International Women’s Day was celebrated nationally on 16 March 2012 in Binga. The first three stories of this issue therefore speak to the theme of gender equality and women empowerment with a specific focus on rural women, gender based violence, and access to quality health services. In addition, this newsletter covers issues of equity and sustainability, including human development, capacity building, and youth empowerment. Finally, the last set of topics are dedicated to the thematic areas of water and health.

Empowering Rural Women

“The UN in Zimbabwe is supporting efforts to incorporate gender budgeting to the national budget, promoting action against gender based violence, and supporting rural women to access viable urban markets and accessing microfinance for small business,” read a joint UN Country Team statement issued during the national commemoration of International Women’s Day.

The national commemoration took place on 16 March 2012 where hundreds of women, men and youths converged at Siachilaba Business Centre in Binga District, 900km from the capital Harare. Binga is regarded as one of the least developed districts in Zimbabwe, with women and children being among the poorest. The commemorations were held under the theme, Empower Rural Women - Eradicate Poverty and Hunger.

Drawn from different parts of Binga, women mounted merchandise they were making and selling to sustain their families, including artisanry and food. Through displaying their merchandize, the women were demonstrating that if given access to resources, they could contribute to poverty reduction and food security. According to Rosemary Cumanzala, the Coordinator of Zubo -- meaning, bringing women together, “There is lack of access to credit facilities by rural women to enable them to diversify their entrepreneurial activities. In addition, the local market for their products is not so vibrant. To address this, the women expressed...
the desire to be linked to markets in order for them to realize significant incomes that can be used to sustain their households.”

The UN statement delivered by the UNFPA Representative, Basile Tambashe stated that gender inequality remained a concern in Zimbabwe, particularly in rural areas. The real income of women is three times less than that of men, and women have a higher structural unemployment rate of 70% compared to 56% for men. In her keynote address, the Minister for Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Hon. Olivia Muchena said the government was working to boost the capacity of women in agriculture through various means that included providing agricultural equipment and input support. The Minister also acknowledged the support received from the UN in promoting women’s empowerment.

In March, with the support of the United Nations, Zimbabwe sent three experienced climbers to Mount Kilimanjaro to raise awareness on Gender Based Violence (GBV). Violence against women is a serious concern on the continent, as well as in Zimbabwe. In Africa, between 13% and 45% of women suffer assault by intimate partners during their lifetimes. Recent studies from the region show that between 16% and 47% of girls in primary or secondary school report sexual abuse or harassment from male teachers or classmates.

“Through a proactive and inclusive campaign such as UNiTE, it is important that we mobilize every effort against Gender Based Violence, particularly violence against women so that they are able to achieve their development aspirations”, said Alain Noudehou, United Nations Resident Coordinator, during a send-off press conference held for the trio.

The Africa UNiTE Campaign is UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s initiative and coordinates actions against GBV from 11 UN agencies, governments and civil society organizations.

“We at the Ministry are particularly concerned that women and girls can live a safe and protected life here in Zimbabwe. We are working to promote women’s rights at all levels of the government’s activities,” noted Hon. Deputy Minister of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Jessie Majome.

Upon return to Harare, Rtd. Major General G.K. Mashingaidze, on behalf of the Zimbabwean climbers said, “We flew the Zimbabwean flag at the peak of Mount Uhuru (Kilimanjaro), and as members of the Zimbabwean Defence Forces, we will work tirelessly to raise awareness of our people in defending the right and dignity of women and girls in Zimbabwe.”

“The participation of the three climbers from Zimbabwe has only been possible because of Government’s commitment and would like to encourage more of these initiatives to be supported by all government agencies to end violence against women,” said Hodan Addou, Representative of UN Women in Zimbabwe.
Schemes to supplement health worker salaries and supply the basic package of essential medicines have shown a significant impact in re-establishing primary health care services across the country.

The latest data shows that there are virtually no major stock-outs of drugs and vaccines across the country, and more than 90% of the 1400 facilities have the majority of required commodities.

In support of the Health Transition Fund, the United Kingdom announced a grant of £50 million (USD 80.3 million). The donation is geared towards the strengthening of health systems, and ultimately saving the lives of more than 30,000 children under five and pregnant women.

UNICEF Representative, Peter Salama said, “Owing to the funds made available, there has been significant progress in the health sector in recent years.” Mr Salama added, “With this contribution, rural clinics around Zimbabwe will continue to provide service to the women in the rural areas, ensuring that mothers enjoy equitable access to quality healthcare.”

“Given our alliance and shared priorities, we will continue to work to improve the health of women and children in Zimbabwe,” said UK AID Permanent Secretary, Mr. Mark Lowcock. “Health is one of the issues we are very focused on and hope to decrease the burden of maternal mortality in Zimbabwe”.

The Health Transition Fund, with the concerted efforts of three UN agencies — UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA — seeks to reduce the high rates of maternal and child mortality by increasing access to health care. The total budget required for the health transition fund is US$436 million covering a programme period of 2012-2015.
United Nations Human Development Report

The recently launched United Nations Human Development Report stated that Zimbabwe’s overall Human Development Index (HDI) performance is on the rebound. The country has shown relative improvement in health, education and income over the past couple of years.

According to the Report, Zimbabwe’s HDI value for 2011 is 0.376—in the low human development category—positioning the country at 173 out of 187 countries and territories.

The Report was formally launched by the Minister of Finance, Hon. Tendai Biti in the presence of representatives of various Government ministries, diplomatic corps and donor partners, the private sector, the UN Country Team and the media.

During the launch, the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr Alain Noudehou highlighted three key messages in line with the theme of the Report, which are as follows:

- Equity and sustainability are inextricably linked - that one will not be achieved without the other;
- Environmental risk such as climate change, deforestation, air and water pollution, and natural disasters disproportionately affect the most vulnerable members of our society;
- Patterns of inequity and unsustainability are shaped by disparities in power at the global and national levels.

In his remarks, the Minister of Finance, Hon. Tendai Biti said that it is imperative for Zimbabwe to continue taking the direction of the global development tide, anchored on the theme: Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All. “I urge all fellow countrymen, development partners and everyone to concentrate and maintain the momentum which Inclusive Government machinery has gained and results will certainly come out,” said Mr Biti.

The Report prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows that following current trends, inequality and deteriorating environmental conditions will together pose obstacles to progress in Africa and across the globe. As the world community prepares for the landmark June 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Report argues that sustainability must be approached as a matter of basic social justice, for current and future generations.

Equity and sustainability are inextricably linked - one will not be achieved without the other.

UN Zimbabwe Sponsors HIFA Community Activities

The sixth annual Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA), a grassroots driven undertaking, will take place under the theme, A Show of Spirit, from 1-6 May. The festival showcases Zimbabwean, regional and international arts and culture through theatre, dance, music, circuses, street performances, spoken word, crafts and visual arts.

The UN in Zimbabwe is sponsoring a large scale city mural in Mbare and the First Street Platform (free stage) aimed at promoting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through involving the broadest possible audience of Zimbabweans and fostering community based development and creativity. For more information on HIFA, click on this link www.hifa.co.zw.
Building Competitive Capacity Fundamental to Zimbabwe’s Development

Despite its consistent average economic growth rate of 5% in the last decade, recent external shocks, such as the global economic crisis and the food and fuel crises, have tested the resilience of Africa to deal with such challenges.

To reflect on the issue of capacity, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) dedicated the commemoration of its 20th anniversary held on 8 February to a high panel discussion on the Future of Africa is Now: the Critical Role of Capacity Development.

Speaking during the high panel discussion officiated by President Robert Mugabe, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Alain Noudehou said, “We in the United Nations believe that committed leadership, resilient institutions, a strong knowledge base, and accountability for results are four key levers for a real change in capacity development in Africa”. The Resident Coordinator further noted, “To bring change in these four areas, there is a need for a comprehensive and systematic development as opposed to ad-hoc interventions”.

The Minister of Finance, Hon. Tendai Biti, who is also the Governor of ACBF, speaking at the same event said that in 2010 the Government had allocated US$ 80 million for capacity building to capital ministries; however, due to lack of capacity only less than 50% of the money was absorbed. “There is a need not only to create capacity but also to retain, develop and recreate what could have been lost,” said the Minister.

Addressing the event’s theme, the Minister of Economic Planning and Investment, Hon. Tapiwa Mashakada noted, “Today Africa is different from the Africa of yesteryear, the new Africa needs trade and investment to enhance the resilience of its capacity.”

On his part, the Minister of Education, Hon. Stanley Mudenge underscored that “without developing the human element of capacity building nothing can be achieved – having appropriate higher learning institutions is of paramount importance to equip people with the necessary skills to plan, set their goals and achieve them.”

On the way forward, all the panellists emphasised the need to promote good governance and build competitive human and institutional capacity as fundamental elements to tackle Africa’s current development challenges.

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Building a Future with Decent Work for Young People

In 2012, the Global Youth Employment crisis is unprecedented. Of the world’s estimated 200 million unemployed people, about 75 million are young people. Globally, four out of every 10 people unemployed are young persons. The on-going youth employment crisis, aggravated by the global financial crisis, has created a renewed sense of urgency for action.

In Zimbabwe, the Government with the support of the United Nations hosted a national youth employment conference on 29 March 2012 aiming at addressing the issue of unemployment in the country.

The United Nations in Zimbabwe has been active in the provision of technical support to various macro-economic and youth sensitive sectoral policies. The policies include the National Youth Policy, the Skills Development Policy and the National Employment Policy. This has been accompanied by several targeted interventions such as the Start and Improve Your Business, the Know About Business and recently the Training for Rural Economic Empowerment.

During the conference, the Minister of Youth Development, Indigenisation & Empowerment, Hon. S. Kasukuwere said, “The Government, together with the United Nations, and other development partners is making a concerted effort through initiating a number of programmes aimed at economically empowering the youth.” The Minister explained that the programmes include a youth development fund, entrepreneurial skills development programmes, a vocational training programme, a national youth service programme and youth data and information.

Reinforcing the Minister’s statement, the Director of ILO, Alphonse Tabi-Abodo said, “Scaling-up of the on-going UN supported skills development programme in seven initial pilot districts and expansion to new districts has been made possible with the financial support of the Danish Government.” Mr. Tabi further noted that since 2009, with the support of the United Nations, more than 2,000 jobs have been created for youth in the rural and urban areas of Zimbabwe under the pilot initiative.
Today there are over 7 billion people to feed worldwide. Rapid urbanization and rising incomes will mean more food requirements. This begs for a sustainable management of resources to produce more food with less water.

Addressing participants at the 2012 World Water Day commemorations held under the theme, Water and Food Security, in Masvingo, President Robert Mugabe said, “Our natural environment is a live system that requires water in order to survive. When we destroy, pollute or silt our sources of water, we are destroying our lives. Water is food. Water is electric energy. Water is industrial development. Water is life. We need water practically in every aspect of our lives.”

Delivering the UN statement at the event, Gaoju Han, FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator said climate change is now an accepted scientific fact that is already having major impacts on food production. Mr Han noted, “To achieve “more crops per drop” irrigation is the way to go and Africa including Zimbabwe should use their potential to expand irrigated area, as only 13% of the suitable land is irrigated currently.”

Minister of Water Resources Development and Management, Hon. Samuel Sipepa Nkomo, gave a testimony of Government and partners’ commitment to expand irrigation schemes and conservation agriculture. He cited a series of projects such as the Tokwe Mukosi Dam in Masvingo and the mighty National Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project (NMZWP).

These projects, upon completion, will contribute to irrigation development, aquaculture, forestry, rice wetlands and the domestic and industrial water uses among many other multiplier benefits. In May 2012 Zimbabwe will launch an extensive US$50 million borehole drilling programme aimed at boosting communal and subsistence farming.

Minister Nkomo called upon Government and partners to avail more resources to enable infrastructural development needed to move into a green economy where water resources are readily available irrigation.

As a precursor to the national commemoration of World Water Day UNIC and FAO facilitated poster competition among 22 schools under the theme “water and food security- the future we want” to raise awareness among students on water management.
UN Campaign “Stop TB in My Lifetime” Echoed in Zimbabwe

The Millennium Development Goal number six (MDG 6) calls for halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB and other diseases by 2015. One of the most effective ways to achieve this goal is to tackle and address TB/HIV co-infection.

Globally, in 2010, there were 8.8 million cases of TB, and about 13% of these occur among people living with HIV. In Zimbabwe, TB/HIV co-infection remains a major problem with over 80% of all new TB patients dually infected with HIV.

It is against this background that Zimbabwe joined the rest of the world to commemorate World TB Day on 24 March at White City Stadium in Bulawayo under the theme Stop TB in My Lifetime.

The commemoration gave due recognition to the role played by individuals and their communities in TB control and adherence to treatment in order to stop TB in our lifetime. Individuals and community groups demonstrated their knowledge of TB disease and its treatment through different performances which showed that there is hope for Zimbabwe to achieve the MDG target on TB by 2015.

Speaking at the event, the Minister of Health and Child Welfare, Dr Henry Madzorera said his Ministry has trained microscopists in an effort to expand laboratory networks to improve the diagnosis of TB. “Our goal as a Ministry is to offer free high quality care for all TB patients in Zimbabwe”, added Dr Madzorera.

In response, Dr. Custodia Mandlhate, WHO Representative said, “the UN in Zimbabwe will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders to scaling-up of effective TB control interventions.”

The commemoration was attended, among others, by the Minister of Health and Child Welfare, Hon. Dr Henry Madzorera, political leaders from Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Representatives UN agencies such as WHO and UNDP.

UN Supports the Establishment of Zimbabwean MPs for HIV

In March 2012, Zimbabwe’s 200 legislators came together to form a network of Zimbabwe Parliamentarians for HIV (ZIPAH). Four United Nations agencies, namely, ILO, UNAIDS, UNICEF, and UNFPA, supported ZIPAH with USD 30,000 for training and to facilitate institutional strengthening for HIV responses.

“We undertake to put more concerted efforts to ensure that we contribute meaningfully towards achieving the three zeroes vision (Zero new infection, Zero HIV Related Death, Zero transmission from Mother to Child)”, said Hon. Blessing Chebundo, ZIPAH Chairperson.

Some of the key issues that the legislators are addressing include reviewing laws related to HIV, access to affordable health care services, addressing issues of key populations of concern and enforcing the Abuja Declaration for resource allocation (15% of the national budget to health care).

“We commit ourselves to providing national leadership on HIV responses by shaping a conducive legislative that places human rights at the centre of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support in Zimbabwe”, reads part of the ZIPAH Victoria Falls communiqué.

Participants of TB day in Bulawayo