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Editorial



Editor, Momelezi Kula.

Parliamentary Association (CPA), but say “drought” or “fire” and we all react with primal fear.

When delegates of the CPA Africa Region meeting this week at Mbombela in Mpumalanga, discussed ways of improving legislation needed to shape regional responses to natural disasters, many may have recalled fires wreaking havoc in suburbs, townships, urban communities and villages of the continent. Fires that warm and help us prepare food suddenly turn into runaway destroyers of homes, families and dwellings. Whether the fires are caused by people or bolts of lightning during storms, they are often swept on by fierce winds.

Africa also knows that drought and famine have destroyed countless millions of our people. In the coming decade, as reported by South Africa Science and Technology Minister Ms Naledi Pandor, this will be compounded by the effects of climate change. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions trap heat from escaping, shrivelling the crops

Legislating to deal with the human, social, economic and other aspects of natural disasters will severely test their ingenuity, said the delegates of the CPA Africa Region. The only constant about Africa’s regional climates is that climate change is here to stay: it is totally unpredictable, apart from its capacity to cripple.

Other issues up for serious debate included democracy’s inability, on its own, to ensure smooth transition of governments in Africa, and our responsibility to fill the gap caused by the reduction of international donor funds for ARVs to assist people living with Aids.

But everywhere at Mbombela, there is a new feeling of clarity about the potential of African players rising in unison, strengthening and reinforcing each other in a renewed Commonwealth. It is as exciting as watching hundreds of graceful giraffes rising up from slumber to take on the new day.

Democracy no guarantee of smooth succession



Mr Emeka Ihedioha of Nigeria

Africa is reaching the final days of dictators who remain in power for no reason other than their strength, relative to the weakness of the institutions they should be serving. That's the word from the leader of the Nigerian delegation at the CPA Africa Region Conference, Mr Emeka Ihedioha. He says expanding the democratic space in African states does not guarantee smooth political transition, because democracy cannot on its own ensure smooth succession. From Kenya in the east to Nigeria in the west, Africa is currently witnessing more constitutional and democratic governance "but not without serious political crises", Mr Ihedioha said.

"Constitutional democracy is a relatively fragile phenomenon in Africa. We have cause to be delighted with those countries in Africa that have risen above our peculiar challenges to uphold the democracy and achieved smooth succession of governments," he said, citing Botswana, Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia as examples of smooth governmental succession. As political reforms gathered support even in countries with monarchies, the number of democratic nations in Africa had grown.

"Succession under constitutional democracy is beyond the issue of tenure limits. We suggest that provision should be made for outgoing leaders to be able to maintain a decent and meaningful way of life

while still contributing to national, regional and international development" Mr Ihedioha said.

The conduct of free and fair elections was paramount in encouraging smooth succession of governments. Parliamentarians should also enhance oversight, pass laws and ensure that when elections took place, members of the armed forces took part as individuals and not as security operatives.

Laws, including constitutional reforms, should be clear and easy to grasp so that they enhanced the value of electorates

and elections. Voters should not have to consent to provisions that were vague or could easily be manipulated. He also urged those present to ensure that unbiased laws that could promote good governance were upheld, because democracy depended on adequate electoral laws. "Constitutional democracy simply means guaranteeing the rule of law," Mr Ihedioha said.

The Speaker of Malawi's National Assembly, Mr Henry Banda, supported the statement that constitutional democracy helped guarantee smooth succession of governments in Africa. Democratic governments were supposed to be put in place through mechanisms that ensured the people of that country maintained ultimate authority.

He said Malawi had strong and determined governance institutions that helped safeguard democratic principles and a Constitution that helped to smooth succession.

"If a country has a well-defined, regulated and transparent system for determining leadership succession embedded in their constitution, it helps to guarantee a smooth succession of government. It means that if State power is reduced and governance institutions such as Parliament are strengthened, we will be assured of creating a conducive environment for smooth leadership succession" Mr Banda said.

TWIN THREATS TO SURVIVAL



Ms Mary Mnyali Meboka Boya of Cameroon

Africa's lack of ability to respond promptly to natural disasters could see millions of citizens suffer massive hunger and starvation because of the continent's major reliance on natural resources and the inevitable effects of climate change. This was among the revelations made during the 41st Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Africa Region Conference currently taking place in South Africa's Mpumalanga Province.

Increased temperatures, longer dry seasons and floods will cause major damage to the agriculture sector posing a serious threat to the continent's ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, to fight hunger and to sustain development, says Botswana delegate Mr Vincent Seretse. "The number of reported disasters in Africa has increased over the past decade. The frequent occurrence of such disasters poses a strong threat to the continent's ability to achieve the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals)," he said.

Unlike developed countries that have strong surveillance systems to predict natural disasters, limited resources restrict the ability of most African countries to respond proactively and promptly to natural disasters.

Ms Mary Boya of Cameroon told the conference that poverty and underdevelopment were the causes of Africa's vulnerability to climate change. Some of the causes of these disasters stemmed from poverty and underdevelopment in Africa. 'We rely on natural re-

sources and have limited financial resources for good houses or managing the ecosystem," she said.

Ms Boya urged delegates to influence their governments to ensure that environmental impact assessments were properly followed in their countries. Governments should without fail establish disaster relief funds and increase their budgets for disaster management. Other mechanisms of enhancing a country's capacity to respond to natural disasters were to shore up scientific research and share indigenous knowledge.

Apart from HIV/AIDS and threats of global warming Africa has its share of major disasters, including serious droughts, floods and veldfires. The delegates agreed that managing disasters required strong leadership and political commitment.

During a conference discussion on the topic "Enhancing the capacity of Parliaments in Africa in responding to natural disasters" the delegates agreed that oversight of disaster management needed to be strengthened. Excellent presentations with no action were not enough, the time had come to roll up sleeves and take action.

At the next meeting Parliaments would be expected to report on what they were doing to enhance the ability of their countries to respond to disasters.



Members of Namibian Delegation during Plenary

Africa must manage

Aids funding

Uganda has always been singled out as Africa's beacon of hope in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Mr Elijah Okupa explains why. "I can confidently say in Uganda each and every family has been affected by HIV/AIDS pandemic in one way or the other. As a result, the leadership of the country and the Parliament has taken it upon themselves to implement policies to not only reduce the spread of, but also increase substantially, funding for HIV/AIDS control."

But unfortunately, the same can't be said of the Sub-Saharan Africa. "Sub-Saharan Africa faces a triple challenge of providing health care, antiretroviral treatment and support to a growing population of people with HIV related illnesses. New HIV infections must be reduced and the challenge of coping with the impact of over 20 million Aids deaths and orphans must be faced," he says.

In the absence of a cure funding is seen as the only major sustainable intervention. "The Aids situation in Africa can be improved through increased funding. This would help to improve both the prevention campaigns and the provision of treatment and care for those living with HIV."

He commended the commitment of multilateral organizations such as the Global Fund and the World Bank in this regard for helping to arrest its spread. "Developed countries have increased funding for Africa in recent years, perhaps most significantly through the Global Fund, which has approved grants totalling 7.2 billion US dollars to help fight Aids and TB. This is making a significant difference, but given the massive scale of the epidemic more money is still needed," he says.

A vast reduction in funding by these multilateral organization does not help the situation. "A report entitled "No time to quit: HIV/AIDS treatment widening in Africa" which builds on analyses made in eight Sub-Saharan countries illustrates how major international institutions such as PEPFAR, the World Bank, and donors to the Global Fund have decided to cap, reduce or withdraw their spending on HIV treatment and antiretroviral drugs over the past year and a half. "

According to him this scenario suggests that Africa's

reliance on foreign donor fund is no longer viable. "African countries cannot continue to rely on donor funding to sustain its HIV programmes. There is a need for increased and sustained financing if the impact of HIV/AIDS is to be reduced. When a patient is on ARVs, it is for a life time."

Mr Okupa reckons that the solution to this predicament is a need for a commitment for incremental funding from African governments. "Africa must, therefore, commit more funding to sustain HIV/AIDS programmes. There is also a need for continuous progressive increments in African governments spending on HIV each year until a country reaches about 30% of ARVs provision, of prevention campaigns, condom distribution. Testing and research are amongst the activities that require additional government funding."





Clerks adopt constitution

Parliament is so much more than a rubber stamp, says the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table of the CPA Africa Region. However, the Society must have a constitution in order to assert its autonomy.

"We gather here with the sad realisation that as a Society we can't look back with pride because we've not made much inroad or set a baseline to serve as a reference for our future endeavours. This is because we don't have a document (constitution) that governs our affairs," said Mr Rolson Moropa, Secretary of the Mpumalanga Legislature.

Given the strategic role that Clerks play in the affairs of their respective Parliaments, that must change. "Our role is to help Members of Parliament to achieve the best possible results, so we must ensure that the Parliament we serve is not regarded as just a rubber stamp. In each case, we must help Parliament assert itself and help forge its autonomy." The 50th CPA held in Canada had resolved that the Africa Region Society of Clerks should be resuscitated, and adopting a constitution became the first item on the Order Paper.

As a consensus-seeking mechanism to precede future business, the CPA Africa Region Society of Clerks was duly renamed the "Africa Region: Society of Clerks-at-the-Table in Commonwealth Parliaments." The Society's business will be served by its executive committee whose mandate is to assume the overall responsibility for control and management of the entity. "The executive committee will be re-

sponsible for the planning and management of the Society, and ensuring that decisions taken at National General Meetings are implemented. When needed it will also provide direction and give advice to the CPA Secretariat," states the report of the task team.

A core objective is to harness the capacity of its regional members. "The Society must develop professional capacity and build understanding and unity between member countries, foster amongst officers of Parliaments and Legislatures a mutual interest in their duties and responsibilities, and assist in their professional development through exchanges of information, views, experiences and best practices," the report states.

First and foremost, it is meant to promote the interests and perspectives of Africa in the Commonwealth and beyond, and serve the broad political agenda of its parent body, the CPA Africa Region: "The Society's support in developing strong administrations of Parliaments and Legislatures, respect for human rights and freedoms and the pursuit of the ideals of democracy and good governance in the region remain a cornerstone of its broad undertakings."

But it will also help member Parliaments of the CPA Africa Region to keep abreast of constitutional laws and legislative procedures governing their affairs. "To achieve that, the Society will publish annually a journal containing articles relating to matters of procedure, privilege, constitutional law and management practices of Parliaments," according to the report.

Strike a rock

African rural women who are mostly unemployed and live in dire poverty have been hailed for their fight against famine and hunger in their communities.

Addressing the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) at a dinner last night in Mbombela, the Deputy Speaker of the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature Ms Violet Siwela paid tribute to poor women of the continent and called them “architects of change”.

“Tonight we honour rural women who continue to till the land and harvest it, in order to feed their impoverished families.

“We pay special tribute to women who have endured poverty and war, and suffered indignity as a result of torture and harassment by militias who prey on the vulnerable and who humiliate those who are defenceless.

“We take this opportunity to honour women who are actively participating in various community development programmes in pursuit of the war against famine and hunger,” Ms Siwela said.

She praised all African women who had excelled in education and business, breaking the barriers of sexual discrimination that sought to deprive women of an opportunity to make a fair contribution and help bring change to the world.

The gala dinner formed part of the activities of the on-going 41st Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Africa Region conference, hosted by Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker said though women had made major contributions to the liberation struggle in the African continent, the question remained whether the continent had done enough to show its appreciation for the work of women.



Mr Andre Pool and Mr Gervais Henrie, Seychelles



Tsholofelo Moreosele and Charl Whitehead, Mpumalanga Legislature Communication staff.



Ms Nosipho Ntwanambi, Parliament of South Africa



Delegates at Plenary

Through the lens

