

Improving Women's Rights through Education and Development

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Introduction:

Studies after studies have shown that nations reach their fullest potential with educated citizenry. It should be the birthright of every human being to have access to food, clean water, clothing, shelter, education and health care. Yet in many places around the globe people live on less than a dollar a day with little hope of improving their lot. This is true nowhere more than in sub-Saharan Africa.

Education is the single most important thing for the advancement and empowerment of women around the world. An educated female population is necessary for the well being of every society and the larger world community. By educating girls, starting at an early age, they receive the skills necessary to support themselves and contribute to the support of their families. According to a U.S. Department of State report, a single year of education for a girl usually correlates with an increased income of 10 to 20 percent during her working years. Further, some societies have learned that educating girls leads to better health for them in their adult years as well as for their families. The more education a woman has, the better are her chances for giving birth to healthy babies and the better the chances for her children living longer and healthier lives. Education is not just for the betterment of women alone but it will be the tools that build understanding, tolerance and the keys to unlocking better futures for all the world's people. Educated societies tend to be less violent societies.

This paper will attempt to address some of the contemporary and critical issues facing African women in sub-Saharan Africa. However, due to time constraints, it will focus primarily on female human rights violations through lack of access to education and thus lack of hope for a better standard of living in sub-Saharan Africa. It will present the general injustices to African females by blocking or hampering education for them, programs for righting the wrongs, success stories and the urgent need to move forward with development of Africa by all her people.

Obstacles to Education:

An article in the Los Angeles Times March 21, 2005, entitled In War-Torn Southern Sudan, Women Battle for an Education chronicled the struggle of 19 year old Martha Yar in her quest to attend school against long established customs. The essence of the articles was that John Benykor watched Yar each day not knowing that she was going to school. He decided that he wanted her and so paid her family 20 cows for her. In this part of the Sudan, the only arithmetic women learn is how many cows they are worth. Females are the property of their fathers. However, Martha rebelled against this arrangement because she wanted to continue her schooling after having worked herself through primary school. Her brother beat her for refusing Benykor's offer because he needed the money to buy himself a bride. Although Martha ran away three times, Benykor, 15 years her senior and an uneducated former rebel soldier finally kidnapped her. She was scared and even after he promised to let her finish her schooling, she refused his proposal. Unfortunately, Martha had no rights in the matter. She begged the headmaster and teacher for support. She became notorious for running away. Finally, her would be suitor rounded up neighbors, friends and relatives, and during the night while she slept, he kidnapped her and locked her for weeks in his house with round the clock security. In the end they were married, and he beat her everyday. But strong willed Martha refused to give up her dream of an education and after a few weeks he let her go back to school. After the birth of her daughter, again her husband told her that he would let her continue her schooling and he did for a while. According to the article, three months before the journalist interviewed Martha, Benykor told her that she had to leave school and he was taking her to his home village where there would be just housework.

Martha recounted to the journalist that her husband said that if he were to let her get an education she would look down on him. She retorted "now that you are keeping me in the house, you are not educated and I am not educated". "How does that help"? She goes on to say that before she met him she was in school, had her own life and wasn't getting beaten each

day. The article ends with this quote from Martha “My family has equated my life to 20 cows,” “But I insist, my life is not equal to 20 cows”.

Perhaps Martha’s story is the exception and not the rule. But there is no doubt that many women in Africa and other developing countries face uphill battles in their quests for education and thus better lives. Martha situation clearly demonstrates a gross violation of her human rights in the 21st century whether for religious reasons or culture traditions. Females where ever they are own their own bodies and minds and should be able to develop their minds through education providing them the means to lead productive lives. Which, in the end benefits the entire society.

Lack of Female Education Slows Development:

A recent report by The World Bank found that research from around the world has shown that gender inequality tends to slow economic growth and make the rise from poverty more difficult. The reasons for these links are not difficult to comprehend. Half of the world’s population is female, therefore, the level to which women and girls benefit from development policies and programs has a profound impact on countries’ overall development success. The findings were that women and girl tend to work harder than men, are more likely to invest their earnings in their children, and that they are major producers as well as consumers. Without these contributions by women to societies, men and boys could not survive much less enjoy high levels of productivity. The empowerment of women is especially important for determining a country’s demographic trends. The same trends in turn offset a country’s economic success and environmental sustainability.

Shocking Statistics:

In sub-Saharan Africa, almost as many children die every month from malaria as died in the Indian Ocean tsunami or roughly 150,000 children. (Source: Columbia Univ. Professor Jeffery Sachs in a report to the United Nations). Still thousands of other Africans children die every year from other preventable diseases. With proper education, would mothers be able to

prevent some of these deaths? The answer is a resounding “Yes”. Often educated mothers are aware of the early warning signs of some illness, there would be more trained nurses and female medical doctors to care for and treat the children. Informed mothers know how important it is for their children to be given clean water even if that means boiling the water before it is given to young children. The lists of what educated females and males alike are capable of contributing to the overall improvement of societies are endless.

In Southern Sudan, only 1% of women finish primary school, and 88% are illiterate. More than one in nine women die in pregnancy or childbirth. (Source: UNICEF). Many women in Southern Sudan are raped by Government supported Northern militias. These Northern Sudanese have for years terrorized and waged war against the defenders of oil rich Southern Sudan. If the unfortunate rape victim, bears a child as a result of the rape, she suffers further humiliation, shame and becomes an outcast in her own village and within her family.

Angola, still smoldering from more than 25 years of civil war, has a very low literacy rate with only 42% of the population, aged 15 or older being able to read. For Angolan women, it is even worse at 28%. Angola is rich in natural resources, such as oil, diamonds and fisheries but the long civil war left it in shambles and left more than 1.5 million of its citizens dead.

In Ethiopia, only one in five girls finish primary school without repeating her education and just a third of women can read or write. There is little need to present additional statistics on the daunting task and burden that sub-Saharan Africa faces and the daily struggle of trying to distribute limited resources. Added to this is the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, malaria, draughts, polluted water, food shortages, civil war, corruption and outside exploitation. Africa’s story is well known to all of us. But what is being done to prepare and outfit Africans to end this long and tragic chapter in Africa’s history once and for all? Part of the solution is to, by any means necessary, educate her people so that they can negotiate and form equal partnerships with other world communities for the development of Africa. Africa is the richest continent by far in

natural resources including oil, gas, rich mineral deposits, gold and diamonds. Because of this wealth, Africa has lots of bargaining power and she should use the power to negotiate the best deal for her people. When there is oil, gas or any other form of exploration and finds in Africa by multi-national companies, the lion share of the profits should be left on the continent and used for the benefits of the people. The oil and gas companies from the West need Africa's resources as much as Africa needs their expertise to dig, drill and refine the materials. For far too long these companies have negotiated contracts in their favor taking, in some cases, more than 75% of the net profits from oil drillings and gold and diamond mining. The other 25% or so goes to corrupt government heads for new palaces, luxury cars and Swiss bank accounts. The African people are left with nothing and this exploitation by foreign multinationals and corrupt African governments has to stop and now. The proceeds from the wealth of Africa should be enjoyed by all her people. Lets starts with the education of the people including the female population. It should be the supreme responsibility of every government to provide public schooling for its young citizenry. Yet many young people in Africa are prevented from getting even a basic education due to fees they must pay to attend school. In most cases, parents cannot even afford to feed and shelter their families much less pay for uniforms, books, lunches and fees for teachers who often are poorly trained and poorly paid. How is it possible that an African child or teenager whose parents immigrate to the U.S. or Europe is able to attend school free but cannot do so in his or her own country. In fact, in Los Angeles Unified School District more than half the student body was either born in other countries or their parents were, yet they get to go to schools free that are supported mostly by Los Angeles County taxpayers and U.S. taxpayers through federal grants. This should be a wake up call to African governments and educators throughout the continent that developed countries realize the importance of education for all people. Countries that educate its own citizens and foreign citizens alike develop much faster and provide better standards of living for all. When large segments of a society are not educated and the cycle continues decades after decades, it places

huge burdens on the overall society and is manifested in the form of extreme poverty, poor health, early mortality, hunger, homelessness and crime.

International Programs Educating and Providing Entrepreneurial Opportunities to African

Females:

The international community long ignored Africa's needs and showed little sympathy for her suffering. No former colonizer wants to take responsibility for the untold destruction it caused Africa and the lasting vestiges of the cruelty they reaped upon Africa and her people. Not nearly enough is being done to assist Africa. Fortunately there are some foreign governments through their various agencies, NGOs (Non government organizations) and private foundations that are stepping up to the plate to put in place and assist Africa in educating her people and creating job opportunities. Following are some examples of projects that are helping to educate African girls and women and to provide them with the skills, information and capital to become entrepreneurs.

Schools and Education Centers:

The U.S. government's foreign assistance programs support a multitude of innovative projects to improve education in Africa and assist African nations overcome the challenges of strengthening and expanding their school systems, including increased enrollment of girls.

In 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush announced a five-year African Education Initiative to help African countries improve primary school education through teachers' training, provision of textbooks, other learning materials and by supporting community involvement and offering scholarship for girls. U.S. embassies in some 30 African countries identified the girls who were eligible for the scholarships. The principal objective of the initiative is to increase both access to quality basic education and the number of teachers, especially at the primary school level. The initial budget for this initiative was a paltry \$15 million and an additional commitment of \$185 million over the subsequent four years through 2006. The initiative is managed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), working

closely with host-countries ministries of education and institutions of higher education, the private sector and local and international nongovernmental organizations. In 2002, only about 63 percent of all children in sub-Saharan Africa attended primary school, and only 21 percent went on to secondary school.

To help improve the situation, the U.S. goal is to provide \$250,000 in scholarship to African girls, train more than 160,000 new teachers, and offer in-service training for more than 260,000 current teachers. To now, as a result of the initiative, more than 110,000 teachers have upgraded their skills through in-service training, and approximately 20,000 teachers have received pre-service training. Also 770,000 textbooks and other learning materials were distributed to students and 17,000 girls benefited from scholarships.

Another key component of the initiative is creating partnerships between six historically black U.S. colleges and universities and six educational institutions in African nations to supply 4.5 million textbooks to schoolchildren in Africa.

In addition to the African Education Initiative, USAID manages bilateral educational programs in 16 African countries including Benin, Mali, Angola and South Africa. USAID has given micro-science kits to 625 schools in South Africa to boost the science and technology skills of disadvantaged girls and boys.

Another similar program, The African Girls' Education Initiative or AGEI is funded in part by the Norwegian government and supported by UNICEF. The initiative promotes systemic changes in a country's educational system to remove gender bias and to improve the quality of education at all levels. It encourages countries to develop policies and plans of action for girls' education, build the necessary partnerships and implement multisectoral programs that encourage learning for girls. The programs may include support for early childhood development, improved water and sanitation, access to health services, attention to HIV/AIDS and income-generating activities for women.

In several countries, the multisectoral approach has and continues to produce new school cafeterias or canteens, and the construction of toilets. As well as in other countries special attention is being given to the health issues of girls. In Gambia and Burkina Faso, mothers' club are sponsoring schools and helping to reduce the dropout rate for girls. In Ethiopia, teacher training is improving classroom learning. In all 34 countries participating, the initiative has supported the development and implementation of a plan of action to promote gender-sensitive primary education.

According to UNICEF, more than 6,000 schools and literacy center in 16 countries in west and central Africa, and regions and districts in 18 eastern and southern African countries are benefiting from AGEI.

Entrepreneurial Projects and Opportunities for Women:

The U.S. based Grameen Foundation through its technology center is replicating in parts of Africa an entrepreneurial phone program which was a big success in Bangladesh. In rural villages where no telecommunication services have previously existed, cellular phones are provided via a sustainable financing mechanism to very poor women who use the phones to sell their business.

In Uganda, the Grameen Technology Center has established a joint venture with MTN Uganda to create MTN Village Phone. Over 1,100 village phone businesses are now up and running in remote villages in Uganda. MTN provides airtime, equipment and support to the small business owners from capital provided from the Grameen Foundation. In addition to MTN Uganda, Grameen Technology Center is in partnership with seven independent micro finance organizations: FINCA, FOCCAS, Uganda Micro finance Union (UMU), Uganda Women's Finance Trust (UWFT), Feed the Children, MedNet, Hofokam and Post Bank. These partners, through Grameen Technology Center assistance, make small loans to its women clients. This level of partnership has helped the project to achieve the necessary scale for

financial and social sustainability. Grameen Technology Center has received many honors and awards for its pioneering work in developing technology for the benefits of humanity.

Case studies of Village Phone Programs in Action in Uganda:

Fatima Serwoni lives in the village of Namunsi in Mbale district. She owns a small store, selling food and household items. In her 11th loan cycle with FOCCAS, her weekly income is 80% higher today than it was before joining FOCCAS. She has used some of her loans to pay for education for her four children. As with other village phone operators, there is no electricity in her village, so she uses an automobile battery to recharge her phone. The nearest public pay phone is over 4km away from her village. Before participation in the program, the shelves in her small shop were bare due to lack of capital to invest in goods for resale. She now uses her earnings to stock the shelves of her store, which is now an important focal point for her small community.

In another success story thanks to the Village Phone Program, Justine Zikusoka operates a small retail shop in the village of Kigando. She is currently in her 5th loan cycle and earns over 65% more than before she joined FINCA. She has used her loans to pay school fees for her children, to feed her family and increase the working capital in her business. Since starting her business, she has sold an average of over 300 minutes per day on her phone. Justine realized the success from her business by actively marketing her services in churches, schools and through other FINCA clients.

There are many other success stories for women Village Phone participants including that of Angilina Wanders, who is a successful borrower from FOCCAS. She owns a dress making shop and when people come to buy her dresses they also often use her phone to make calls throughout Uganda and to surrounding countries where they may have relatives or friends. She too has increased her earnings many times over and provides a better standard of living for her children and other family members.

Grameen Technology Center is now working to replicate the success it had in Uganda in Rwanda. In partnership with MTN Rwanda Cell, an agreement was made to begin a pilot project in 100 villages in rural Rwanda by the end of the first quarter of 2005.

Not only are the women of small business receiving positive results, but the partnerships between Grameen Technology Center with phone companies and other businesses have provided these local businesses long needed capital and expansion. As a result of its partnership with Grameen, MTN Uganda has become a dominant communication company in Uganda. In 2004, MTN Uganda had in excess of 600,000 customers in 120 towns and villages. It is clear, that in economic terms, this is how market economies function and countries develop. The Grameen Technology Center partnerships with African businesses have produced not only a trickle down effect but a flowing down effect from the highest level of big business to the most impoverished level of society-the rural women. This is just good business!

The Coca Company has similar programs in South Africa and other African countries. Oprah Winfrey, after learning of the plight of Africa and talking with Irish rocker, Bono of U-2 fame, opened a girls' school in South Africa and have provided millions of dollars in schools supplies, clothing and toys to children throughout South Africa. General Electric built a hospital in Ghana and the Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation has provided million upon million of dollars for medical care and education awareness to AIDS victims and for the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa and promises to do much more. The list is endless from the giants mentioned here to the tiniest charities like JIJUMA Global Services and International Language Center Education and Outreach to rural schools and clinics in West Africa and to the poor wherever they can reach them in Africa, are all doing their part for Africa. Yes, the number of foreign governments, NGOs, United Nations Agencies and private foundations working in Africa are many and too numerous to list in a paper of this length. Some progress have been made, but there is much yet to be done and African governments,

educational institutions and private businesses must take a leading role in educating and improving the lives of its citizenry.

Home Grown African Initiatives for Women's Education, Entrepreneurship and Political

Inclusion:

Neither African Governments, nor NGOs, nor private business have done nearly enough to educate African women, improve their lives by giving them access to business opportunities nor have women been included in the political process to the degree they should be. However, some credit must be given to African leadership, whether as a result of outside encouragement or from their own initiatives, for steps taken in different forms to improve the lives of African women.

In recent years, Many African nations have made primary schooling free for every child. But the sudden influx of large numbers of students, who previously could not afford to pay school fees but wishing to take advantage of free education, has placed severe stress on already fragile school systems with limited resources. Individual class size with as many as 100 students and sometimes more, make it difficult for teachers to reach all students. The large number of student seeking education now because they do not have to pay, should be a wakeup call to African governments and educators that Africans, young and old alike, are starved for knowledge.

An example of a model secondary school is Gambia High School in Banjul, which is second to none. A visit there in early 2003, by this writer and an in-depth interview with the principal and vice principal was a most welcome and pleasant surprise. The students, teenage girls and boys, were extremely well mannered in crisp clean white blouses and shirts matched with pale blue slacks on boys and pale blue skirt on girls. The male and females students freely associated with each other in the most respectable manner. Classrooms were clean, organized and facilitated with printed material, books, pictures, maps and computer labs. The administrative staff was pleasing and carried out their duties in well-equipped offices. Our

comparative research and visits to schools throughout three continents including Beverly Hills High in the U.S.A., Europe and Africa gives Gambia High an A+. If Gambia, one of the smallest countries in Africa can administer a school of this caliber, so can countries throughout Africa. If wondering how best to upgrade and provide the best education and pleasant environment to their youngsters, African ministers of education are encouraged to pay a visit to this model schools.

A World Bank study, found that community involvement in children' education in Guinea, Bukina Faso, Mali and Mauritania yielded and continues to yield positive results. The study followed the role of parents associations (Association des Parents d'Eleves or APE) and associations of mothers (Association des Meres d'Eleves or AME).

The involvement of APEs and AMEs in both rural and urban communities includes parents participating in building schools, managing school cafeterias, supplying equipment and participating in the maintenance of school buildings.

In Guinea, parents groups helped build a library at the urban middle-school in Samoe. They helped build primary schools in the rural villages of Lelouma, Dalaba, Mamou, Boffa, Kankan and Madiana. The groups have helped resolved issues of salary and housing for contractual teachers in Mandiana.

In Bukina Faso, the parents groups gave financial and material support to help the students with basic material such as textbooks and chalk, sports equipment and extra reading books. Also the groups have built extra classrooms to meet the increasing demand of enrollment.

In Mali, the parents group in Koube-Koundia, with the help of an international NGO, opened its own school and pays the teachers' salaries. The parent group also helps the school director enroll girls, monitor equality between girls and boys, and facilitate the use of the Dogon language.

AME was created in Burkina Faso in 1992 in the region of Sissili by a small group of women who wanted to participate and contribute more to the education of their children. According to the mother, APEs, which are typically run by men did not fully integrate women into their activities. The initiative proved to be effective in involving more women in the development of school activities and in girls' schooling. AMEs objectives are:

- Increase the rates of enrollment and success of students, girls in particular;
- Improve the access and retention of all students.
- Enable more girls to finish their studies;
- Prepare girls for integration into their environment while giving them the skills to manage their lives; and
- Enable women to work together in order to ensure their full participation in the education of their children, particularly of their daughters.

AMEs has changed the parents-school relationship, as well as parents' mentality toward girls' education. Far from being in conflict with APEs, they play a complementary role and have enabled more women to participate in school meetings and decision -making.

It is hoped that programs that involve the community likes AMEs and APEs are put in place throughout Africa. It is clear that it does indeed take a village to educate and raise our children, girls and boys alike, to grow up to be good citizens who in turn will contribute to the development of Africa. Lets not fool ourselves though, there is much yet to be done and African governments and businesses of all sizes must be involved with the community in order for the continent to prosper.

There have been efforts in recent year throughout Africa to increase the number of women in politics and in government. In fact African nations are now setting the pace for inclusion of women the political process. In July 2003, the African Union (AU) adopted the Protocol on the Rights of Women but it has been ratified by only a few countries including

Rwanda, Comoros, and Libya. It requires 15 countries' ratification to become law. The protocol covers a broad range of human rights issues and is a comprehensive framework that African women can use to exercise their rights. Among African women urging ratification of the protocol is Graca Machel of Mozambique.

In August 2004, the U.S. Embassy in Cote d'Ivoire, sponsored a week-long innovative training seminar that encouraged women to become more active in the political arena. Odette Nyiramilimo, a member of the Rwandan senate, shared her insight on power sharing and grassroots mobilization. At the opening of the seminar, Cote d'Ivoire's first lady, Simone Ehivet Gbagbo welcomed the sponsors and participants. After the seminar, her husband, President Laurent Gbagbo indicated that he would discuss with his party a proposal that the party list for the 2005 parliamentary elections include at least 30 percent women. After the training seminar, 25 Ivorian women announced that they would stand for office in the upcoming national election.

In the last quarter of 2004, Ethiopia's ruling party announced that it was imposing female quota on candidates in an effort to include more women in parliaments. Women are guaranteed up to 30 percent of seats in the national elections for the incumbent Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Currently Ethiopia's parliament has just 42 female members as compared to 505 men. Education Minister, Genet Zewdie is the only female member of the 16- member cabinet. A UN report showed that Ethiopia lagged behind other African countries when it came to giving women a voice.

Rwanda has the largest number of women in parliament than does any other county in the world. Women there hold 49% percent of the seats. This is great news considering Rwanda's recent catastrophic history. Women in power are far less likely to start or permit civil unrest.

Trailblazing African Women:

Despite all the obstacles facing them, African women are forging ahead and continue to make their marks in Africa and around the world:

A daughter of Africa, Dr. Wangari Maathai of Kenya, brought pride to all of Africa, when she became the first African Woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. Maathai won the world highest honor for efforts contributing to sustainable growth and preservation of the environment of her beautiful country for future generations. Dr. Maathai studied extensively abroad but returned to Kenya for her doctorate. Her accolades and awards are far too many to detail but what led her to this place is history was her founding of the Green Belt Movement. She started the Green Belt Movement as an attempt to solve the most pressing problem confronting the women in her country: shortages of clean water, nutritious food, and the fuel to cook it. A spiraling cycle of deforestation-forested land in Kenya had dropped from 30 percent to 2 percent of the nation's total area in a few decades. The shift from growing food for the local market to cash crops, had all exacerbated these problems, and were quickly leading to an environmental crisis.

Dr. Maathai started her grassroots movement in 1977 by persuading women that planting trees was a way out of poverty. With the motto, "One Person-One Tree", the movement gathered momentum. The movement faced many obstacles including discrimination and government repression but Dr. Maathai and her followers pressed on. The government arrested and imprisoned Dr. Maathai on many occasions. During one peaceful demonstration, she was even beaten to the point of unconsciousness, but despite her life being in imminent danger, she forged ahead. In 1987, a Pan-African Green Belt Network was established. Her movement has transformed Kenya and other parts of Africa, making an important contribution to improving the natural environment as well as to the stabilization and revitalization of local communities and to society at large. The Green Belt Movement has more than 100,000 members and they have planted over 30,000 trees in Kenya, Tanzania,

Uganda, Malawi, Lesotho, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. Dr. Maathai was elected to the Kenyan parliament in 2002 with 98 percent of the vote. In 2003, she was appointed assistant minister for the environment, natural resources and wildlife. She has addressed the UN on numerous occasions.

On April 19, 2005, Margaret Dongo, President of Zimbabwe Union of Democrats (ZUD) spoke at UCLA. Among many other subjects she addressed was whether Zimbabwe political parties adhered to South African Development Community (SADC) guidelines. The guidelines call for a 30% representation of women in decision-making positions including parliament.

Ms. Dongo was a liberation fighter against British occupation of her country. She joined the liberation struggle in 1975 and went to Chibawabawa where she stayed until 1976 when she left to receive Military training at Chimoio Training Camp. She worked primarily as a medical assistant and nurse, receiving and treating patients injured on the battlefields. In 1980, she served as Secretary of Women's Affairs at the headquarters of Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANUPF). From 1983-89, she worked in the Ministry of State for Security in the President's Department. She became one of the founding members of the Zimbabwe War Veterans Association, which represents the former freedom fighters in Zimbabwe. In 1990, she was elected Member of Parliament for Harare East Constituency. In August of 1995, Ms. Dongo became the first person ever in Zimbabwe to single-handedly challenge an election in the High Court. She won her case and became the only Independent Member of Parliament. Margaret Dongo holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Harvard University.

Like Dr. Wangari Maatha and Margaret Dongo, there are thousands of African women who against all odds, have shown courage under fire, and stayed the course for the betterment of human kind. What do these two Daughters of Africa have in common? EDUCATION, which surely did not come without roadblocks and uphill battles.

Conclusion:

Africa must educate all its citizenry, starting when they are young to enable them to grow and prosper to realize their full potentials. Education will enlighten Africans and provide them with the tools to leverage their human resources to achieve economic competitiveness and growth while achieving social development and cohesiveness. Africans must develop their skills to be competitive in science and technology keeping abreast of the never-ending changes in these disciplines. Africa must nurture, manage and protect her human and natural resources with care and foresight. Africa is special and beautiful. Why is it that from the beginning of exploration, foreigners sailed to the shores of Africa and went deep into the hinterlands to exploit and possess Africans and Africa. It seems that foreigners are aware of the wealth and beauty of Africa more than are Africans. Africans struggle daily to buy back the bare necessities of life from foreigners who took the goods out of Africa in the first place. Throughout Africa, foreigners live better than Africans. Africans are servants to these foreigners in their own land. This could not happen in Europe and Asia, which is where most of the foreigners come from and who are living large in Africa. Many Africans are treated as second-class citizens in their own countries and certainly in Europe where some have gone to seek better lives. These situations cannot continue.

Africans must take some responsibility for this exploitation of African resources, human and natural alike. Corruption in politics must be done away with, senseless civil wars must end once and for all, human rights including the rights of women and innocent children must be protected at all cost. Africans, who speak different European languages whether English, French or Portuguese, must not let this be a barrier to unity. Europeans speak many different languages but they do not let this stop them from effectively communicating with each other. Developing Africa by Africans would stop the brain drain of most intelligent people and it would give future generations pride in their homeland. If Africa were to

provide her people with good education, good standards of living and jobs, there would be no need for large number of Africans to leave the continent and take up permanent residence in other countries. The host country get the benefits of the most intelligent and best educated Africans leaving Africa with the uneducated masses who are unable to contribute to the development of the continent. Education in the best Universities in the West is fine and no one can be blamed for wanting the better things in life after he/she has experienced them. However, the practice must start where the educated African take his/her knowledge home and together with likeminded Africans, develop African education system from primary through university to be the best in the world. Through partnerships and carefully negotiated capital investment from the West if necessary, African must develop Africa's infrastructure, create jobs and make Africa the home Africans look forward to returning to. Education could also be funded from monies government heads and ministers waste on multiple expensive, foreign made automobiles, multiple homes around the world and Swiss Bank accounts.

To finance education at all levels, African governments must negotiate financial aid from multi-national companies wanting to do business in Africa. Exxon Mobil needs Africans oil and gas as much as Africa needs them to drill and refine it. Institutions of higher learning in the sciences, technology and mining must be founded and supported to provide future generations in Africa with the know-how to discover and refine their own natural resources. Then sell portions to international markets at rates most favorable to Africa. Medical centers, hospitals and think tanks must be developed to conduct research and find cures for HIV/AIDS, malaria and other curable diseases that continue to ravish and therefore weaken Africa. Foreign aid is good but equal partnerships are better.

All the aid in the world and improvement in managing resources will have little positive results if Africans, whether in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Cote d'Ivoire, continue to kill each other in these never ending cycles of violent and senseless civil wars. We can love our ethnicity without hating the other person's ethnicity. We are all Africans and that's

what really counts. These destructive acts only serve to weaken Africa and in the end neither side is the better of for them. Nations of Europe, once ruled by ongoing civil wars, have come together as one nation and are thriving. For the first time in half a century, there is an international currency preferred to the U.S. dollar and that is the Euro. If Europe can come together as one so can Africa.

This paper closes with a quote from President Ikeda, founder of Nichiren Buddhism, which is essence said “Africa will become the continent of the 21st Century....those whom the world has oppressed the most, will carry the world into the future”. “Those who have experienced the extremes of human cruelty, have a mission to change humanity”. If a Japanese can believe this and is this confident in Africa, why can’t we as Africans at home and in the Diaspora. My sisters, brothers, and friends lets go forth and make it happen by developing and preserving Africa as a place of hope, of dreams realized, of stars reached and above all a homeland of dignity for our children and future generations to grow and thrive. Lets do it for Mother Africa so that she can finally take her place as an equal partner and stand head to head and shoulder with the great nations of the world. We owe it to her and we must not fail her.

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Data from websites of the World Bank, United Nations Agencies U.S. State Department International Information Programs, Grameen Foundation USA, Afrol News, AllAfrica.com, UCLA African Studies Department and Nichiren Buddhism News.