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No longer objects of pity

African women making progress

by Karanja Njoroge

he African Woman cannot afford to be an object of pity in her development strategy," said Her Excellency Princess Elizabeth Bagaya, the Ugandan Ambassador to the United States, in her address to 500 guests in the McInnes Room, Dalhousie University, for Africa Night celebrations.

Bagaya said the African social and economic condition is undergoing a multi-faceted crisis, and the African woman bears the brunt of this crisis. It is a well-known fact that women produce two thirds of agricultural output in Africa. So, when agricultural commodity prices collapse on the world market,

when international money lenders are asking Africans to produce more, it is the African woman who has to till the soil harder. It is the African woman who has to walk many miles in search of water when drought takes its toll. When the nutritional status and health of children deteriorate, it is the African woman who must nurse them. She is the nurse, the doctor, the psychologist, the breadwinner, and most importantly, the mother and homemaker.

The African woman has been in full charge of economic production, said Bagaya. She lamented the fact that African male populations have been forced, by economic circumstan-

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ces, to desert their families and emigrate to labour or industrial centres. In Lesotho, the whole Basuto male population crosses the border into South Africa, leaving women fully in charge of making ends meet. "The African

identify the causes of conditions under which the African woman operates," said Bagaya.

'Male-dominated societies have been perpetuated by myths, customs, traditions, and religions. These are now well-



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woman is an indispensible source of labour, from the nuclear family to the global economy," she said.

This overwhelming social and economic contribution by African women is inversely related to their influence in the decision-making process of their society. Unfortunately, there are few women involved in politics.

"I must admit that it is easier to deal with effects than causes. It takes complex explanations to

square pizza

established stereotypes. The African man, it must be admitted, has his layer of pressures and frustrations. He has also been an object of abuse through history. Perhaps he has tended to unload some of these pressures on the women."

Bagaya also looked at the brighter side of this story, telling the attentive crowd that the African woman has made tremendous progress in all walks of life in Africa.

"There are now women in politics, civil service, professional jobs, and commerce. But this is not nearly enough.

Suggestions were made to strengthen women's organizations at local and national levels, as well as establishing extraterritorial linkages that promote interaction between women world-wide.

Bagaya paid tribute to the growing network of exchanges between Canadian women and their counterparts in Africa and other Third world countries. There is a danger, however, of

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