

Dear friends

27 July 2007

This Rwanda update on development issues and my activities is sent from time to time. Please feel free to forward it to anyone you think would be interested. You should let me know if you want to be taken off the mailing list. If you receive this e-mail direct from me and you wish to keep receiving it, you need to say so once every three years, as the list is updated annually to remove any people who have been silent for that time.

Weddings. While the number of Australians who are married has dropped below 50 per cent for the first time, according to 2006 Census figures, there is great pressure on Bandarwanda to formalise longstanding relationships by marriage, so that women can have the full protection of land law: women who are not legally married have no legal entitlement to their husband's land. Efforts by local communities in sensitizing couples to abolish cohabitation and legalize marriages are yielding fruit through group wedding ceremonies, with sometimes 50 and more couples marrying at the same time. In one sector there have been nearly 7000 marriages since 2005. Last month I went to the wedding ceremony of one of my SNV colleagues, who has four children and whose 12 year old daughter had insisted her parents marry. In August, one of my guards, Eustace, who has six children aged from two to 21, is marrying. Almost every weekend now I would attend a 'give away' engagement or full marriage ceremony of a friend, or relative of a friend. These are very happy, relaxing occasions. The photos below show me sitting at a wedding celebration with Lieutenant Colonel Rose Kabuye, former army officer, now Protocol Officer for the President, and President Paul Kagame and the First Lady leaving the ceremony.

Rwanda. There is an enormous misconception that all of Africa is strife-torn and impossible - in reality the continent is 56 individual countries, and many of them are ranked by the World Bank as having better business environments than Greece or India. Rwanda is truly making great strides – hard to believe the recovery when it started from a zero base after the 1994 genocide, which destroyed much of its human capital, infrastructure and socio-economic fabric. The country has achieved its highest absolute value since the 1970s in the human development index. The Transparency International Report on Corruption Perception Index ranked Rwanda 83rd among 158 countries surveyed, a better rating than all countries in Eastern Africa. A recent World Bank study on how countries have improved their investment climate concluded that Rwanda was among the top 10 countries worldwide, the only African country listed. Another World Bank report that measures factors like corruption control, government accountability and absence of violence highlighted the progress Rwanda had made towards political stability, topping the other four East African Community (EAC) states. Such achievements emphasize the resilience, hard work and commitment of the government and the people. The World Bank will increase grants to Rwanda by 51 percent to USD 106m in the 2007/2008 financial year because of the levels of transparency in the country and because all the grant money goes directly to the projects it is meant for. US has also increased its funding as the biggest *bilateral* donor. This week, the Parliamentary President of UK's opposition Conservative party, eight MPs and 36 party members are in Rwanda for a two week voluntary work mission. UK is also a major donor country.

Rwanda has gone from being the continent's greatest *source* of insecurity to a *provider* of security, as a key part of the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Darfur. President, Paul Kagame and his government, with their zero corruption policy, have managed to stabilize the country and then translate that political stability into innovative policy reform - so much so that Rwanda is now poised to benefit from globalization and build sustainable economic and political security for its citizens. Thanks to ambitious government initiatives in developing Rwanda's telecommunications infrastructure, the country's ICT sector -- including mobile phone and fibre optic networks as well as PC and Internet access -- has become a primary target of both international public and private investment in recent years. The country is set to become sub-Saharan Africa's ICT hub. The Connect Africa Summit, to be held in Kigali in October, will bring together the private sector, governments and international organizations to seek ways to address the "digital divide" across the continent and to promote the use of ICT to achieve development goals.

All public schools in Rwanda are expected to join the information super-highway by the end of next year. Already, half of the primary and secondary schools have embraced the new technology, which has been given priority by the Government under its Vision 2020 program. The Rwandese Government has supplied the 400 schools with 4,000 desktop computers and 4,000 power units (UPS), in addition to training 2,000 teachers in basic computing. More than 400 students have been benefited from full scholarships to study information technology in India, South Africa and the United States. They are expected to graduate and return home to take up civil service jobs to promote the ICT program. All ministries have been mandated to appoint ICT directors. The new technology has also been embraced by the Rwandese Cabinet, where ministers attend meetings on Wednesdays armed with laptops. The public and the press are free to log on to the Government website 24 hours later and find resolutions posted there. The Rwandese Government wants to cut costs of stationery and boost service delivery to the public.

Kofi Annan has been appointed head of an Alliance of African governments and business leaders seeking to reverse the decline in the continent's agricultural output. With a terrain that may not favour some agricultural sectors coupled with no mineral wealth, Rwanda has focused its resources to developing its infrastructure to position itself as the regional interconnectivity center. Rwanda is targeting the probable large market in eastern D R Congo as an entry point. It is refurbishing its entire road network. Coffee exports increased by 48 percent in 2005-6, the country producing specialty coffee that commands top prices - meaning more income for farmers. Rwanda has given up membership of the Economic Community of Central African States and the South African Development Community to join EAC, aligning itself with English-speaking Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. It has also applied for membership of the Commonwealth. Relations with France continue strained and the current Rwandan enquiry, and now the French media, are unearthing more evidence of the French complicity in the genocide.

HIV/Aids. The HIV/Aids Implementers International conference held in Kigali in June had 1500 international delegates from different nations deliberating on the way forward in the global fight against the virus. Again Rwanda is a success story with incidence reduced from 11 percent seven years ago to 3 percent now. A new World Bank report on HIV/Aids said that the mobilization of empowered 'grassroots' communities, along with delivering condoms and life-saving treatments, are beginning to slow the pace of the continent's epidemic. Nevertheless, a report by South Africa's Institute for Democracy shows that HIV/Aids may be killing African politicians faster than they can be replaced. There has been a sharp rise in the number of AIDS-related deaths of elected leaders in southern African nations. In Malawi, 28 MPs have died from AIDS in the past few years. The [World Health Organisation estimates](#) the virus [infects 7000 women and girls globally every day](#) and that [already, 17 million women and girls are living with the virus](#). It found that in 35 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, most women give birth to more than five children. And, of the estimated 210 million women worldwide who become pregnant every year, more than 500,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth, and about one in five of them resorts to abortion because of poor access to contraception.

There are special challenges in Africa in relation to prevention and treatment of the disease. In the developed world, pregnant women carrying HIV are given a simple treatment in labour, along with their baby, and discouraged from breastfeeding. This lowers the risk of transferring the virus to about 2 per cent. In Africa, fewer than 10 per cent of pregnant African women get such interventions and, unlike in Rwanda, almost none are tested for HIV. 700,000 HIV-positive babies are born every year, and most die before the age of five. Then, of course, there is the dispute between Aids campaigners and the drugs firms that oppose generic antiretroviral treatments; the reluctance of some governments still to accept that HIV is sexually transmitted, or that ARVs can diminish the impact of the virus; and the fact that long-distance truckers in Rwanda and Uganda believe that they need to have regular unprotected sex to stay healthy. The Organisation of African First Ladies against AIDS campaign prints full-page advertisements in our local newspapers declaring that "Sex with a child is not a cure for aids: it is murder". They go on to say: "Be an example, speak out! Call the crime by its real name and make it a thing of the past".

Women. Women around the world continue to make slow progress. Dame Carol Kidu has been reelected to Parliament in Papua New Guinea, but sadly will still be the only woman. Pratibha Patil has been elected India's 13th president and its first woman in the post with a huge majority, breaking six decades of male monopoly. Congress president Sonia Gandhi has called it an important milestone for women in the world's largest democracy. Cassey Eggelton of the Cook Islands has been elected a new deputy speaker of Parliament and is the first woman to fill this position. The first-ever women judges have been appointed in the Maldives. Obiageli 'Oby' Ezekwesili, formerly Education Minister in Nigeria, has been appointed Vice President of the World Bank for the Africa region and will oversee lending of USD 4.7 billion a year. Her life is a testament to her dedication, passion and commitment to Africa as is her high degree of integrity and optimism. The respect in which she is held by the international community will bring invaluable strengths to the Bank. Winnie Byanyima, former MP in Uganda and a founder of the Assembly's women's caucus has been appointed Director of the UNDP Gender Team, Bureau for Development Policy. The latest Cabinet for Quebec in Canada has nineteen positions, of whom nine are women (including the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Finance). No other jurisdiction in North America has come anywhere near so close to gender parity. The current Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is a woman. In the UK the appointment of Jacqui Smith as the first female home secretary by Gordon Brown broke new ground. Whatever people think of Tony Blair's legacy, one of his undoubted achievements was the number of female colleagues he appointed to cabinet. His last frontbench lineup included eight women - one third of the cabinet. Before this, only nine women in the history of parliament had ever made it to cabinet level.

Does gender matter in politics, or just performance? Women make up more than half the electorate, so the representational maths is obvious. Few can deny that the critical mass of women elected in Mr Blair's landslide 1997 victory and the family and women-focused policies that ensued were more than a coincidence. A clampdown on forced marriages, and flexible working and rape laws have all taken place in the last decade, when an unprecedented number of women sat on the parliamentary benches. Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki on June 25 hailed the joint UNDP and Equity Bank project to empower women entrepreneurs across East Africa as a "creative new investment initiative" that would unlock women business potential and lead to Africa's rapid economic transformation. Women in Sierra Leone stand to enjoy unprecedented rights under new laws making wife-beating a criminal offence, allowing women to inherit property, and protecting young women against forced marriage.

Vilma Espin, wife of Cuba's acting president Raul Castro, has died in Havana, aged 77. She was a key figure in the Cuban revolution and the long-standing head of the Cuban Women's Federation, which works to advance women's rights. Born into a wealthy family, she fought as a guerrilla alongside Fidel Castro and his younger brother Raul in the Sierra Maestra mountains. She married Raul in early 1959 and was often described as Cuba's 'first lady'.

In the current climate of fear and despair in Zimbabwe, it is a women's group that has consistently defied the regime to go out on to the streets and protest. Women of Zimbabwe Arise (Woza) was set up three years ago and its founder, businesswoman Jenni Williams, has been arrested countless times and had her life threatened on several occasions. Despite this there are now an estimated 30,000 members, who are demonstrating for basic rights including access to food, education and health care. And so far Woza's strict creed of non-violence has made it hard for authorities to crack down on it too viciously. "It's very hard for a policeman to intimidate us when his mum, his sister, or his girlfriend is there as one of us. It's embarrassing for them," Ms Williams says. "I'm very proud to be a Zimbabwean woman right now".

On the downside for women, the chances of a woman dying as a result of pregnancy or childbirth during her lifetime is about one in six in the poorest parts of the world compared with about one in 30 000 in Northern Europe. Such a discrepancy poses a huge challenge to meeting the fifth Millennium Development Goal to reduce maternal mortality by 75 percent between 1990 and 2015.

The maternal mortality rate in sub-Saharan Africa is the equivalent of three jumbo jets going down every day – imagine the publicity those events would engender and compare it with the silence on the high maternal mortality rate. Rwanda is still counted among countries with the highest infant and maternal mortality worldwide, with the rate of 89/1000 and 846/100,000 respectively. Only 28.2 percent of women deliver their babies at health facilities and this means that 71.8 percent have their babies at home either because they cannot afford the user fee or their distance from health centres, putting themselves at a high risk of maternal mortality.

Vanuatu. I traveled to Port Vila for a week in June to find a state of upheaval. The wonderful famous historic wooden Court House facing my unit had been burnt down the day before, with the loss of irreplaceable and invaluable historic court archives dating back to the earliest proceedings and decisions of the Joint Court at the beginning of the 1900s. The Court House was one of the first big administrative buildings built by the Condominium Government in the New Hebrides. It was completed in 1910, four years after the New Hebrides officially became a colony of Britain and France, and was originally built as the residence of the President of the Joint Court, on the top of the hill facing the entrance to the harbour as a way of demonstrating the rule of colonial law to all who entered the harbour. Vanuatu's Prime Minister Ham Lini wasted no time in getting rid of a rebel political party which supported a motion to oust him. In an unusual political twist, the opposition leader, Serge Vohor, filed another no-confidence motion, then withdrew it and joined the government with his Union of Moderate Party members. This move caught out the Vanuaaku Party, a member of the coalition government, which had supported the intended motion. Despite the reshuffle, the Vanuatu government apparently is still stable, but the only female Minister, Isabel Donald, lost her portfolio. While in Vanuatu, I cleared out my unit and books – wonderfully supported by friends. Although I still have a yearning to go back one day to Vanuatu, this is possibly unrealistic, and my unit overlooking the harbour is tentatively on the market.

Family. My mother, Jenny Izett and I enjoyed some wonderful visits to movies and lunches in Perth before she finally went into full-time care – recognising herself that she could no longer be professionally managed at home. Erica has done a magnificent job of giving care and companionship to her grandmother over the last five years. I had only a couple of days in Sydney with my children and grandchildren, finalised my tax and saw Andrew and his coxless four off to the preliminary world rowing championships. Emilia left for overseas soon after in her school orchestra and Harry and Isabella will go into boarding for the next few weeks. Ellen is coaching her crew in Sydney and will go overseas to the final WRC regatta. It was good to catch up briefly with Alan who was working in Sydney and helped babysit Jessica and Alicia while Adam was in Perth working on data bases for Aboriginal art centres. I stayed over in Dubai both ways and it is wonderful to see how Julie has been able to turn their villa into a home already, and both Doug and Nathan have settled in well to work and school there.

Life in my lovely home has been challenging over the last weeks with water and power problems. Over the last month we have had enough water in the house for toilets and a quick shower, but during the last fortnight even that dried up. Finally Electrogaz has sent someone to investigate and a new pipe has been installed. We have running water again and the swimming pool is filling up – my morning swim had become a wading exercise – no doubt walking in water is good for my knees! This situation has been a special challenge as I have hosted three events in the last week – a social function for the Rwanda Association of University Women, our monthly book club, and a Rotary meeting. I am looking forward to being in the United Kingdom for two weeks in August, attending the International Federation of University Women triennial conference, giving a seminar on development issues in the Pacific, Asia and Africa at the University of Sussex, and visiting family and friends. Work continues to be fulfilling. Yesterday the UNDP Human Development Report – *Turning Vision 2020 into Reality* - was released – I was a member of the steering committee on behalf of SNV Rwanda – more news about this next time.

Peace and strength to you
Shirley



Dr Shirley Randell AM
Senior Adviser, Responsive and Accountable Local Government – RALG/Gender
SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
East and Southern Africa Region
Avenue de la Révolution no.51
BP 1049, Kigali, Rwanda
Tel: +250 57 56 19, fax: +250 57 46 71

srandell@snvworld.org, www.snvworld.org
mail@shirleyrandell.com.au, www.shirleyrandell.com.au

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