
Development

HEALTH

Compulsory HIV Tests for Malawi Girl Scholars 9mins. 12secs. 3
Church's decision to screen girls seeking bursary for its all-girl secondary school for HIV controversial.

Condom Adverts Deemed Too Explicit 7mins. 6secs. 5
Zambian state-broadcaster pulls condom advertisements off air. Deemed too explicit by the government.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Child Rape On the Rise in Zimbabwe 10mins. 5secs. 5
Child sexual abuse is on the increase in Zimbabwe, a phenomenon the southern African nation is deeply divided over its cause and how to handle it.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Famine Looms Again As Army Worms Strike 5mins. 7
As Tanzania emerges from one of its most severe food shortages, the country is in danger of another cycle of famine following an outbreak of army worms.

Environment

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Better Weather Network in 2002 for Kenya 6mins. 6secs. 3
Kenya will be linked to a more sophisticated weather satellite network next year, to ensure efficiency in weather forecasting and boost the effectiveness of early warning systems.

POLLUTION

Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria Probes Oil Spill 3mins. 8secs. 4
The Akwa Ibom State Government in the Eastern part of Nigeria has constituted a 12-man technical committee, to investigate the alleged November 2000 oil spill in the state.

Used Engine Oil Creates Problems In Urban Areas 6mins. 7secs. 7
The closure of the British Petroleum Zambia Plc has led to improper disposal of used oil threatening the environment in Zambia.

CONSERVATION

Camels Moved To Mt Kenya 5mins. 4
A call has been made for the immediate removal of hundreds of camels from the Mt Kenya Forest to avoid an ecological disaster.

Wetland World-A World to Discover 9mins. 10
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Seychelles' Nature Reserve in International Spotlight 5mins. 5secs. 6
By being the first nature reserve in Africa to feature in the International Biodiversity Observation Year, Cousin Island in Seychelles has obtained world-wide recognition for eco-tourism and coastal management.

Point of View

WOMEN

Gender Equity Good for Democracy

17mins. 6secs.

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Yvonne Malhunge, Zimbabwean lawyer comments on the future of women in a democracy and encourages greater participation in government.

Noted

WOMEN

Our People O! Grant for Better Understanding.

6mins.

9

Four women writers have been awarded the first "Our People O! Grant for Better Understanding".

FOOD

DRC Introduces New Cassava Varieties

3mins. 5secs.

10

The National Institute for Agronomic Study and Research of the Democratic Republic of Congo has introduced 200 new varieties of cassava, tested at the International Tropical Agriculture Institute of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Dateline

ENERGY

Renewable, Sustainable Energy Critical In Millennium

4mins. 5secs.

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According to the Executive Director of UNEP, Klaus Toepfer, green environmentally friendly energy, such as solar, wind and wave power, is one of the most pressing issues facing mankind in the new millennium.

Children's Section

The Hunter

17mins.

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Jamina wants to be a hunter but when she gets lost in the forests, she makes new friends that change her mind and the way she sees the world.

Parting Shots

Celebrate the joy of the African experience with some unforgettable proverbs

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News

Compulsory HIV Tests for Malawi Girl Scholars

9mins. 12secs.

Controversy now surrounds Malawi's second-largest church's decision to screen girls seeking bursary for its all-girl secondary school for HIV. The Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) says whoever wants the church's all-inclusive bursary, which will cover tuition and boarding fees including toiletries and other school accessories, will have to undergo a mandatory HIV test. The church authorities went on to mandate that those who pass the first test and are admitted to the school, will have to undergo yearly tests in all the four years they will be at Neno Secondary School in the border district of Mwanza. Those found to be positive at any point of their four-year study will automatically lose their bursary. If they want to still be at the school, says the church, they will have to bear the full cost of their education.

The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) has described this as "repulsive and discriminatory". NACP Director, Owen Kalua told journalists it was government policy that nobody should be discriminated against because of their HIV status. "This will only stigmatise those who will fail to qualify for the bursary," he said. But the Reverend Daniel Gunya, General Secretary for CCAP's Blantyre Synod, insisted the bursary conditions are not discriminatory. "In fact, those who don't want it will be asked to pay for their education but those who want the sponsorship have to consent to the conditions so it's not discriminatory at all," he said. But Kalua of the NACP insists that the church seems to tie HIV to wayward, promiscuous behaviour. He said those innocent girls who might have contracted the deadly virus through rape or blood transfusion will suffer unfairly.

Charles Gunsaru, director for secondary and higher education in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, said the ministry was surprised by the church's stand. "We are surprised because nobody has ever used HIV status as a yardstick to offer anything, even employment, in Malawi," he said. But the ministry, whose role is merely supervisory, can only advise the church. They cannot force it to change its stance.

Reverend Gunya said he was actually surprised his church's stand has excited such an uproar, not praise, for its pro-active stance on the national HIV/AIDS fight. He said church leaders thought this was one way making young girls sexually pure and deterring them from contracting the deadly disease. "The annual blood tests will discourage promiscuity among our girls and give our girls an immediate reason to avoid any dangerous behaviour that could result in their contracting the killer disease," he insisted.

Malawi has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world. According to the latest figures from the National AIDS Control Programme, up to 14 per cent of Malawi's 10 million people are living with the virus that can cause AIDS.

Africa Online

Better Weather Network in 2002 for Kenya

6mins. 6secs.

Kenya will be linked to a more sophisticated weather satellite network next year. The new network, serving 45 developing countries, will be launched on the Guyana Islands, off the West African coast. It is expected to ensure efficiency in weather forecasting and boost the effectiveness of early warning systems. "We will be able to give our consumers information that is more accurate and tailored to suit their specific requirements," Mr. Ayub Shaka, an Acting Assistant Director of Meteorology, said. Speaking to the Nation in his office, Mr. Shaka said the new forecasting technology would provide weather data twice as often as the current system, enabling more precise tracking of weather changes.

The new satellite network, which will serve Europe and Africa, will generate data every 15 minutes and not every half-hour as is the case currently.

Kenya's Meteorological Department will manage the preparatory phase of the project in the participating African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. According to Mr. Shaka, the European Community has approved funds to enable the countries to update their weather stations. Kenya will install a new satellite receiving station and re-equip its 35 data-collecting stations in various parts of the country to make them compatible with the new technology. The project will also train weather scientists and technicians as part of a programme that has been going on for the past three years. Kenya's Drought Monitoring Centre, which serves the IGAD region, will likewise benefit from enhanced technical and technological capacity. According to Europe's Organisation of Meteorological Satellites, the new network is expected to provide at least 20 times more information than is currently given by the Meteosat satellite. It will have 12 channels of data instead of Meteosat's three, which will broadcast clearer images of evolving local weather events. The European weather body says the data generated could be used to strengthen air traffic control and security in marine transportation.

The new satellite network, expected to be fully operational by 2005, will for the first time contribute to the monitoring of environmental phenomena like desertification, climate change and fires.

The Nation

Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria Probes Oil Spill

3mins. 8secs.

The Akwa State Government in the Eastern part of Nigeria has constituted a 12-man technical committee, headed by Prof. Etie Akpan, a marine geologist, to investigate the alleged November 2000 oil spill in the state. Environment Commissioner, Obong Isidore Akwan-Ebe, briefing newsmen, said, "reports reaching this ministry indicate that there was actually a massive oil spill on the shores of the state".

He said the committee had been given six weeks to submit its report to government. "In addition, the committee is also working on the satellite imageries obtained from radar stations strategically positioned to monitor the sensitive environment of Akwa Ibom", he said.

The Exxon/Mobil authority had last November, after conducting newsmen on a high-sea coastal tour, denied there was a spill in the state. The Commissioner, who identified Exxon/Mobil, Elf and Shell as the three major companies doing oil business on the shores of Akwa Ibom said the Technical Committee on the spills would soon come out with a confirmation on who owned the facilities where the reported spills took place. Obong Akpan-Ebe assured the public that as soon as the Professor Etie Ben Akpan's committee completed its assignment, the entire findings would be made public.

allAfrica.com

Camels Moved To Mt Kenya

5mins.

The co-ordinator of the Greenbelt Movement, Prof Wangari Maathai, has called for the removal of hundreds of camels from the Mt Kenya Forest. Prof Maathai has written to the Head of Civil Service, Dr Richard Leakey, demanding action on the pastoralists. She says the animals will upset the mountain's vital ecosystem, which, being a water catchment area, should be preserved at all costs. "The movement of the animals into the forest is very telling that Kenya's desertification has reached alarming rates. Camels are desert animals," she said.

Famine and hunger, she said, would become a permanent feature in Kenya if forests were not preserved, as they attracted rain, which supported agriculture to a large extent. She was reacting to press reports that

pastoralists have been driving hundreds of camels into the Gathiuru section of Mt Kenya forest in search of pasture. Similar protests came from the Kieni MP, Dr Chris Murungaru, in whose constituency Gathiuru falls. But the government quickly responded, saying it was closely monitoring the pastoralists' movements. Nyeri police boss Elijah Shamalla visited the area to assess the security situation following reports that clashes were likely to occur between the pastoralists and farmers living on the edge of the forest.

Prof Maathai took issue with Laikipia Deputy District Commissioner Omar Sallat for saying the pastoralists were only moving in animals in desperation. "He should know that they are others who are desperate to save the forests. Rainfall and crops have failed due to destruction of forests and that's why Kenyans are very hungry," Prof Maathai said.

The Nation

Condom Adverts Deemed Too Explicit

7mins. 6secs.

The campaign to combat HIV/AIDS in Zambia hit a snag when the state-broadcaster pulled condom advertisements, deemed too explicit by the government, off the air. Church leaders from the Christian Council of Zambia, a powerful lobby group comprising a number of influential churches, had protested loudly that anti-AIDS campaign material aired in recent months by the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) was misguided and encouraged promiscuity.

The government itself appeared divided over the issue. Health Minister Enoch Kavindele last week urged Christian leaders to "face reality" over the extent of the AIDS epidemic, but Education Minister Godfrey Miyanda backed the clergy. President Frederick Chiluba, who in 1991 declared Zambia a Christian nation, controversially said that he felt the use of condoms was a sign of lax morals. The decision by ZNBC to cancel the advertisements - bowing, the company said, to public sentiment - has been sharply criticised by anti-aids campaigners. Masauso Nzima, country coordinator for the UK-based AIDS Alliance said it appeared that "people do not know how badly hit this country is by HIV/AIDS". He added: "Condoms are one of the major ways of preventing the spread of AIDS and I think they should not be dismissed just like that without as much as an offer of an alternative."

An estimated 20 percent of Zambian adults are HIV-positive. According to the government's own figures, more than 700,000 people have died from AIDS-related causes since the early 1980's, and more than 650,000 children have been orphaned. Currently, between 25,000 to 30,000 children are born with HIV/AIDS, while 7 out of every 10 children in this category are not expected to celebrate their fifth birthday.

Acknowledging cultural taboos over open discussion of sex, Nzima said he believed the condom outcry has largely been due to the fact that the commercials had been aired during prime time, "when parents are having dinner with their children. Perhaps the timing has been wrong but even then, I believe there's a thing called parental guidance." The church has urged abstinence as a solution to the AIDS epidemic.

Nils Gade, Chief Executive for the Zambian Society for Family Health pointed out that the UN AIDS programme UNAIDS has "endorsed the condom as the most effective way of avoiding AIDS ... especially for many Zambians who do not know their status, whether they are positive or negative."

Integrated Regional Information Network

Child Rape On the Rise in Zimbabwe

10mins. 5secs.

Upwards of the 2,000 rape cases involving children as young as three months old were brought before the courts last year in Zimbabwe. Authorities and civic groups believe this figure is a mere tip of the iceberg. Child sexual abuse is on the increase in the country, a phenomenon the southern African nation is deeply

divided over its cause and how to handle it. In most of the cases, the children are raped by relatives in whose custody they would have been entrusted, making the abuse difficult to detect. But most worrying to the authorities and women pressure groups is the emerging trend in which the crime is increasingly being committed by people advised by witch doctors to rape a minor to be cured of illnesses not responding to treatment. The belief among the rapists and witch doctors is that the sexual purity of a young girl's soul and body has medicinal value, and in some cases, the crime is committed in the belief it would bring luck.

The result has been devastating to both the victims and their parents: Many of the children raped are infected with sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. Studies show as much as 70 percent of child rape victims in Zimbabwe are infected with a sexually transmitted disease of one form or another. Estimates indicated that among 5,000 people who are infected weekly by AIDS in the country, 30 percent are children who would have suffered sexual abuse. Delays in detecting child sexual abuse, because of the home environment in which most of the rape cases occur, make the victims particularly vulnerable to disease infections. A pressure group, Child and Law Project, estimates that most of the rape cases only come to light after one year, if the victim does not suffer immediate physical harm or disease infection from the abuse. Other studies indicate child sexual abuse cases are so widespread in the country that most girls in Zimbabwe were becoming sexually active at the age of eight, which is just half the country's legal age of consent. A commission of inquiry set up by President Robert Mugabe two years ago found most young girls lived under the constant threat of sexual abuse, and suggested stringent laws to protect the children. "Such a development (growing child sexual abuse) is of great concern because of the risk of these children contracting STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections) and HIV," said the commission in its report.

But the nation is still unsure, despite the various studies on child sexual abuse, of the exact causes of the increase in the number of rape cases involving minors which occur even in remote corners of the country. While court evidence from child rape cases point to a growing involvement of witch doctors in the crimes, the traditional healers argue instead that the expanding influence of Western culture was the main culprit.

Women pressure groups say the crime is becoming prevalent because of sentences passed by the courts on offenders were not stiff enough to deter people from child sexual abuse. They are advocating death sentences for rape offenders, or better still castration, two possible punishment forms which they feel would be proportional to the gravity of the crime and also serve as a sufficient deterrent.

PanAfrican News Agency

Seychelles' Nature Reserve In International Spotlight

5mins. 5secs.

Cousin Island in Seychelles has obtained world-wide recognition for eco-tourism and coastal management after being the first nature reserve in Africa to feature in the International Biodiversity Observation Year. Reports reaching Port-Louis said that Cousin Island Special Reserve was recognised as the best example of how eco-tourism is practised as well as for coastal and marine management in two recent publications released by international organisations.

The special reserve, managed by BirdLife Seychelles, is the only example in the Book, "Sustainable Development of Tourism Compilation of Good Practices from East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean region". In a letter to the Seychelles Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister Simone de Comarmond, WTO Secretary General Francesco Frangialli said: "I am sure it (the book) will add prestige to the tourism industry in Seychelles." The second book - Marine and Coastal Protected Areas - A Guide for Planners and Managers is published by The World Conservation Union. Cousin Island featured in two prominent case studies in the new book. The first one, which covers the operation of the island is entitled "Cousin

Island - A Sea and Island Reserve scientifically managed by an NGO". It describes the research, monitoring, education, conservation management and administration achievements.

Nirmal Jivan Shah, the Chief Executive of BirdLife Seychelles, said that the Cousin success story reflected on Seychelles as a whole and that all Seychellois should be justifiably proud of these accomplishments. "People have all kinds of opinions about things, but one of the best measures of success and achievement is validation and recognition by well known international organisations," Shah said. "We will not rest on our laurels but will continue to set new standards on Cousin and elsewhere," he added.

allAfrica.com

Used Engine Oil Creates Problems In Urban Areas

6mins. 7secs.

Used engine oil is posing a new threat for the environment in Zambia. In the past British Petroleum Zambia Plc used to buy back this used oil for re-processing at their plant that was sited in the central copper mining city of Kitwe. But with the closure of the plant, industries and motor repair workshops are now having to dispose of used oil in a manner most suitable to them that connect to sources of drinking water.

"Used oil should be a matter of intense environmental concern as its chemical and physical constitution renders it to be potentially hazardous to soils, water and air quality," Jewitt Masinja, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, says. It is for this reason that the Zambia chapter of the Institute of Waste Management in Southern Africa recently held a workshop at which the scope of disposal of used engine oil was the main topic of discussion. Also attending were workers from motor repair workshops and the oil marketing companies. The aim of holding the workshop was essentially to examine the environmental impact of oil spilled from motor repair workshops and fuel dispensing service stations.

After the closure of the BP Zambia oil refining plant in Kitwe and its relocation to Zimbabwe, workshops and service stations were left pouring used oil carelessly in drains and trenches. In some instances, this oil has found its way to sources of drinking water, sewerage ponds and even spread to farmland as well as plots adjoining the workshops. The result is that the oil has contaminated water used by both humans and domestic animals and has devastated aquatic life, including fish and mosquito eating frogs.

The Institute is now joining hands with branches in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana with a view of working out mechanisms for encouraging re-processing of used oil so that it is refined into a usable commodity. It is hoped that a sustainable way of minimising waste and the subsequent indiscriminate degradation of the environment, through dumping of used engine oil, will be avoided or cut drastically.

PanAfrican News Agency

Famine Looms Again As Army Worms Strike

5mins.

As Tanzania emerges from one of its most severe food shortages, the country is in danger of another cycle of famine following an outbreak of army worms. The government has issued an alert that five out of 20 Tanzania mainland regions have already been invaded by the destructive army worms, and six more regions are in danger of being infested. The five affected regions are Dodoma, Arusha, Mbeya, Iringa, and Singida, where the caterpillars are reported to be multiplying at an alarming rate. Three of the regions - Arusha, Kilimanjaro and Tanga - border Kenya to the north, and it is feared the infestation may spill over into Kenya. It is also feared infestation from Mbeya could spill over to neighbouring Malawi and Zambia.

Although the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security could not state the exact extent of damage in terms of tonnage, it is estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands of tonnes of grain in farms occupying some

7,780 hectares in the five regions. The Tanzania government is preparing to request the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome for \$1 million to combat the army worm threat. Tanzania has at the same time been facing attacks from red locusts, rodents and quelea birds, which, officials say, could greatly aggravate Tanzania's food security if they are not checked.

An official of the Plant Protection Unit, Mr. Sergei Mutahiwa, warned countries sharing borders with some of the affected regions to be prepared, as the movement of the worms could be enhanced by weather and winds.

The East African

Point of View

Gender Equity Good for Democracy

17mins. 6secs.

Voter apathy has characterised every election in Zimbabwe since 1985, hence the admission that the officials responsible for conducting last year's parliamentary election were "overwhelmed" by the turnout of the electorate. After the 1980 election, the euphoria of Independence fizzled away as disenchantment and reality settled in. People just did not see the need to vote. Women as part of the electorate naturally also followed this trend. Women's numerical advantage over men makes them fertile ground for any aspiring member of parliament in an election. But have women been taken seriously as an electorate? Or have they been assigned the role of chorus singers in the political campaigns of men? Are they to be perpetually relegated to singing and kneeling on the tarmac at the Harare International Airport, donning the head of someone's husband? Surely the time has come for women as potential king-makers to be taken much more seriously. Should political parties not be energetically seeking their votes?

As an electorate women must now sharpen their skills to examine a political party's record and its gender policy. It is therefore an unavoidable consequence that the longer a party has been in existence, the longer a record it will have of disregarding or paying attention to the gender issues in its election campaigns. The brutal reality in Zimbabwe is that if all Zimbabwean women eligible to vote were registered voters and they all voted for one party, that party would not need a single man's vote to win a simple majority in parliament. This of course assumes that there will be no constitutional provision guaranteeing the presidential appointment of 30 (male) members of parliament. The sad reality in Zimbabwe is that because of party structures, women have not been able to feature as prominently as men do in this country's political life.

The most important issue in Zimbabwe is that the environment is not friendly to women. Politics the world over has been labelled a "dirty" game and one which is the preserve of men. A self-respecting woman is not expected to join this game. Generally, once one makes the choice to become a public official that person makes a deliberate choice to have their dirty laundry not only washed in public but, with the "assistance" of their political opponents, to have the same not-so-clean laundry hung out in the open for public inspection.

It has been argued that the participation of women in politics should have the effect of making politics more honest and focused on issues and not personalities. In Zimbabwe, the dirtiness of the campaign trail manifested itself in a rather uniquely grotesque manner. This was through political violence throughout the country. There were allegations that the governing party unleashed the war veterans on the opposition. The cruel reality is that the whole environment emphasised that only the fittest will survive. The fact that women who were active in the opposition were targets of this political violence served as a reminder to those women that they should not be involved in politics. The fact that these women were only involved in the lower echelons of the opposition parties and were therefore not candidates serves only to emphasise their powerlessness.

Another factor, which in my assessment has been used to the disadvantage of women and results in less women seeking political office is the cultural norms and value systems. These are either misconstrued purposely or unknowingly to the disadvantage of women. Hence women are viewed first as women and then as potential candidates. Examinations into their status are made: is she single or married? And if single why is she? Is she divorced or not? Does she have children and by how many men? These questions are not asked of male politicians. In fact, it is perfectly acceptable for a male politician to be on to his second or third wife. He is still perceived as being respectable. The status of a woman candidate is made the election point and not her ability to address the constituency's problems. In the ideal world it should be vice versa. In fact, some female candidates do not even make it past their respective party's selection process because of these misconstructions.

Through my involvement in the parliamentary election I realised just how expensive an election campaign is. In Zimbabwe most funding is accessed through the candidates political party. In an ideal Zimbabwe any Zimbabwean should be able to freely donate their skill, cash or other possessions to a political party of their choice. Unless a party has an assured source of income such as that guaranteed under the Political Parties (Finance) Act, it will be difficult for it to access funds. Even then, the fact that a political party has acquired funds does not automatically mean that the female candidates within the party will receive equal funding as male candidates. This is why it is essential that women position themselves strategically within their parties.

A government that is committed to creating an environment of gender equity along with good governance and democracy is indispensable. Hence if a government only has one female cabinet minister, the warning bells of the women's electorate should be clanging louder than the sound of the presidential motorcade. A government should feel duty bound to promote not only a gender-sensitive environment, but one that emphasises the importance of an equal partnership between men and women in a free and democratic society.

Abridged opinion of Yvonne Malhunge, in the Zimbabwe Independent

Noted

Our People O! Grant for Better Understanding

6mins.

Four women writers have been awarded the first "Our People O! Grant for Better Understanding". The grant was funded through proceeds from "Our People Oh!", the book written by internationally renowned Indian journalist, Alka Raza and wife of the former US ambassador to Nigeria, Susan Twaddell to mark the United Nations Year of Older Persons. It recounts the life stories of a cross section of older Nigerians, from a veteran journalist to a traditional female drummer. As described by the Chief Guest, Regional Director of the Ford Foundation, Dr. Akwasi Aidoo, the grant is "an occasion to build a bridge between the young and the old Nigerians, those who go beyond art for arts sake...those interested in development...excellent and talented female writers...interested in telling the Nigerian story" the initial grant for the book was given by the Ford Foundation.

Daniele Landry, a representative of the United Nations Population Agency, echoed his sentiments, saying "International guests can, indeed, sometime be more observant about the surroundings than their hosts. For one always searches in vain for publications that give uncoloured and unbiased impressions about people in their country... (the book) shows what has been achieved by very ordinary and very distinguished individuals in Nigeria."

Grantees were chosen to represent the major geographic regions of the country. Nneka Osakwe is an Eastern lecturer at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, and is the recipient of many national and international academic awards as well as a dedicated crusader for children's rights. Northern efforts were acknowledged through the poet and writer of short stories, Binta Muhammed. Florence Inokweje was the Middle belt woman chosen for her work in poetry, drama, history and youth campaigns. Mrs. Kemi Wale Olaitan, an actress, columnist and radio producer who is a loud voice in African feminism, represented the West. Each of the grantees was given N100,000 to support their efforts and publish their works in socio-economic awareness.

CFC

DRC Introduces New Cassava Varieties

3mins. 5secs.

The National Institute for Agronomic Study and Research of the Democratic Republic of Congo has introduced 200 new varieties of cassava, tested at the International Tropical Agriculture Institute of Ibadan, Nigeria. The varieties likely to adapt the best to local conditions will be reproduced and distributed to local farmers. The institute said that in this regard, the testing of two nurseries in Mvwazi and Mbakana, in the outskirts of Kinshasa, have started. The first nursery was set up with the assistance of the institute, while the second is supported by the Mbakana Agricultural Centre for Integrated Development where 100,000 healthy cuttings have been planted. The introduction and testing of these new varieties are in line with the efforts deployed by the Congolese government to eradicate cassava pest.

Cassava is the staple food for over 70 percent of the Congolese population, particularly in the Bundundu and Lower-Congo provinces and in the city of Kinshasa. These efforts, backed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, are deployed within the framework of a project aimed at promoting a lasting approach for the improvement of food security.

PanAfrican News Agency

Dateline

Renewable, Sustainable Energy Critical In Millennium

4mins. 5secs.

Green environmentally friendly energy, such as solar, wind and wave power, is one of the most pressing issues facing mankind in the new millennium, the Executive Director of UNEP, Klaus Toepfer told a meeting on renewable energy in Paris. "Green energy must be put at the heart of sustainable development if the threats of climate change and the need to tackle poverty and ill health in the developing world are to be truly addressed," Toepfer warned. "Sustainable development, or not cheating on your children, means things like ensuring our ever-growing cities function as stimulating and vibrant places to live and work; to ensuring that the poorest people in the world are not forced to chop down forests full of precious wildlife for wood to cook or keep warm," he added.

The views, were delivered at a January meeting of the G-8 Task Force on Renewable Energy, comes as ministers from some ten African countries at UNEP's Nairobi headquarters to agree on a common position on sustainable energy use. The ministers will submit their conclusions to the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development scheduled in April. Toepfer's exhortations also come in the run-up to UNEP's 21st session of its Governing Council in which ministers from around the world will meet in Nairobi 5-9 February when renewable and sustainable energy will be among the key issues on the Council's agenda.

PanAfrican News Agency

Wetland World- A World to Discover

9mins.

The pioneers who managed to bring the representatives of 18 countries to the small city of Ramsar, Iran, on the shores of the Caspian sea at the end of a cold month of January should be genuinely proud of what they accomplished then and there. The Convention on Wetlands was concluded at that meeting on 2

February. Today 30 years later the treaty has become an effective instrument, being used by its 123 Contracting parties to ensure conservation and wise use of their wetlands. These few pages with only 12 articles that constitute the text of the Ramsar Convention have managed to create a worldwide movement to safeguard one of the most productive and yet threatened, ecosystems of the planet.

The past years have proven that the Convention on Wetlands goes beyond a typical instrument of international law, it embodies a movement with its very dedicated followers in government agencies, the scientific community international organizations indigenous people, national and international NGOs, community based groups and even private sector executives. It is in this constituency that rest the vitality and effectiveness of the Convention on Wetlands, a very special feature that needs to be cherished and strengthened while also respecting the rules of the game of any intergovernmental treaty.

123 member countries, 1042 sites on the list of Wetlands of International Importance covering nearly 800,000 square kilometers of prime wetland areas, a good number of countries with national wetland policies or action plans in place, a significant array of technical and policy instruments developed within the convention's framework and formally adopted by its conference of parties. This is the encouraging reality of the Ramsar Convention today.

Yet we cannot relax. Many Ramsar sites are under threat and a considerable number of them do not have effective management plans in place. Some national wetlands policies exist only on paper and the Ramsar Administrative Authority in some countries are too weak to influence the policy and action of other government agencies that *de facto* have the upper hand on the wetland resource in the country.

To address these weaknesses, we need to bring into the Ramsar movement more people and other sectors of the society. We need to do more to help people discover the true value of wetlands and their functions, so that we can count upon more defenders when it comes to electing governments and influencing decisions on natural resources management. This is the main aim of the World Wetlands Day 2001, riding on the theme, "Wetlands World - a world to discover". February 2, 2001 is a day for people to discover the values and functions of the wetlands. By doing this, a major contribution will be made to maintaining the ecological health of our planet, our common and, so far, only home.

Delmar Blasco, Secretary General, Ramsar.

Children's Section

The Hunter

17mins.

In the early morning, Jamina went with her grandfather to collect honey. They followed the honey bird far into the bush. "I want to see elephants! Jamina cried. "Grandfather, do you think we will?" "You'll be lucky," said the old man. We don't see many now. Not since the hunters came."

Hunters! Jamina's eyes lit up. 'I'm going to be a hunter'. Jamina played hunters. She shot the mighty elephant; she tracked a rhino deep into the forest; she stalked a pride of lions.

Then she turned back to look for her grandfather. But she had wandered too far into the bush and the old man and the honey bird were nowhere to be seen. She called out but there was silence. Then, far away on the wind. Jamina heard a sound. A sad and desperate cry that tugged at her heart. She held her breath and listened. Jamina looked up. Vultures hung high in the heavy noon heat, and all around she could sense danger.

‘Never go alone into the bush,’ her parents had warned. But the sound was so mournful she couldn’t help but follow. Further and further she went... until she came to a clearing. There she found a tiny elephant, trying in vain to wake his mother. The hunters had been and, like Jamina, he was lost and afraid. ‘Don’t cry, little one,’ she whispered. Jamina tilted her head to listen. Perhaps the rest of the heard was nearby. But all she could hear was the endless rasping of insects in the heat. She knew the baby would not survive alone. She could try to lead him home with her and perhaps they would find his family on the way. But the baby was frightened.

‘I am not a hunter,’ she said softly. For a long time she spoke to the elephant until he grew calm and nuzzled her with his trunk. Jamina stood up and walked a few steps. The baby followed, tottering weakly in the blazing heat. Then the rain came and cooled by the water, the elephant found strength to go on. At times they slipped and struggled. But they kept on walking, right through the storm. As the skies cleared, the baby grew excited and for a moment Jamina thought she could hear elephants. But when she stopped to listen there was only whispering of the wind in the grass. For a long time the elephant would not move. Then, sadly and silently, he carried on

‘If you are lost,’ her grandfather had told her, ‘follow the afternoon herds; they will lead you to the river. Home is on the other side.’ It was a long time before Jamina and the elephant found the herd of zebra making its way across the plain. They traveled with the thirsty animals all through the hot afternoon. As the sun dipped low in the sky, they finally reached the river. But hidden eyes watched them from the water and Jamina sensed danger there. ‘It is not safe to cross here, little one,’ she said. ‘We must travel on.’ As Jamina turned, she thought she could see elephants on the horizon. She blinked and strained her eyes, but there were only acacia trees, shimmering in the hazy heat. Jamina and the elephant set off again, but soon the baby began to slow down.

‘Just a little further,’ begged Jamina. But he was too tired to go on. As Jamina waited with him, she thought of her mother. If only she could call her. Soon people would worry; soon they would come searching. The baby whispered. She stroked him gently. He had no mother to call. ‘Listen!’ Jamina hushed the elephant. They could hear voices. My parents! She thought. But the dark shadows in the distance were not her parents.

‘Poachers!’ she gasped under her breath. Now Jamina felt she too was one of the hunted. She prayed that the baby would not whimper. But the elephant sensed evil and stayed as still as a stone until the danger passed. Darkness fell and the whoops and howls of the night creatures sent a shiver down Jamina’s spine. She huddled close to the baby, then clung to him in fear as the deep and terrifying groan of something hungry sounded nearby.

As Jamina waited to be hunted, the words of her grandfather came to her again. ‘If ever you are in danger,’ he had said, ‘never lose hope.’ So Jamina listened for her parents. She closed her eyes and wished for them. But instead she saw elephants. Her mind was filled with the great herds of long ago. The mighty tuskers her grandfather had seen when he was young. Giant elephant shadows moving like ghosts across the plains. She could hear their deep and gentle murmurs close by. When she opened her eyes, there were elephants all around, as if she’d called them in her dream. Jamina wasn’t afraid.

‘Take this little one,’ she said. ‘And keep him safe’.

By the first light of dawn, Jamina’s mother found her sleeping in the grass. ‘I was playing hunters and I got lost,’ Jamina said. She stayed very close to her mother all the way home. ‘I will never be a hunter’, she said softly to herself as they reached the village.

Paul Gerarty in the book "The Hunter"

Parting Shots

Celebrate the joy of the African experience with these unforgettable proverbs

On wisdom

Do not spend an evening in a house where you are not willing to spend the night
Ethiopia

Do not abuse a crocodile when you are near the river
Uganda

On patience

A chicken does not scratch the ground with both legs
Equatorial Guinea

Patience is the egg that hatches large birds
Zimbabwe

More African Proverbs

...And a word on conservation

He that plants trees loves others besides himself
Thomas Fuller
1723

Remember ...

The heart is like a plant, it grows where it wants to
Zimbabwe
African Proverbs