

West African newspaper for South Africa

The FS African Standard, a newspaper for the ever-expanding expatriate communities of West Africa living in South Africa - estimated to number around 100 000 - has been launched in the country by leading Nigerian publisher Millennium Harvest Ltd.

The monthly tabloid publication, produced by the Financial Standard, Millennium Harvest's flagship weekly business publication, will also be an information source for South African companies doing business in the region, or which are interested in doing so.

The launch of this new publication, the first of its kind, is a sign of the growing relationship between the two regions and contributes to the spirit of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Its existence highlights the increasingly pan-African nature of South Africa itself and will provide a window on African communities in their country for South Africans themselves.

The first commercial issue went on sale this month in CNA and Exclusive Books, following on the heels of the complimentary issue circulated in the market during April, as part of an extensive distribution and advertising drive. FS African Standard currently has limited distribution in Nigeria and aims to extend this to other West African countries in due course.

The project is being managed by Africa @ Work, a South African company focusing on the African marketplace. The publication, which is being edited by staff in South Africa and Nigeria, will focus on news and features from West Africa, particularly from Nigeria and Ghana, and on West African communities and personalities in South Africa. Trade and business ties between the two regions will also be featured.

Ghana and Nigeria were selected as the target countries in the first phase of the project as they have the biggest expatriate numbers in South Africa. Officially registered Nigerians number around 4000 although unofficially, the population is estimated at anything up to 50 000. The officially registered number of Ghanaians in the country is around 4000 but is officially estimated to be much higher.

Eniola Fadayomi, Chairman of Millennium Publishers, says the idea for such a publication resulted from her many visits to South Africa. "I could see that South Africans had limited knowledge of what was happening in other parts of Africa. And yet at the same time there were moves towards greater integration of South Africa into the rest of Africa through various political initiatives. "With the information revolution, the world is becoming a much smaller place and what we have to consider in terms of this is that it is not longer a question of an Africa-Europe axis. It is a question of what we can do within Africa, between countries."

She hopes the paper will help to create greater understanding between Africans themselves, that Africans from other parts of the continent can be showcased for their achievements. "We need to show South Africans that our people are not doing well because of crime, but because of their own efforts."

The publication has been welcomed by both Ghana High Commissioner to South Africa, Ellen Nee-Whang, and the High Commissioner of Nigeria, Dr Tunji Olagunju.

Dr Olagunju says South Africa and Nigeria's historical links from the apartheid struggle have continued to grow. "The focus of this relationship is not about unhealthy competition, conflict and rivalry. Rather, it is an expression of solidarity born from our shared experiences, our common faith in democratic institutions and the complementarity of our economies."

On the economic front the countries have recorded significant growth in trade in the past few years, with trade volumes reaching a high of about US\$753,3 million. Nigeria's exports from South Africa have grown from about US\$5.6 million in 1996 to about US\$441 million in 2001 while exports from South Africa to Nigeria have risen from US\$27 million to US\$220 million over the same period.

"We welcome this publication which is bound to heighten public discourse and improve news and information dissemination among African peoples. But let me state that the media has an important role to play in forging a positive image and unity for Africa. For too long, we have been negatively affected by the stories carried in the media about the situation on the continent."

Dr Olagunji says the African media has a responsibility to educate Africans on the need for "focused leadership, unity and the richness of our diversity with a view to promoting tolerance among our people".

Nee-Whang says trade links between Ghana and Nigeria are growing rapidly and South Africa currently ranks second as Ghana's trading partner on the continent. In 2003, South Africa's exports to Ghana amounted to R1 billion while its imports from Ghana were R52.4 million. Despite the trade balance being heavily in South Africa's favour, she says Ghana is working hard to actively promote greater investment in Ghana by South African companies.

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