to upgrade these rented shacks. In addition, street vendors, many of whom are women, were obliged to pay a daily “space levy.”

Koch FM invited onto the air lawyers from Kituo cha Sheria, a non-governmental legal aid society. They explained that such fees had no legal foundation. Once residents became aware of this, they refused to pay. Both levies were soon cancelled.

Educational programmes on the radio, targeted to young women and men alike, are intended to raise awareness of women’s rights. Reports of rape have declined as a result. Benefit dinners and other fund-raising activities sponsored by the station have raised money to send young women to secondary school.

### Holding leaders to account

The station helps organize periodic public forums. These are usually held in the community hall — or, if they are too large, in the square in front of it — and take up particularly pressing issues. One prevalent concern is the use of money allocated by the government to Korogocho through a decentralized Constituency Development Fund (CDF). Since members of parliament are responsible for overseeing the CDF, the local MP was asked to come to Korogocho to explain how the money was used, but declined. He lost his seat in the subsequent election and blamed the radio station for his defeat.

His successor did come to hear Korogocho residents’ complaints. But little has happened since then, and people are skeptical that their request



*Koch FM staffer Leonard Njeru outside the radio offices. “Edutainment” — education through entertainment — is the station’s motto. 📷 Africa Renewal / Ernest Harsch*

to be allowed to elect representatives to the CDF board will be accepted.

The adoption of a new Kenyan constitution in 2010 expanded human and democratic rights in various areas of life. Unfortunately, many Kenyans are still not fully aware of those rights. Koch FM brought on the chief justice of the Supreme Court, lawyers from Kituo cha Sheria and others to help explain the constitutional safeguards.

With a new round of elections coming up (probably in early 2013), activists are worried about the possibility of political violence. “How do we sustain the peace during that forthcoming election?” asks Mr. Mboya. Koch FM’s answer is to organize more public forums, so that residents can openly air whatever animosities or misunderstandings they may have. “After they speak out,” says Mr. Mboya, “you see there is a sense of relief.” 🌍



# Africa's vanishing Lake Chad



## Action needed to counter an “ecological catastrophe”

**By Ahmad Salkida**  
Maiduguri, Nigeria

**A**s you approach the Lake Chad basin from Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria, the atmosphere of despair is telling. The

air is dusty, the wind is fierce and unrelenting, the plants are wilting and the earth is turning into sand dunes. The sparse vegetation is occasionally broken by withered trees and shrubs. The lives of herders, fisherfolk and farmers are teetering on the edge as the lake dries up before their eyes.

Vegetation and water, the traditional staples of livelihood for the Lake Chad community dwellers, are vanishing. Vultures feast on dead cows as drought and desertification take their toll. The UN Food and

*Passengers in Nigeria taking ferries to cross Lake Chad, whose shoreline is receding because the lake is drying up.*

 Panos / Jacob Silberberg

Agriculture Organization (FAO) has called the situation an “ecological catastrophe,” predicting that the lake could disappear this century.

According to FAO Director of Land and Water Parviz Koochafkan, the Lake Chad basin is one of the most important agricultural heritage sites in the world, providing a lifeline to nearly 30 million people in four

countries — Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

Lake Chad is located in the far west of Chad and the northeast of Nigeria. Parts of the lake also extend to Niger and Cameroon. It is fed mainly by the Chari River through the Lagone tributary, which used to provide 90 per cent of its water. It was once Africa's largest water reservoir in the Sahel region, covering an area of about 26,000 square kilometres, about the size of the US state of Maryland and bigger than Israel or Kuwait.

By 2001 the lake covered less than one-fifth of that area. "It may even be worse now," says Abbas Mohammed, a climatologist at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.

### Dams and irrigation

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), a regional body that regulates the use of the basin's water and other natural resources, maintain that inefficient damming and irrigation methods on the part of the countries bordering the lake are partly responsible for its shrinkage. Emmanuel Asuquo-Obot of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), an organization devoted to wildlife conservation, points to the diversion of water from the Chari River to irrigation projects and dams along the Jama'are and Hadejia Rivers in northeastern Nigeria.

As parts of the lake dry up, most farmers and cattle herders have moved towards greener areas, where they compete for land resources with host communities. Others have gone to Kano, Abuja, Lagos and other big cities for menial jobs or to roam the streets as beggars.

Those who remain in Lake Chad shoreline communities such as Doron Baga are haunted by the speed with which the lake is vanishing. The Doron Baga settlement, which used to

be by the lakeside, is now 20 kilometers from its edge.

Alhaji Baba Garba, a 78-year-old fisherman who has spent his life on the banks of the lake, says that much of the village used to be alongside it. Pointing at one of his children in his mid-30s, Garba adds, "even before that boy, Suleiman, was born." Another villager, Salisu Zuru, laments the death of livestock.

The once busy Baga market in Maiduguri, where truckloads of fish from the lake used to be processed and then transported daily to other parts of the country, is now quiet. The villagers must now travel by canoe and on foot for days from Doron Baga to Daban Masara, then to Darak in search of food. Darak is an affluent fishing community to the east of Cameroon's border with Nigeria.

### Tensions rise

The impact of the drying lake is causing tensions among communities around Lake Chad. There are repeated conflicts among nationals of different countries over control of the remaining water. Cameroonians and Nigerians in Darak village, for example, constantly fight over the water. Nigerians claim to be the first settlers in the village, while Cameroonians invoke nationalistic sentiments, since the village is within Cameroonian territory. Fishermen also want farmers and herdsmen to cease diverting lake water to their farmlands and livestock.

The LCBC — established by the leaders of Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger in 1964 and later joined by the Central Africa Republic in 1994 — and its partners continue to make efforts to save the lake or at least mitigate the impact of its shrinkage on people's lives. In his book *An Inconvenient Truth*, former US Vice-President Al Gore shows several images of the lake shrinking from 25,000 square kilometres in

1963 to just 1,500 square km in 2001. However, a 2007 satellite image shows improvements from previous years.

Recent drought may again have worsened the situation, says Professor Mohammed of the University of Maiduguri. He urges the LCBC and its partners to tackle the impact of climate change, as well as to control damming and irrigation by the LCBC countries.

### Replenishment plans

The commission's member countries have plans to replenish the lake by building a dam and 60 miles of canals to pump water uphill from the Congo River to the Chari River and then on to Lake Chad. The replenishment project "will be the first of its kind in Africa," says Martin Gbafolo, the LCBC's director of water resources and environment. The commission has raised more than \$5 million for a feasibility study. Although the total cost of the project will not be known until the study is completed, experts like Professor Mohammed expect it will take a huge injection of funds to save the lake.

Already the World Bank is providing \$10.6 million for a project to reverse land and water degradation in parts of the lake. In addition, the LCBC is educating livestock herders on gaining access to grazing and watering areas. Water users are taught efficient water-utilization methods and fishermen more appropriate techniques for catching fish.

At the opening of the African World Forum on Sustainable Development in N'Djamena, Chad, in October 2010, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan stressed the collective determination of leaders of the LCBC member countries to salvage the lake. But among the 30 million people who depend on it, there is uncertainty as to how much longer the lake will remain and when they will be able to get a relief. 



# Power from the wind in South Africa



## Turbines generate hope for clean energy

 **By Liane Greeff**

**T**hree blades — each the length of a tennis court — revolve atop a wind energy tower reaching 50 metres into the sky, equal in height to a 17-storey building. There are four such turbines whirling in the hot, dry and windy landscape near the town of Darling in South Africa's Western Cape, generating 7 gigawatt hours per year of green energy. This first commercial wind farm in South Africa, reflecting the collaborative efforts of international donors, government agencies and the private sector, shows that wind energy is feasible.

The development of the Darling Wind Farm, which was established in 2008, was fraught with obstacles. This was mainly because large-scale wind generation was new to South Africa and institutional arrangements were not yet in place to allow independent

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 Liane Greeff is coordinator of EcoDoc Africa, a South Africa-based non-governmental group that promotes ecological sustainability and social justice.

power producers to feed energy into the national grid.

What made the difference was that the then minister of mineral and energy affairs proposed the Darling Wind Farm as a national demonstration project in 2000. She also requested international assistance in developing wind energy from the Global Environment Facility, UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Danish International Development Agency.

That assistance led to the South African Wind Energy Programme (SAWEP), a project to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the promotion of wind power. It facilitated the creation of the Darling Wind Farm.

### Private sector

“The significant thing to remember about the Darling Wind Farm is that it shows that wind energy can be done by the private sector,” says Andre Otto, the project manager of SAWEP. “It was never intended to be a fully economical business,” he adds. It also served to demonstrate how to develop power purchase agreements with Eskom, South Africa's public electricity utility.

A power purchase agreement was signed with the city of Cape Town to buy energy from the Darling Wind Farm. The city

*Turbines at the Darling Wind Farm in South Africa.*  Liane Greeff

then sells the electricity through “Green Energy Certificates” to buyers prepared to pay a higher price for green energy. For example, when the African Wind Energy Association decided to hold a conference in Cape Town in May 2010, the organizers purchased certificates for 9,900 kilowatt hours to ensure that the conference used only green energy.

### Catalytic effect

SAWEP was one of several initiatives contributing to South Africa's adoption of a target of reaching 10,000 gigawatt hours of renewable energy in its Integrated Resource Plan, an energy blueprint for the period from 2010 to 2030. The government is now soliciting bids from independent power producers to generate an initial 1,850 megawatts of wind energy within the next few years.

“The establishment of Darling had an important catalytic effect in promoting wind energy in South Africa, as it showed that on-grid wind could be a reality,” says Lucas Black of the UNDP/Global Environment Facility unit.

As the Darling Wind turbines revolve at a constant speed of 32 revolutions per minute, they represent the baby steps of an industry whose time has come. 

# Full steam ahead to sustainable energy

## Tapping geothermal power in Kenya's Rift Valley

By Björk Hakansson

There is clean energy in the ground in Kenya — a lot of it — and Kenya has already moved to start tapping the Rift Valley's vast steam reserves. The government hopes to generate about 27 per cent of the country's electrical power from geothermal sources by 2031.

Kenya, the first African nation to drill for geothermal power, and other developing countries are benefiting from a programme guided by scientists from another country with ample geothermal expertise, Iceland. Since 1979, the United Nations University Geothermal Training Programme, a partnership between the university and the government of Iceland, has been operating in Iceland to boost geothermal projects worldwide.

Geothermal energy is fuelled by the internal heat generated and stored in the earth. Many developing countries have significant geothermal resources. Costa Rica, El Salvador, Indonesia and Kenya have initiated successful medium- to large-scale geothermal power development projects, among more than 20 countries worldwide already generating electricity with geothermal energy. More than 70 countries use geothermal resources to some extent for heating.

### 'Geothermal energy is the future'

In Kenya, the Olkaria geothermal power plants operate in the Rift Valley, 105 km northwest of the capital, Nairobi. They are expected to become the largest power generation complex in Kenya and to eventually increase the share of geothermal power in the country's supply mix to about 25 per cent.

Anna Wairimu Mwangi, a geophysicist from Kenya and a graduate of the UN University Geothermal Training Programme, is confident that her country is heading in the right direction. "I think geothermal energy is the future," says Ms. Mwangi. "It is a resource that is renewable."

Currently, about 1.5 billion people worldwide have no access to modern energy services. One of the main challenges in achieving an energy-sustainable future is to phase out inefficient fossil fuel consumption and make a smooth transition to clean energy.

### Sharing knowledge

Since Iceland has been one of the pioneers in using this unconventional source of energy, its scientists and engineers have led the development of the partnership. Their goal is to help developing countries by offering tailor-made training courses for professionals in advanced geothermal technology.

"This is a place for exchanging ideas and knowledge," says Ingvar Birgir Fridleifsson, director of the partnership. "Capacity building in renewable energy technology is essential, especially in developing countries, because that is where the biggest increment in energy use will occur."



Steam venting from beneath Kenya's Rift Valley: Geothermal power may eventually supply a quarter of the country's energy needs.  Alamy Images / Mark Boulton

As of 2011, 482 professionals from 50 countries had graduated from the geothermal training programme, with enough understanding and practical experience to conduct independent projects back home. The graduates from Kenya are now among the leading specialists contributing to geothermal development in the Rift Valley.

"These projects," said Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga during a ceremony in Nairobi, "mark the beginning of Kenya's journey to transform its energy sector and put the country on the path to green economic growth." 

## To Rio and beyond

from page 11

common interests, common responsibilities and common sense.”

Advocacy groups concur. In a discussion paper for Rio+20 entitled “A Safe and Just Space for Humanity,” Oxfam, a UK charity, adds its voice. The biggest cause of stress to the planet, says Oxfam, is excessive consumption by the wealthiest 10 per cent of the world’s population and the means by which companies produce what they buy.

While mounting concern over the state of the planet is reflected in the diagnoses contained in several reports produced by governments and civil society groups to stimulate debate in Rio, it cannot be denied that some areas have seen progress. According to a World Bank report released in March this year, sub-Saharan Africa succeeded in reducing extreme poverty from 55.7 per cent in 2002 to 47.5 per cent in 2008. At the global level, reports the UN, the damage to the ozone layer is declining, civil society participation

*At a flower farm near Lake Naivasha, Kenya, a greenhouse is heated with geothermal power from underground steam.*

 Redux / Hollandse Hoogte / Fred Hoogervorst

in policy decisions is rising and corporations are more aware of their social responsibilities.

Additionally, technology has made information widely available and decision-making more transparent. There is now a better understanding of the ecosystem and the use of appropriate sustainable technologies.

### Retooling the global economy

Yet this progress has been insufficient to significantly reduce poverty among the world’s population of 7 billion — expected to reach 9 billion by 2050. More than a billion people still live on less than \$1.25 a day and many more are facing hunger. Also troubling is the amount of food going to waste: 222 million tonnes wasted annually by consumers in rich countries, a figure roughly equal to all the food produced in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2030 the demand for food will have risen by 50 per cent, for energy by 45 per cent and for water by 30 per cent, according to the report of the High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability.

To retool the global economy, preserve the environment and provide equal opportunities to all, the panel lists 56 recommendations. It proposes that prices of all goods and services reflect their true costs to people and the environment, and that new means

of measuring development be created to go beyond the current measure, gross domestic product (GDP), which many economists believe has outlived its usefulness. It further calls for the setting of “Sustainable Development Goals” to take the place of the Millennium Development Goals, whose deadline expires in 2015.

For now, governments are busy finalizing the Rio+20 outcome document that they intend to provide a clear guide for action towards sustainable development. Under the theme of “the future we want,” the negotiations are focusing on global commitments to expand access to the essentials of life, such as water, food and energy. The negotiators face a difficult task in balancing the diverse views in more than 6,000 pages of contributions from UN member states, international organizations and other stakeholders.

The document is still a work in progress — some of its proposals are modest, others potentially groundbreaking; some will be modified or dropped, and new ones may be added before a final text is adopted. Still, it gives a reasonable picture of the issues likely to dominate in Rio. Africa, for example, wants to see the Nairobi-based UNEP transformed into a specialized agency with a bigger budget and a stronger mandate. It argues that the current global structures do not fully address the continent’s needs. Other proposals include adopting a set of sustainable development goals—akin to the MDGs.

At this point, even with many leaders signing up to go to Rio, it’s too soon to determine if Rio+20 will be remembered as a turning point or a lost opportunity. What is obvious, though, is that progress will require strong political will from global leaders. When that happens, the world will have taken a significant step towards bringing happiness to present and future generations. 🌍





## Mobile phones are getting smarter in rural Africa

Every phone can become a “mobile computing device”

Imagine you are in Yokadouma, a rural community in eastern Cameroon with little electricity and inaccessible roads. You have an old, inexpensive mobile phone with which you can only make and receive calls. The good news is that it is now possible for that phone to be smarter — to send and receive e-mails, check a Facebook account and chat online, even without internet access.

ForgetMeNot Africa, owned by Lon-Zim and ForgetMeNot Software, developed the Message Optimizer (MO) service in March 2009 to enable telecommunications operators to provide messaging services to customers at no extra cost, without any new applications or phone upgrades. Popular chat services such as MSN Messenger, Yahoo!, Windows Live and Gtalk are all incorporated into the MO.

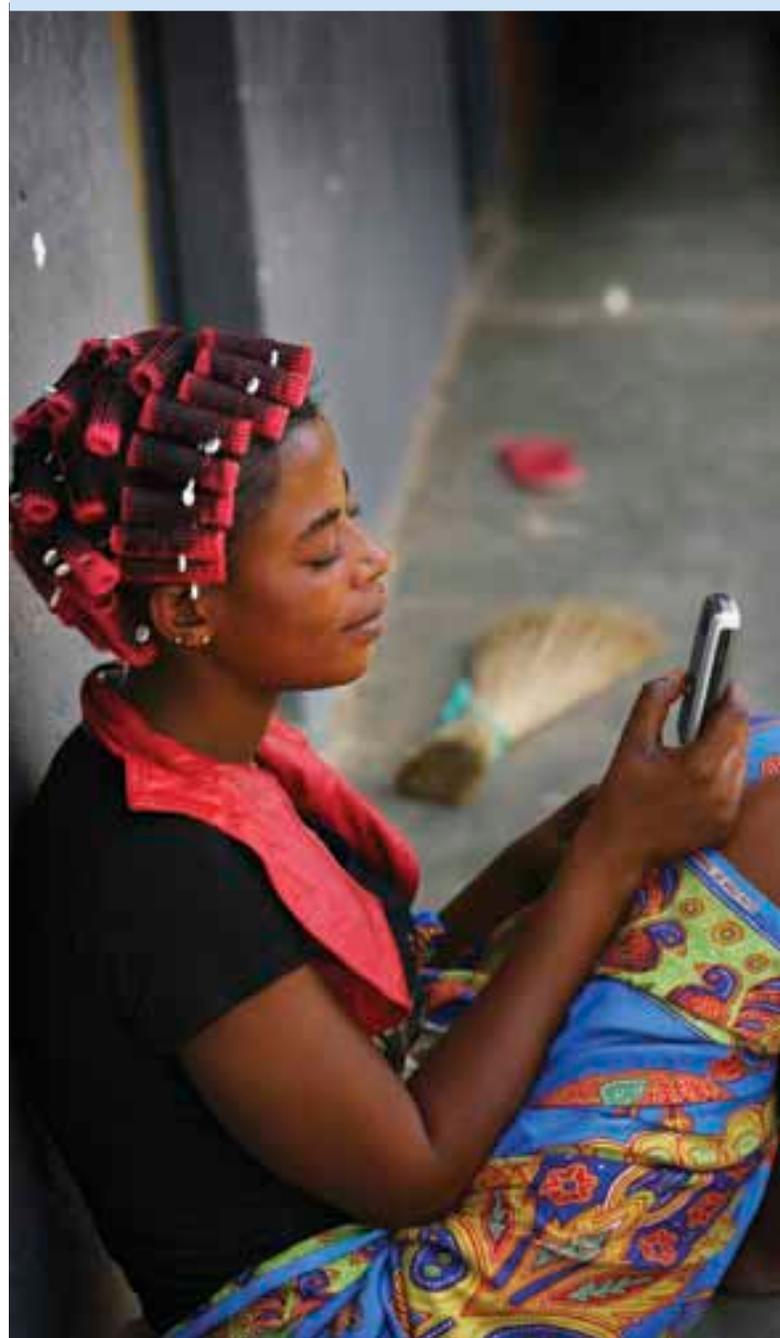
“Message Optimizer turns every mobile phone into a mobile computing and mobile authentication device,” states ForgetMeNot Africa. The MO allows “more and more of our subscribers to get access to the internet without having to purchase expensive smartphones,”

according to Douglas Mboweni, the chief executive officer of Econet Wireless Zimbabwe, a mobile network.

How does the MO deliver messages without the internet or a personal computer? First, a mobile phone subscriber sends an SMS to a given short code. The message is received in the mobile company’s message centre, which then forwards to ForgetMeNot Africa’s internet servers. The servers process, route and deliver the message to the subscriber, who can then respond.

Many factors account for why ForgetMeNot Africa’s MO is spreading speedily, especially in rural areas. Africa has about 1 billion people. Some 72 per cent of them live in the countryside, while internet penetration overall is just 11 per cent, largely in urban areas.

Yet mobile phone use is increasing at a fast pace. In Nigeria, for instance, there are about 90 million mobile phone users, while only 12 million people are connected to the internet. By providing low-cost access to people in rural areas, ForgetMeNot Africa aims to capture the huge market of mobile phone users.



Now Africans can easily make their old mobile phones “smarter,” even without the capacity for internet connection  Panos / Abbie Traylor-Smith

The company currently has around 48 million users, having made inroads into east, west, southern and central Africa. In late 2011, it started targeting 23 million Portuguese-speaking Africans, beginning with

100,000 Cape Verdeans, following collaboration with T-Mais, a mobile company in Cape Verde.

Jeremy George, the chief operating officer of ForgetMeNot Africa, says →

## Appointments

UN Photo/Rick Bajomas



**Fatou B. Bensouda** of Gambia has been appointed as the new chief prosecutor

of the International Criminal Court, based in The Hague in the Netherlands. She has been serving as deputy prosecutor since 2004 and previously worked as a legal adviser and trial attorney at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, based in Tanzania. The current chief prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, from Argentina, will step down in June, after nine years on the job.

Agência Brasil



The World Bank has announced the appointment of **Makhtar Diop** of Senegal as its new vice-

president for Africa. He will take up his new position in May, succeeding Ms. Obiageli Ezekwesili. A former finance minister in Senegal and chair of the West African Economic and Monetary Union's Board of Finance Ministers, Mr. Diop joined the World Bank in 2001. At the Bank he has served in various senior positions, including as country director for Kenya, Eritrea, Somalia and, most recently, Brazil.

INTERPOL/ICPO



The world's largest international police organization has appointed **Elizabeth**

**Kuteesa** of Uganda as director of INTERPOL's National Central Bureau and Regional Police Services (NRPS) unit, making her the first African woman to become an INTERPOL director. Since 2007 Ms. Kuteesa has served as assistant director for INTERPOL's Africa region, and previously held a range of positions with the Ugandan police.

that the company "can now serve the vast majority of people across the continent, no matter whether they speak English, French or Portuguese."

On their success so far, Mr. George adds that the company has been able to offer "a new revenue stream from their [mobile companies'] existing subscriber base, while

offering customers a unique service." With every phone becoming smart, Africa's rural dwellers can proudly now hold aloft their inexpensive phones. ●

## Orange to offer customers free online access to Wikipedia

In what is being promoted as the first partnership of its kind, millions of mobile phone owners in Africa and the Middle East will soon have free access to Wikipedia, an online encyclopaedia. Wikipedia is available for free on the internet, but to access it, mobile phone users have to be enrolled in a data plan that can be costly for most people, especially in low-income African countries.

A leading French mobile company, Orange, has struck an agreement with the Wikimedia Foundation, a non-profit organization that operates Wikipedia, to provide mobile subscribers access to the digital encyclopaedia without incurring additional costs on their internet data plans or subscription fees. The service is being launched throughout 2012 and will be available in both urban and remote parts of Africa and the Middle East. Orange has operations in 15 African countries and five in the Middle East.

According to a joint statement by Orange and the Wikimedia Foundation, any customer with an Orange SIM card and mobile internet-enabled phone will be able to access the Wikipedia site either through their browser or an Orange widget or software application. This will give users "access to the Wikipedia encyclopaedia services for as many times as they like at no extra charge as long as they stay within Wikipedia's pages."

According to information on its website, Wikipedia "is a free, collaborative, multilingual internet encyclopaedia." The website has more than 21 million articles (over 3.8 million in English alone) that have been written by volunteers around the world. Most of Wikipedia's articles can be edited by anyone with access to the website.

"Wikipedia is an important service, a public good — and so we want people to be able to access it for free, regardless of what

device they're using," said Sue Gardner, the executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation. "This partnership with Orange will enable millions of people to read Wikipedia, who previously couldn't."

The group executive vice-president for Africa, the Middle East and Asia at Orange, Marc Rennard, said, "In countries where access to information is not always readily available, we are making it simple and easy for our customers to use the world's most comprehensive online encyclopaedia."

While Orange has 70 million customers across Africa and the Middle East, the free service will be available only to users — currently about 10 million — who have mobile phones with 2G or 3G capability to access the internet. The French mobile operator expects to expand the service to 50 per cent of its customers by 2015. But since the deal with Wikipedia is not exclusive to Orange, similar arrangements with other phone operators in Africa, currently the world's fastest growing market for mobile phones, are likely to be struck in the future. ●

# Africa Books

**Indigenous Knowledge and the Environment in Africa and North America**, eds. David M. Gordon and Shepard Krech II (Ohio University Press, OH, USA, 2012; 368 pp; hb \$59.95)

**Coping with Global Environmental Change, Disasters and Security**, eds. Hans Günter Brauch et al (Springer, New York, NY, USA, 2011; 1872 pp; \$399.00)

**Vulnérabilité, insécurité alimentaire et environnement à Madagascar** by Jérôme Ballet and Mahefasoa Randrianalijaona (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2011; 246 pp; pb €22.50)

**Petite histoire de l'Afrique. L'Afrique au Sud du Sahara, de la préhistoire à nos jours** by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (La Découverte, Paris, France, 2011; 222 pp; pb €15)

**Issues in Women's Land Rights in Cameroon**, ed. Lotsmart Fonjong (Langaa RPCIG, Bamenda, Cameroon, 2012; 178 pp; pb £18.95)

**Que vivent les femmes d'Afrique?** by Tanella Suzanne Boni (Karthala, Paris, France, 2011; 168 pp; pb €19)

**Global Exchanges and Gender Perspectives in Africa**, eds. Jean-Bernard Ouédraogo and Roseline M. Achieng' (Codesria, Dakar, Senegal, 2011; 212 pp; pb £20.95)

**ECOWAS and the Dynamics of Conflict and Peace-building**, eds. Thomas Jaye and Dauda Garuba (Codesria, Dakar, Senegal, 2011; 252 pp; pb £24.95)

**Sustainable Intensification: Increasing Productivity in African Food and Agricultural Systems** by Jules Pretty, Camilla Toulmin and Stella Williams (Earthscan Publications, London, UK, 2011; 200 pp; hb \$99.95)

**Les dessous de la Françafrique: Les dossiers secrets de monsieur X** by Patrick Pesnot (Nouveau Monde Editions, Paris, France, 2011; 511 pp; €9)

**Nation-States and the Challenges of Regional Integration in West Africa: The Case of Gambia** by Siga Fatima Jagne (Karthala, Paris, France, 2010; 140 pp; pb €15.20)

**G20 and Global Development: How Can the New Summit Architecture Promote Pro-poor Growth and Sustainability?** eds. Thomas Fues and Peter Wolff (German Development Institute, Bonn, Germany, 2010; 113 pp; free e-publication)

**L'Afrique condamnée à l'espoir** by Ibrahima Signate (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2012; 158 pp; pb €15.68, ebook €12.38)

**L'Afrique en face: Dix clichés à l'épreuve des faits** by Vincent Hugué (Armand Colin, Paris, France, 2010; 192 pp; pb €16.20)

## BOOK REVIEW

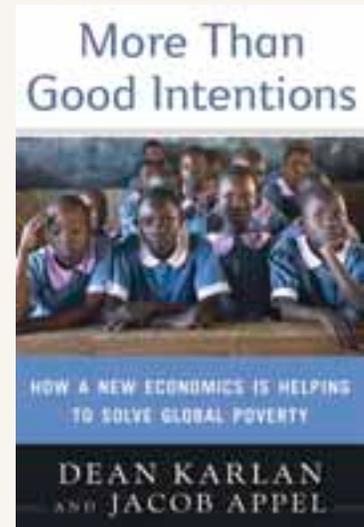
### More Than Good Intentions: How a New Economics Is Helping to Solve Global Poverty

by Dean Karlan and Jacob Appel (Penguin Group, New York, USA, 2011; 320 pp; hb \$26.95, pb \$16, ebook \$12.99)

With their book *More Than Good Intentions*, Dean Karlan and Jacob Appel seek to stimulate debate on better and more efficient ways to address global poverty, beyond foreign aid or other common approaches. By combining anecdotes with straightforward explanations, the authors ask good questions about what works and what doesn't. They also keep the reader anchored with simple and clear explanations, even when they cite complex social science notions, such as using control groups to measure the impact of particular interventions. "For each dollar donated," the authors ask, "how much good can be done?" To illustrate, they contrast different school attendance programmes. They find that \$1,000 in "conditional cash transfers" (direct payments conditional on participants' behaviour), can bring one year of improved school attendance. But the same result can be obtained with \$100 in "uniform give-aways" (such as giving school uniforms to all students) and just \$3.50 spent on deworming children.

The book also criticizes microfinance as an alternative to foreign aid. Although microfinance has been popular, the authors argue that it may not be suitable to everyone and that people's specific needs must be thoroughly examined before handing out loans. People's needs can be very complex, and may not be met by just obtaining a loan. In the long term, such loans can at times be more detrimental than beneficial.

The emphasis, say Karlan and Appel, should always be on helping people to improve their basic living conditions,



including through better access to health services, more investment in education and better monitoring of school attendance. The book concludes with seven prevalent ideas that have been proven to work: microsavings instead of microcredit, reminders to save (banks sending text messages and mail to their clients), fertilizer bought at harvest time before the next season to improve usage, deworming to increase children's health and school attendance, remedial education in small groups, chlorine dispensers for clean water and locked-in savings accounts to help people reach their goals and make better choices. Although very stimulating, the proposed options are based on microanalyses — studies of small groups of people. But a macroanalysis of a wider population would have enhanced the validity of their research. 

— Rebecca Moudio

**Challenging the Rulers: A Leadership Model for Good Governance**, eds Okoth Okombo et al (East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, Kenya, 2011; 300 pp; pb £32.95)

**L'Afrique subsaharienne face à la mondialisation** by Mahmoud Ben Said (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2012; 86 pp; pb €8.55)

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