

MAG 0823 - AUGUST 2023

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# Democracy On Trial In Niger's Consequential Coup

By Ajong Mbatndah L

For Niger, old habits really die hard. For much of its history, the impoverished West African nation has seen the good, the bad and the ugly side of military coups. Just when everyone thought that a new era had set in with President Bazoum succeeding President Issoufou in a peaceful democratic transition, Niger was back in the news for yet another coup!

Unlike previous coups which have been dismissed with a wave of the hand, the recent coup has had global reverberations. The show of bravado from the coup leaders and the eerie calm in Niger is in stark contrast to the frenzy with which the Economic Community of West African States-ECOWAS is grasping for a way out of the crisis, and the visible unease of some leaders across the continent. It is one coup that has the world rattled. The clamour from the international community for a speedy return to democratic constitutional rule contrasts with the curious popular flair that the coup enjoys in Niger, and across many African countries.

For a region that was considered as bastion of democracy in Africa, the flurry of coups has been mind boggling. Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and now Niger are all under military rule, and one of the lingering questions now is who will be the next leader to be ousted. A growing concern we raised in coups preceding Niger was the ease with which Africans, even those who yearn ardently for democracy were embracing and normalizing them. Colonel Assimi Goita in Mali and Capt. Ibrahim Traoré in Burkina Faso both enjoy cult followings in their countries and across the continent. For Capt Traore, for instance, few African leaders grabbed the spotlight the way he did with exchange he had with President Putin in Russia.

As analysts try to make sense of the coup, there are questions worth asking and there are inconvenient truths that must be told. That many in Niger have participated in public manifestations backing the coup juxtaposes the pressure from the broader international community for President Bazoum to be reinstated as President. Is this a case

of the international community crying more than the bereaved? Should the international community be seeking to impose democracy on Niger when the people themselves seem to want something else? While not in any shape or form trying to cushion coups, something we abhor and have condemned in previous issues of PAV magazine, we believe that hard questions need to be asked. Why are people who a few years back were craving democracy now finding solace in military coups?

A common thread that runs through the surge of coups in West Africa is that there are all in former French colonies. There has been a strong and growing anti-French sentiment in literally all countries which were French colonies. Talk to the people and they will tell you France bears the brunt for all their miseries with mind boggling accords that rob their countries blind, a currency that is unpopular by the day, military interventions that people do not cherish, and a penchant to support leaders who are quick to cater to the interests of the French while ignoring the demands of their own people.

Some of these concerns are real, some are imagined, but there is no denying that there is a serious French problem which may need redress before the wave of coups spreads to other parts of the continent. In Niger for instance, part of the ire of the population comes from the exploitation of uranium and the sentiment that the country is been robbed blind by the French. Talk to folks in Niger and they will point out the irony of having the military leader of Chad who was installed with strong French backing as the first emissary to engage with actors in Niger after the coup....

A look at the actors in ECOWAS trying to restore order in Niger--- In Nigeria, President Ahmed Bola Tinubu is still in court feuding with rivals contesting his victory at the last elections. His challengers Labour Party candidate Peter Obi and PDP flagbearer Atiku Abubakar think the elections were deeply flawed. In Benin, there are growing fears from the opposition that President Talon may do away with term limits. It is something that President



Ajong Mbatndah L, Managing Editor

Ouattara craftily succeeded to do in Cote d'Ivoire.... In Senegal, there is the strong believe that without popular pressure, President Macky Sall was working his way towards a third term though the constitution caps term limits at two. The rest of the countries Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea are under military rule already.

It now becomes understandable when people cast doubts on the ability of ECOWAS leaders to provide solutions to the problems in Niger. The coup leaders in Niger ignored the ultimatum given by ECOWAS and are consolidating their grip on power. The disconnect between the leaderships and the people is deep and profound. In Nigeria, the Senate has been reluctant to sanction any military action. Without the leadership of Nigeria, it becomes hard to see Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gambia, or Senegal embarking on the perilous mission of sending troops to the uncharted territory that Niger is.

At the African Union, unconstitutional takeovers are prohibited but what constitutes unconstitutional remains problematic. When you limit it only to military coups, leaving out those who do away with term limits to remain in power or those who thrive on flawed elections, more and more Africans do not find it funny, When the AU is hard on some countries and gives others a pass, Africans take note.

Compounding to the spectre of coups is the growing Russian presence in the continent. Suddenly, many Africans now see Russia as the savior, or the ideal

partner needed to address the myriad of problems facing the continent. If Africans want the French out, what is the wisdom in bringing in Russians? What makes Africans think that there will be different in the long wrong? From the attendance at the recent Second Summit of the Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum, there is a sense of growing importance for Russia in Africa. He who brings home ant infested faggots should be ready for the visit of lizards, says Achebe. The words of wisdom could be used by African leaders in navigating challenging global stakes.

In Guinea, the military leadership of Colonel Mamady Doumbouya promised a return to civilian rule within 24 months. As Guineans hope that the military will keep to its word, politicians like Barry Siaka think that it is time for the country to usher in a different kind of leadership. Siaka who leads the Movement For Popular Democracy in Guinea- MPDG, says it is time for Guineans to go in for the kind of fresh, young, and dynamic leadership that incarnates 21st century aspirations.

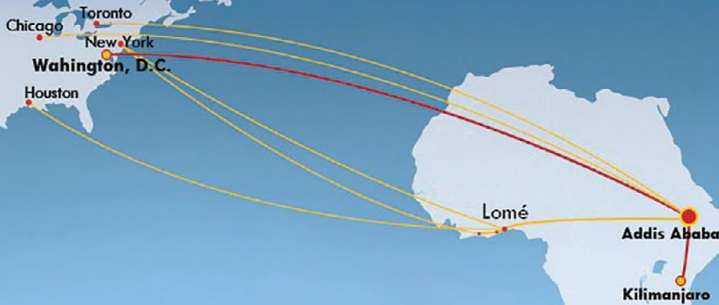
Incarnating these 21st century aspirations is Prof Victor Mbarika who is heralding a tech revolution in Africa with the ICT University. With campuses in several regions and countries across the continent, the ICT Universities are forging a new generation of young Africans adroit with tools to compete and excel in the modern world. For Prof Mbarika, the vision to bring the kind of quality education offered in Western Universities to Africans in Africa at a way cheaper and more affordable cost is bearing fruits and waxing stronger each day. Africa has what it takes to be the envy of the world instead of envying the world, says Prof Mbarika.

Barry Siaka and Victor Mbarika are two young Africans representing the generational shift and mindset that Africa needs. Their interviews are complemented in this issue of PAV magazine with stories on the Niger saga, the different facets of the Russian - African ties, Museveni's clapback at the World Bank for linking partnership to gay rights, and more. Happy Reading —



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# Uganda: Museveni Scoffs At World Bank

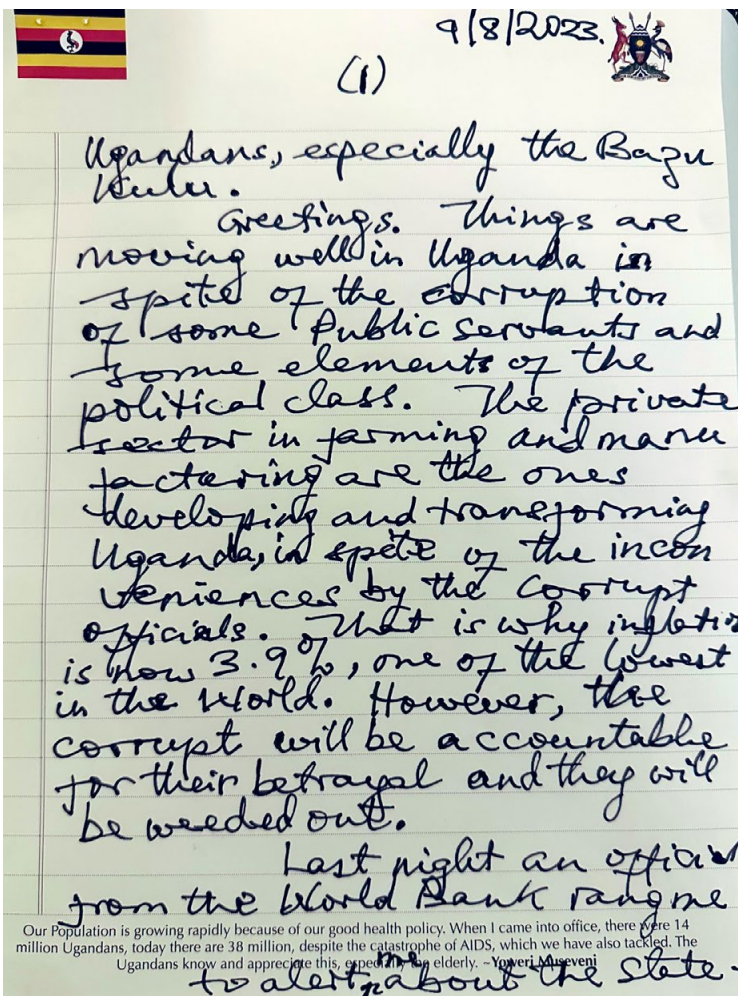
By Prince Kurupati

On May 29 2023, long-time Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni passed the Anti-Homosexuality law. Immediately after, ordinary citizens and organisations from both within Uganda and beyond the country's borders poured their hearts out in response to the passing of the law. The response included both support and condemnation of the law.

Perhaps the biggest and most worrisome condemnation came from the World Bank. In a scathing statement, the World Bank said that "no new public financing for Uganda" would be submitted to the financial institution's board of directors as the new law passed by the country runs contrary to the institution's values of eradicating "poverty on a liveable planet". The World Bank currently finances several projects in Uganda with Reuters reporting that the



Uganda Will Prosper With or Without World Bank Support, says President Museveni.  
Photo credit Reuters.



Bank's "current investment portfolio in Uganda is \$5.2 billion".

Also adding his voice to the condemnation of the law hence emboldening the stance taken by the World Bank was the American President Joe Biden. President Biden described the law as a "serious attack" The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also weighed in saying the passing of the anti-homosexuality law is a serious "concern" and it comes at a time when the world is looking to advance all human rights.

Putting more pressure on the World Bank to keep to its guns is the U.S. Congress. In a letter signed by several Congress members including Joyce Beatty (Ohio), Steven Horsford and Dina Titus (Nevada), the lawmakers said that the World Bank should stick to its guns otherwise it risks giving a wrong "signal to the Ugandan government and other governments considering similar laws, and LGBTQ+ people around the world that the World Bank does not truly value inclusion and that its commitments to non-discrimination are disingenuous."

The criticism that the law received

however did not frighten the Ugandan president who remained firm and vowed to move his country forward "with or without loans" from the World Bank. In a statement posted on the newly rebranded online platform X (formerly Twitter), President Museveni said, "It is therefore unfortunate that the World Bank and other actors dare to want to coerce us into abandoning our faith, culture, principles and sovereignty, using money. They really underestimate all Africans. We do not need pressure from anybody to know how to solve problems in our society. They are our problems."

Furthermore, the Ugandan leader said that money regardless of how much it is will not persuade the country to abandon its values. In another 'X' post, the leader said, "It is therefore regrettable that the World Bank and others are trying to pressure us to abandon our faith, culture, principles, and sovereignty, using money."

President Museveni however showed that not all is lost when it comes to the relations between Uganda and the World Bank when he



said, "We are continuing to talk with the World Bank so that both they and we avoid this diversion if possible". These words were also reinforced by the Ugandan information minister Chris Baryomunsi.

"Consultations are still ongoing between the Ugandan government and the World Bank on issues surrounding the anti-homosexuality law," Minister Baryomunsi said. He went further stating "However, the World Bank and others should be reminded that Uganda is a sovereign country, making decisions in the interests of its people, and this is the spirit of the anti-homosexuality law."

Following the condemnation by the World Bank, Uganda's Parliament according to Reuters will conduct an emergency vote of a revised 2023-2024 (June-July) budget that will reflect the impact of the bank's loan suspension. Economic analysts predict that the impact will be huge as the early indications show. Perhaps justifying this is that soon after the passing of the law, Uganda's shilling plunged, taking its deepest dive in

nearly eight years.

In as much as the criticism levelled against the anti-homosexuality law is in regards to the infringement of the concept of human rights, some are largely critical of the penalties to which offenders are liable. Those accused and convicted of "aggravated homosexuality" (caught having sex) will receive the death penalty. This penalty has not been applied in the country for many years now

regardless of there having been several individuals convicted of heinous crimes including mass murder. Those accused and convicted of simply "promoting" LGBTQ issues stand to receive prison sentences of 10 to 20 years.

Moreover, some medical specialists fear that the law will force all members of the LGBTQ+ community not to seek medical attention for fear of stigmatization at healthcare

centres. This in essence will necessitate the spread of diseases especially STIs and STDs as well as HIV/AIDS.

In the wake of the passing of the law, a seemingly silent discord has however emerged as the Ugandan Ministry of Health issued a statement saying no one should be "discriminated against or stigmatised" for reasons of "gender, religion, ethnicity, social or economic status or sexual orientation". It's to be seen therefore moving into the future if the health ministry will stick to this when the anti-homosexuality law criminalises some instances of sexual orientation.

Sexual Minorities Uganda executive director Frank Mugisha said "The lived reality for LGBTQ Ugandans living under this law tells a very different story – one filled with discrimination, fear, and violence because of this law and those who support it... The only way forward is for Uganda's courts to stand up for the principle of non-discrimination – already enshrined in our constitution – and rule that the law is unconstitutional as soon as possible".

*Unfortunate that the World Bank and other actors dare to want to coerce us into abandoning our faith, culture, principles and sovereignty, using money, says Museveni.*



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## Kenya: Hope Alive For Bipartisan Talks

By Samuel Ouma

Normalcy has been restored in Kenya following weeks of anti-government protests marred with police brutality, destruction of property and running battles between the police and public members.

The protests were organised by the opposition leader, who protested against the high cost of living under President William Ruto's administration and fraud in the 2022 polls.

Protests began once a week, then twice a week, before Odinga led three days of demonstrations that drew concerns from both the local and international communities.

During the demonstrations, Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa were the most impacted towns. Locals chose to close their businesses for fear of looting and damage, costing billions of shillings in revenues. Learning in schools was also halted, with many parents preferring to stay at home with their children.

The transportation system was also affected as protestors barricaded roads and ignited bonfires, instilling terror among vehicle firms and drivers. A few available vehicles



*Friends turn foes. President Ruto and opposition leader Raila Odinga were allies before things fell apart. Photo courtesy*

that managed to operate charged high transportation fees, burdening Kenyans trying to make ends meet due to the high cost of living.

Security officers and protesters both showed disdain for human rights principles during the demonstrations that affected 20 of the 47 counties. Kenyans witnessed the torture and killing of harmless citizens by police

officers.

The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) reported instances of delayed and denied justice for those arrested during demonstrations, including the denial of bail at the point of arrest as provided by the Kenyan Constitution.

"We received reports of torture and abuse, wanton beating of persons even

after surrender, indiscriminate tear-gassing of residences and schools. There have been heart-rending images on mainstream media and social media platforms, clearly showing the involvement of uniformed police officers in the wanton and brutal attack of defenseless members of the public," said KNCHR.

The security officers were also accused of breaking into people's homes to arrest alleged suspects and kidnapping any individual opposing Ruto's government. Several opposition leaders were arrested and later charged in a court of law following a public outcry.

The former Prime Minister Raila Odinga's bodyguard Maurice Ogeta was among those kidnapped and detained for three days. After his release, Ogeta revealed that he was abducted by police officers who wanted to know his boss' whereabouts and plans. He claimed he was blindfolded and detained in an empty room without food.

KNCHR further reported the assault and arbitrary arrest of human rights defenders and harassment of special and vulnerable interest groups, including children, women,



*A truce with the opposition will augur well for the Ruto administration*



*Opposition leaders addressing the media.*

the elderly and people with disability.

Following the political crisis in the East African nation, the international community intervened through the retired Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. A local newspaper reported that Obasanjo met Ruto and Raila quietly in the coastal city of Mombasa. The two leaders' allies were excluded from the meeting to prevent the talks from collapsing.

Prior, Odinga had claimed Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu and South African Head of State Cyril Ramaphosa unsuccessfully tried to mediate talks between him and Ruto.

Speaking at an international media conference on July 25, the former AU special envoy said President Samia Suluhu spent two days in the country to mediate the talks, but President Ruto snubbed her.

"Samia Suluhu came here two weeks ago at the invitation of President Ruto to mediate, but she was kept waiting not from our side, we were available, but the other side was not available. She spent two nights here and it was all in vain," said Odinga.

He further disclosed that President Ramaphosa was ready to bring the friends turn foes together, but Ruto dismissed him.

After Odinga's revelation, President Ruto invited Odinga for a one-on-one meeting via a tweet, an invitation that was dismissed by Odinga's allies as casual.

"My friend Raila Odinga, am off to Tanzania for a human capital meeting to harmonise the expansion of employment opportunities in our continent. I will be back tomorrow evening, and as you have always known, am available to meet one on one with you anytime at your convenience," tweeted President William Ruto.

Following months of name-calling and trading of accusations, the ruling Kenya Kwanza (Kenya First) coalition led by Ruto and the opposition Azimio La Umoja (Declaration of Unity) coalition led by Odinga are finally prepared to begin negotiations aimed at lowering political tensions in the nation.

The two parties have released a list of five representatives, each who will participate in the talks. This follows an agreement between President Ruto and Odinga to arrange a ten-member delegation to begin negotiations to address the social, economic, and political predicament facing Kenyans brokered by President Obasanjo.

Azimio was the first to unveil its team, led by former Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka. Other members chosen by the coalition are the National Assembly Minority Party Leader Opiyo Wandayi and DAP Party Leader Eugene Wamalwa, Senator Okon'go Omogeni and MP Amina Mnyazi.

The key issues the outfit wants to be addressed are the high cost of living, the audit of the 2022 elections, bipartisan reconstitution of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, Inclusivity in national affairs, and respect for Political Parties in line with the constitution.

"Our position remains that no party to these negotiations can claim a right to determine for the other what to raise and what not to raise. Azimio will respect Kenya Kwanza's right to bring all its issues to the table. We expect Kenya Kwanza to do the same with our issues," the party said in a statement.

On the other hand, the Kenya Kwanza delegation will be led by National Assembly Majority Leader Kimani Ichung'wah and his Senate counterpart Aaron Cheruiyot. Other team members are Governor Cecily

Mbarire, MP Hassan Omar and Woman Representative Catherine Wambilianga.

Their wish list contains the reconstitution of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), implementation of 2/3 gender rule, entrenchment of Constituency Development Fund (CDF), establishment and the entrenchment of the Office of the Leader of the Opposition, and embedment of the Office of Prime Cabinet Secretary.

Earlier talks, led by a 14-member committee comprised mostly of MPs, had failed. :Azimio had called off the talks accusing Kenya Kwanza of insincerity.

"We have had to suspend the bipartisan dialogue after we could not persuade our friends from Kenya Kwanza to concede to some common sense interim measures namely; lowering of the cost of unga (cooking flour), preservation of the election servers, suspension of IEBC reconstitution and for them to leave Jubilee alone," said Nairobi Senator Edwin Sifuna, the then member of Azimio in bipartisan talks.



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# Fostering Lasting Stability And Democratic Progress In Niger And The Sahel: A Comprehensive Approach To Strategic Engagement

By Ambassador Omar Arouna, MBA\*

According to the U.S State department on August, 7th, 2023 “Acting Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland traveled to Niamey to express our grave concern regarding developments in Niger and our resolute commitment to supporting democracy and constitutional order. The United States continues to call for the immediate release of President Mohamed Bazoum, his family, and all those detained as part of the extra-constitutional attempt to seize power”. Following her trip and in a conference held from Niamey the U.S diplomat in a readout of the trip indicated that “because we wanted to speak frankly to the people responsible to this challenge to the democratic order to see if we could try to resolve these issues diplomatically, if we could get some negotiations going, and also to make absolutely clear what is at stake in our relationship and the economic and other kinds of support that we will legally have to cut off if democracy is not restored”

I am happy the U.S is engaging early and directly in Niger without the usual filters of its traditional allies. However, the situation in Niger presents a multifaceted challenge that demands a comprehensive analysis.

While many have been quick to advocate for the return of constitutional order and the reinstatement of President Bazoum, a deeper examination is crucial to understanding the root causes of the coup and the genuine support the Junta seems to have garnered among the Nigerien population.

Beyond the surface-level demand for democracy, it's essential to inquire why the people of Niger are rejoicing and supporting the Junta. This suggests a level of discontentment with the previous administration, possibly rooted in socio-economic disparities, governance issues, or



Ambassador Omar Arouna.

unmet public expectations. The quick attribution of external factors, such as Russia's Wagner involvement, might overshadow the complex internal dynamics at play.

From a U.S perspective, engaging in a knee-jerk reaction of demanding a return to the status quo might overlook the opportunity to address the underlying grievances that fueled the coup. Instead of solely fixating on the immediate restoration of democratic norms, the U.S could take a more nuanced approach. By delving into the societal pulse and uncovering the true aspirations and concerns of the Nigerien people, a more tailored and effective solution could emerge.

The U.S should also recognize that the situation offers a chance to engage diplomatically, helping in fostering inclusive governance, socioeconomic development, and strengthening democratic institutions. By digging deeper and bypassing conventional narratives, the U.S can play a more constructive role in supporting Niger's path towards stability,

inclusivity, and sustainable progress.

In essence, the Niger situation demands a shift from reactive responses to proactive, strategic engagement. A deeper analysis that accounts for local realities and aspirations, while addressing root causes, holds the promise of not only resolving the immediate crisis but also of fostering a more stable and resilient Niger in the long term.

The situation in the region as a whole offers an intriguing parallel to the U.S engagement with Eastern European countries following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Just as the U.S adopted a strategic and comprehensive approach to support the transition to democracy and development in those nations, a similar model could be explored in Africa and the Sahel region.

By recognizing that the various coup in the regions are not merely a singular events but symptoms of broader societal challenges, the U.S can adopt a multifaceted strategy.

This strategy could involve diplomatic efforts to engage with multiple stakeholders, including the Junta's in Guinea, Mali, Burkina, Niger and civil society groups, fostering dialogue and understanding.

Furthermore, drawing inspiration from the Eastern European example, the U.S could offer assistance in building democratic institutions, promoting good governance, and providing technical expertise to address socioeconomic disparities through the Sahel region in an integrated manner. This approach goes beyond just advocating for a return to the constitutional order and delves into the complexities that underlie the situation.

The U.S could also collaborate with international partners and organizations to coordinate efforts aimed at stabilizing the Sahel region as a whole. By focusing on regional stability, economic development, and security cooperation, the U.S can contribute to addressing the root causes of instability and extremism in





*U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken with then President Mohamed Bazoum at the presidential palace in Niamey, Niger, on March 16*

the region.

In conclusion, the U.S. has an opportunity to learn from its past successes in Eastern Europe and apply a similar approach to the challenges in Niger and the Sahel. By embracing a comprehensive and strategic engagement that takes into account local realities and aspirations, the U.S. can play a pivotal role in fostering lasting stability, development, and democratic progress in the region.

\*Ambassador Omar Arouna is a former envoy of Benin to the USA, a Cybersecurity Technologist, International Relations and Africa market entry strategist and consultant

## What's Happening in Niger Is Far From a Typical Coup

By Vijay Prashad\*

On July 26, 2023, Niger's presidential guard moved against the sitting president—Mohamed Bazoum—and conducted a coup d'état. A brief contest among the various armed forces in the country ended with all the branches agreeing to the removal of Bazoum and the creation of a military junta led by Presidential Guard Commander General Abdourahamane "Omar" Tchiani. This is the fourth country in the Sahel region of Africa to have experienced a coup—the other three being Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. The new government announced that it would stop allowing France to leech Niger's uranium (one in three lightbulbs in France is powered by the uranium from the field in Arlit, northern Niger). Tchiani's government revoked all military cooperation with France, which means that the 1,500 French troops will need to start packing their bags (as they did in both Burkina Faso and Mali). Meanwhile, there has been no public statement about Airbase 201, the U.S. facility in Agadez, a thousand kilometers from the country's capital of Niamey. This is the largest drone base in the world and key to U.S. operations across the Sahel. U.S. troops have been told to



*The new military leadership has stepped up public outreach to bolster support. Photo credit Balima Boreima, Getty Image*

remain on the base for now and drone flights have been suspended. The coup is certainly against the French presence in Niger, but this anti-French sentiment has not enveloped the U.S. military footprint in the country.

### Interventions

Hours after the coup was stabilized, the main Western states—especially

France and the United States—condemned the coup and asked for the reinstatement of Bazoum, who was immediately detained by the new government. But neither France nor the United States appeared to want to lead the response to the coup. Earlier this year, the French and U.S. governments worried about an insurgency in northern Mozambique that impacted the assets of the Total-

Exxon natural gas field off the coastline of Cabo Delgado. Rather than send in French and U.S. troops, which would have polarized the population and increased anti-Western sentiment, the French and the United States made a deal for Rwanda to send its troops into Mozambique. Rwandan troops entered the northern province of Mozambique and shut down the insurgency. Both Western powers

seem to favor a “Rwanda” type solution to the coup in Niger, but rather than have Rwanda enter Niger the hope was for ECOWAS—the Economic Community of West African States—to send in its force to restore Bazoum.

A day after the coup, ECOWAS condemned the coup. ECOWAS encompasses fifteen West African states, which in the past few years has suspended Burkina Faso and Mali from their ranks because of the coups in that country; Niger was also suspended from ECOWAS a few days after the coup. Formed in 1975 as an economic bloc, the grouping decided—despite no mandate in its original mission—to send in peacekeeping forces in 1990 into the heart of the Liberian Civil War. Since then, ECOWAS has sent its peacekeeping troops to several countries in the region, including Sierra Leone and Gambia. Not long after the coup in Niger, ECOWAS placed an embargo on the country that included suspending its right to basic commercial transactions with its neighbors, freezing Niger’s central bank assets that are held in regional banks, and stopping foreign aid (which comprises forty percent of Niger’s budget). The most striking statement was that ECOWAS would take “all measures necessary to restore constitutional order.” An August 6 deadline given by ECOWAS expired because the bloc could not agree to send troops across the border. ECOWAS asked for a “standby force” to be assembled and ready to invade Niger. Then, ECOWAS said it would meet on August 12 in Accra, Ghana, to go over its options. That meeting was canceled for “technical reasons.” Mass demonstrations in key ECOWAS countries—such as Nigeria and Senegal—against an ECOWAS military invasion of Niger have confounded their own politicians to support an intervention. It would be naïve to suggest that no intervention is possible. Events are moving very fast, and there is no reason to suspect that ECOWAS will not intervene before August ends.

## Coups in the Sahel



*Tough talk from Nigerian President Tinubu and ECOWAS leaders have left the new military leadership unfazed.*  
Photo credit Sundiata

When ECOWAS suggested the possibility of an intervention into Niger, the military governments in Burkina Faso and Mali said that this would be a “declaration of war” not only against Niger but also against their countries. On August 2, one of the key leaders of the Niger coup, General Salifou Mody traveled to Bamako (Mali) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) to discuss the situation in the region and to coordinate their response to the possibility of an ECOWAS—or Western—military intervention into Niger. Ten days later, General Moussa Salaou Barmou went to Conakry (Guinea) to seek that country’s support for Niger from the leader of the military government in that country, Mamadi Doumbouya. Suggestions have already been floated for Niger—one of the most important countries in the Sahel—to form part of the conversation of a federation that will include Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. This would be a federation of countries that have had coups to overthrow what have been seen to be pro-Western governments that have not met the expectations of increasingly impoverished populations.

The story of the coup in Niger becomes partly the story of what the communist journalist Ruth First called “the contagion of the coup” in her remarkable book, *The Barrel of the Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d’états* (1970). Over the course of the past thirty years, politics

in the Sahel countries has seriously desiccated. Parties with a history in the national liberation movements, even the socialist movements (such as Bazoum’s party) have collapsed into being representatives of their elites, who are conduits of a Western agenda. The French-U.S.-NATO war in Libya in 2011 allowed jihadis groups to pour out of Libya and flock into southern Algeria and into the Sahel (almost half of Mali is held by al-Qaeda-linked formations). The entry of these forces gave the local elites and the West the justification to further tighten limited trade union freedoms and to excise the left from the ranks of the established political parties. It is not as if the leaders of the mainline political parties are right-wing or center-right, but that whatever their orientation, they have no real independence from the will of Paris and Washington. They became—to use a word on the ground—“stooges” of the West.

Absent any reliable political instruments, the discarded rural and petty-bourgeois sections of the country turn to their children in the armed forces for leadership. People like Burkina Faso’s Captain Ibrahim Traoré (born 1988), who was raised in the rural province of Mouhoun, and Colonel Assimi Goïta (born 1988), who comes from the cattle market town and military redoubt of Kati, represent these broad class fractions perfectly. Their communities have been utterly left out of the

hard austerity programs of the International Monetary Fund, of the theft of their resources by Western multinationals, and of the payments for Western military garrisons in the country. Discarded populations with no real political platform to speak for them, these communities have rallied behind their young men in the military. These are “Colonel’s Coups”—coups of ordinary people who have no other options—not “General’s Coups”—coups of the elites to stem the political advancement of the people. That is why the coup in Niger is being defended in mass rallies from Niamey to the small, remote towns that border Libya. When I traveled to these regions before the pandemic, it was clear that the anti-French sentiment found no channel of expression other than hope for a military coup that would bring in leaders such as Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, who had been assassinated in 1987. Captain Traoré, in fact, sports a red beret like Sankara, speaks with Sankara’s left-wing frankness, and even mimics Sankara’s diction. It would be a mistake to see these men as from the left since they are moved by anger at the failure of the elites and of Western policy. They do not come to power with a well-worked out agenda built from left political traditions.

The Niger military leaders have formed a twenty-one-person cabinet headed by Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine, a civilian who had been a





Rally in Niamey on August 6 in support of Niger's coup leaders and against foreign intervention

finance minister in a previous government and worked at the African Development Bank in Chad. Military leaders are prominent in the cabinet. Whether the appointment of this civilian-led cabinet will divide the ranks of ECOWAS is to be seen. Certainly, Western imperialist forces—notably the United States with troops on the ground in Niger—would not like to see this torque of coups remain in place. Europe—through French leadership—had shifted the borders of their continent from north of the Mediterranean Sea to south

of the Sahara Desert, suborning the Sahel states into a project known as G-5 Sahel. Now with anti-French governments in three of these states (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) and with the possibility of trouble in the two remaining states (Chad and Mauritania), Europe will have to retreat to its coastline. Sanctions to deplete the mass support of the new governments will increase, and the possibility of military intervention will hang over the region like a famished vulture.

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# France's Imperial Dreams Turn Sour

By Rebecca Tinsley\*

When President Francois Mitterrand described France's relationship with its former African colonies he said, "France is the big hen followed by the little black chicks."

The late French leader was so determined to keep his imperial flock together that he approved Operation Turquoise, training and funding the Francophone Hutu insurgents responsible for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Local witnesses say that each day during the 100 days of the slaughter, a French plane brought more weapons with which the Interahamwe could murder the country's one million Tutsis.

Mitterrand must be spinning in his grave. France's sphere of influence has been undermined by a toxic mix of jihad insurgency, climate change, Russian disinformation, Chinese investment and demography. Mali, Central African Republic, and Burkina Faso – all former satrapies of France – have recently decoupled, and Niger may be next. France is reduced to scuttling around Africa, anointing kleptocratic and undemocratic family dynasties in Chad and Cameroon in order to cling to its flock.



Goodbye France reads a message carried by protestors in Niger against western backed sanctions. Photo credit Mahamadou Hamidou, Reuters.

A 3,000-strong outpost of the French Foreign Legion is headquartered in Chad. When President Idriss Déby was killed in 2021, President Emmanuel Macron rushed to N'Djamena and conferred his support for Déby's son, Mahamat Deby. Unsurprisingly, in this

unconstitutional environment, the threat of unrest persists, counter to France's stated desire for stability.

In Cameroon, where the restive Anglophone minority has been marginalised and oppressed for decades, the Élysée Palace may be considering bestowing its blessing

on the son of 90-year-old dictator President Paul Biya. This power transfer would be unconstitutional and reward Biya's mishandling of the six-year Anglophone Crisis, a conflict that has wrecked one-fifth of the country. In neither Chad nor Cameroon do the French sufficiently remark on human rights abuses, the killing or imprisonment of peaceful opponents and journalists, the crushing of civil society, or the absence of democracy or free speech.

At the 1885 Berlin Conference, France took the largest slice of "the magnificent African cake," yet the cake has gone sour. Since 1990, there have been 27 coups in sub-Saharan Africa, of which 78% were in Francophone countries. When Britain, Portugal and Belgium left their colonies at independence, the French remained, fostering patron-client relationships in local business, military and political circles. France's heavy-handed attitude has not won it local friends.

Last month, opportunistic generals staged a coup in Niger, arguing the democratically elected president,



President Macron was actively present in Chad during the state funeral of President Deby and the swearing in of his son General Mahamat Idriss Deby as the new leader. Photo credit AP



Mohamed Bazoum, was a puppet of France. Russia's disinformation campaign contributed to dislike of the French, but the challenges felt by the Nigerien population amidst years of close relations between Niger and France surely did not help form a positive association with France.

Paris's neo-colonial coup reaction was counter-productive. France "will not tolerate any attack against France and its interests" in Niger, a statement from Macron's office said. "They have until tomorrow to renounce this adventurism, these personal adventures, and restore democracy," added French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, to no effect.

The former French Ambassador to UNESCO, Rama Yade, says Western involvement in the Sahel has failed. Having focused on troop deployments and defence agreements, "Africa's Western partners are leaving these presidents to face their downfall without any strategy that would help them to connect with the civilian populations."

The French Council of Investors in Africa claims anti-French sentiment is more about politics than France per se. France has 200 subsidiaries in Mali, 45 in Burkina Faso, 30 in Niger and 10 in CAR. Uranium operations in Niger have continued throughout the coup period, in fact.

### The Hen Followed by a Bear

Russia's infamous Wagner Group, a private military contractor, offers customers a simple deal: it protects unpopular leaders in exchange for lucrative mining and timber concessions. Wagner has prospered because of privatisation policies, discredited UN peacekeeping and failed Western interventions. Wagner



*Africa's Western partners are leaving these presidents to face their downfall without any strategy that would help them to connect with the civilian populations, says Rama Yade. Photo courtesy.*

is ostensibly fighting insurgencies, but there is no evidence it reduces jihadist terrorism. It was defeated by jihadists in Mozambique and had to withdraw. In Mali, its activities have led to human rights violations which have been used as a recruiting tool for Islamist fundamentalists. For this reason, Burkina Faso has cooled on links with Wagner.

The Kremlin's anti-colonial rhetoric resonates only so far in African capitals. Just because African leaders have links with Russia and China, it does not mean they do not want relationships with the West. They increasingly refuse to be forced into binary choices, a fact that France and the West seem not to have grasped. France could exert interest and power as part of the EU rather than as Mother Hen of a former empire.

### The Elephant in the Room

What is clear is that by ignoring the human rights abuses and kleptocracy of pliable leaders, France and the West have fuelled the jihadist narrative and allowed Russia's Wagner Group to gain a foothold. Angry, unemployable young men find joining a militia more attractive than farming a small, barren piece of land in an increasingly hot, dry climate. Without education, health services or land reform, they have no stake in the future. Brutal, neo-colonialist Russian mercenaries extract resources, while African leaders look the other way, their thrones secured.

The West should seek new partnerships to counter the violence and extremism threatening Africa: offering technical expertise, funding human development projects,

helping establish manufacturing to process natural resources, and building institutions to support good governance. France's enterprises should be run by Africans for Africans, not just the African elite, to allow a great transfer of technology and provide local employment. Otherwise, there will continue to be coups and unrest because the West, and especially the French, have enabled bad governance rather than helping or allowing countries to create systems and institutions that respond to people's needs.

The French and West should have acted on this decades ago. Nothing like coups, jihadists, and the Russian Bear to clarify the mind.

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# Across Guinea With Siaka Barry

By Ajong Mbandah L

For Guinea, a generational shift beckons says Siaka Barry, leader of the Movement For Popular Democracy in Guinea-MPDG. Hopeful that the current military junta honor key engagements to restore power to civilian rule, Siaka Barry says it was time for Guineans to go in for the kind of fresh, young, and dynamic leadership that incarnates 21st century aspirations.

"Our population is very young, almost 70% of the Guinean population is under 35 years old. So, we believe that this youth needs a new political offer centered on the issues and challenges of the modern world," says Siaka Barry.

In an exclusive interview with PAV, Siaka Barry says the MPDG positions itself as a party of hope for this Guinean youth. "This is why we are resolutely committed to competing with the old traditional parties and we are optimistic that with the support of

the young people of Guinea, the final victory will be on our side," Siaka Barry affirms with confidence.

A former Minister of Culture, Sports, and Historical Heritage between 2016 and 2017 under, Siaka Barry has been of the most vocal and outspoken politicians in a country where civil liberties have been largely curtailed since the military ousted President Alpha Conde.

"Some actions have been timidly initiated, particularly within the framework of the general census of the population, consultations for the drafting of a new constitution and preparatory work for the establishment of an electoral register. However, these results are very meager in view of the objectives set for a period of two years. If the pace is not accelerated, the impatience of the population risks creating a crisis of confidence," Siaka Barry cautions.



*Siaka Barry says it is time for Guineans to go in for the kind of fresh, young, and dynamic leadership that incarnates 21st century aspirations.*



*It is imperative to respect the deadline of 24 months concluded between the government and ECOWAS for the return to constitutional order in a climate of peace and understanding, says Siaka Barry.*

**Could we start with a summary of how Guinea is doing now economically, politically, and socially?**

Siaka Barry: Guinea is currently in a phase of transition which is the third in our history since our independence acquired on October 2, 1958. The present transition is taking place in a relatively peaceful and stable climate, although the country is facing exogenous shocks (especially the war in Ukraine) which causes a certain inflation and an increasing cost of living.

The reforms undertaken by the new authorities, the CNRD, particularly in the fight against corruption, macro-economic stability, support for the agricultural sector, improvement of road infrastructure, etc. are levers that explain a certain resilience of our country in the face of these brutal shocks.

On the political level, several challenges still challenge Guineans. Conducting a peaceful transition can only be achieved through consensus and consultation. However, the political dialogue initiated by the

government is struggling to bring together all the political actors with a view to resolving the crisis. How to respect the deadline of 24 months concluded between the government and ECOWAS for the return to constitutional order in a climate of peace and understanding, in order to achieve credible and transparent elections. This is the great political challenge that awaits Guinea.

**This interview has been done in the wake of a military coup in Niger, how was this news received by you and what did Guineans think about it?**

Siaka Barry: I personally welcomed the coup in Niger on July 26 with bitterness and great concern for the future of democracy in Africa. We thought that the demon of coups had moved away from Africa at the end of the 20th century and that Africa was now entering a virtuous phase of democracy and the rule of law.

Niger has just reminded us that this demon is not as far away as we imagined, when we know that West Africa has just recorded seven



coups in 3 years. This same feeling of concern is widely shared by Guineans.

**How has life been for you generally and what have you been up to since the military ousted the government of President Conde?**

Siaka Barry: Before the overthrow of President Alpha Condé's regime, I had the honor of serving Guinea as Minister of Culture and Sports in his government. A political and ideological rupture will end up distancing us and will push me to create a political party, the MPDG (Mouvement Populaire Démocratique de Guinée) which will obtain 3 seats in the national assembly. At the end of 2020, I resigned from the National Assembly because of political differences. The reversal of the regime will follow only a few months on September 5, 2021.

Since then, I have been working to establish our party across the country in view of the next election.

**During your stint as Minister of Culture, Sports and Historical Heritage of Guinea, may we know what this experience meant to you and some of the achievements you registered?**

Siaka Barry: My time as Minister of Culture, Sports and Historical



**Siaka Barry says the MPDG is resolutely committed to competing with the old traditional parties and is optimistic on the support of young Guineans who yearn for change.**

Heritage between 2016 and 2017 was a very rewarding experience for me. You know Guinea is a country with a rich cultural and historical heritage. It was an honor for me to initiate actions for the preservation and promotion of this vast heritage during my time in the ministry. The strengthening of our country's sports performance during my time in the ministry is also something to highlight.

**Last October, Guinea's ruling regime agreed to restore civilian rule in two years, what progress have we seen**

**towards this and are Guineans convinced about their sincerity on this?**

Siaka Barry: Indeed, the transition regime has made a commitment to Guinea's return to constitutional order in 24 months from January 2023. Ten projects were then agreed to lead to the presidential election and the installation of democratic institutions.

To date, some actions have been timidly initiated, particularly within the framework of the general census of the population, consultations for the drafting of a new constitution

and preparatory work for the establishment of an electoral register.

However, these results are very meager in view of the objectives set for a period of two years. If the pace is not accelerated, the impatience of the population risks creating a crisis of confidence.

**Can you shed light on your party the Democratic People's Movement of Guinea -MPDG, how has the party been operating under the present politically circumstances in Guinea?**

Siaka Barry: The MPDG is a young Guinean political party of social democracy obedience whose first activities were launched on February 2, 2019. In its first participation in a legislative election in Guinea, the MPDG ranked 3rd out of 30 parties electing 3 deputies to the National Assembly.

To date, in a context of renewal of the Guinean political class, the MPDG is one of the most emerging and growing parties, especially in rural areas. We continue intensively the establishment of the party throughout the territory with the objective of winning power in the next elections.

**For long the political space was dominated by leaders like ousted President Conde, and opposition leader like Cellou Diallo, where does the MPDG fit in the current and future political dynamics of Guinea?**

Siaka Barry: Yes, as I was saying earlier, the political map is currently being redrawn in Guinea. Our population is very young, almost 70% of the Guinean population is under 35 years old. So, we believe that this youth needs a new political offer centered on the issues and challenges of the modern world.

The MPDG positions itself as a party of hope for this Guinean youth. This is why we are resolutely committed to competing with the old traditional parties and we are optimistic that with the support of the young people of Guinea, the final victory will be on



**Our vision is that of a Guinea that finally manages to complete the construction of a strong, united and prosperous nation, says Siaka Barry.**



our side.

**May we know what kind of vision your party has for Guinea, what are some of the key proposals your party has in mind for a better Guinea?**

Siaka Barry: Our vision is that of a Guinea that finally manages to complete the construction of a strong, united and prosperous nation. A nation in which justice, social equity, solidarity, unity, respect for diversity will be the basis of a solid democracy in sustainable development.

- To this end, our party emphasizes 5 major pacts:
- the promotion of the rule of law through justice and democratic principles.
- the construction of a strong economy by the rational exploitation of our strong natural potential in an equitable partnership with the rest of the world.
- The fight against corruption and the promotion of ethics and good governance.
- the fight against all forms of social discrimination and the strengthening of the education and health system.
- restore Guinea's image abroad through a balanced foreign policy geared towards economic development.

**How concerned are you and your party about the surge in military coups and what do you make of the way ECOWAS, the AU and the broader international community responded to the coup in Niger?**

Siaka Barry: As I mentioned earlier, the resurgence of coups in Africa constitute a real setback for democracy and a threat to the rule of law.

In the specific case of Niger, while strongly condemning the coup and especially the arrest of President Bazoum, which is similar to a hostage-taking, I think that ECOWAS got



**The weariness of ECOWAS on Niger remains understandable when we know that it has just recorded the 7th coup in its space in 3 years, says Siaka Barry.**

confused on its own in its strategies.

In my opinion, the use of military force should be the last option after having exhausted all other levers. However, the weariness of ECOWAS remains understandable when we know that it has just recorded the 7th coup in its space in 3 years.

**What do you make of the growing anti-French sentiment, and the growing presence of other powers like Russia, China, and the USA, what kind of relations will Guinea have with these powers if you were President?**

Siaka Barry: As I said on the main pillars of our social project, we want to develop a balanced and diversified diplomacy towards all the powers wishing to maintain mutually respectful and advantageous relations.

The anti-French sentiment expressed today almost everywhere in Africa is born from the rejection of the paternalistic relations that France has always wanted to maintain with its former colonies without adapting to the realities of an increasingly multipolar world.

The challenges facing African countries today are no longer ideological but essentially economic. This is why African youth are asking to break the old historical chains that hinder their development, while turning to new, more economically advantageous partnerships -China, USA, BRICS, etc.

**Are you concerned with the continuous detention of potential candidates for the presidential elections like former Prime Minister Ibrahima Kassory Fofana?**

Siaka Barry: When the army took power, one of the measures I most applauded was the fight against corruption and the moralization of public management. It is in this context that several former collaborators of former President Alpha Condé have been pinned down by the courts. The objective behind this operation was noble. However, in view of the targets pursued so far, we are entitled to ask legitimate questions.

Doesn't the arrest of former Prime Minister Kassory Fofana and several members of his government, as well

as their prolonged detention, raise fears of the politicization of the judicial process? This is why we continue to call for the diligence of this procedure to situate each accused on his fate, preferably before the next elections.

**In the vision that you and your party have, what will be the fate of the Simandou project that was touted as a game changer for Guinea under President Conde?**

Siaka Barry: As for the Simandou project, it is indeed, in our view, the backbone of the mining development of our country. The current government following the Alpha Condé government has done a lot for the effective start of the project by eliminating endogenous and exogenous

constraints. Personally, I attach great importance to two aspects of the project: the infrastructure component and the financial impact of the operation on the public treasury.

**When you look at Guinea today, what gives you hope and what are your fears for its future?**

Siaka Barry: Today, seeing my country Guinea, the reason for hope that I have is the dynamism of its youth, the resilience of its populations and the diversity of its natural resources. I am convinced that with a better education of this youth, we will be able to turn its creative energy towards the transformation of these enormous natural potentialities into real wealth.

On the other hand, this dream can only be accomplished in national unity and social justice, but my main fear lies in this social, ethnic, and tribal tearing which we are witnessing more and more because of political excesses.

It's our mission, as a new generation, to find the appropriate remedies before it's too late.





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# Guinea: The Curious Case Of Former PM Kassory Fofana

By Samuel Ouma

A political future in limbo, judicial proceedings against tainted with bias and irrational decisions, failing health leading to growing concerns from friends for his safety—such is the lot of former Guinean Prime Minister Ibrahima Kassory Fofana.

Languishing in jail on alleged corruption charges, former Prime Minister Kassory Fofana is one of the high-profile casualties of the coup that ended the third term folly of President Alpha Conde in violation of constitutional term limits.

Amid fears for his safety, health and future, the American government is being urged to champion for his release after being held behind bars for more than a year.

In a letter addressed to Members of the Maryland Congressional Delegation, friends of Fofana living in the US urge authorities and the Biden administration to look into the curious case of the former Guinean Prime Minister

They said Kassory is wrongly detained, saying corruption charges being levelled against him are politically motivated and nothing but a total witch hunt.

They further claimed that he has been seriously ill since February 2023, and the current Guinea regime led by Colonel Doumbouya has refused to authorize his sanitary evacuation to receive medical attention.

“Yours is a very powerful voice, a voice that champions the course of democracy, a voice that epitomizes the rule of law and the respect of fundamental human rights. For Mr. Fofana and his frail health, the genuine fear for his life, the trauma that his wife and children are going through, it is our prayer that you will use that powerful voice to call for his speedy release,” read the letter in part.

“Mr. Fofana has been severely ill as well. His situation has since worsened and he has been in and out of the hospital. On several occasions, his



*The lines have been blurred in the trial of Ibrahima Kassory Fofana leading to questions on the real motives for his detention. Photo courtesy.*

trial has also been adjourned because of his deteriorating health.”

According to the friends of Fofana, Colonel Doumbouya's regime is deliberately playing hide and seek with his health with the intention to eliminate him ahead of the upcoming elections.

They likened Kassory's situation to what happened to Mali's Former Prime Minister, Boubeye Maiga. Maiga died at a local hospital after his government denied him a chance to seek medical assistance.

“Mr. Fofana's case is like a déjà vu of what happened in Mali to Former Prime Minister Boubeye Maiga. As soon as Mr. Maiga started talking about a transition of power back to civilians through elections, and his possible candidacy, he was arrested, never judged, became ill and was interned in a local hospital where he died, after the government denied his evacuation for medical treatment. Many in Mali have the suspicion that that he may have been assassinated

by the military junta there,” they said.

Mr. Fofana reportedly enjoys solid political support in Guinea compared to some of his opponents, a thing that gives National Committee for Reconciliation and Development (CNRD) the military junta sleepless nights.

As Prime Minister, Fofana promoted economic growth, job creation, and improving Guinea's investment climate. He also implemented many economic measures, especially in the mining sector, to draw in international capital and profit from Guinea's abundant natural resources.

Prior to joining politics, he enjoyed a successful career in business, mainly in the mining sector. He had various senior roles with mining companies, including that of Chief senior Officer at the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation (IFC). He also served as an advisor to ousted Guinea president Alpha Condé on economic and financial matters.

“The current military ruler is showing no signs of organizing elections and handing over power to a democratically elected government anytime soon. Opposition leaders who cheered his coup hoping for a speedy transition to civilian rule have been forced to flee the country,” added the friends of Fofana.

Mr. Fofana was arrested in April 2022, just months after the coup of 2021, and charged with theft of public funds, unlawful enrichment, money laundering, and complicity.

He was accused of stealing nearly \$4 million in government funds meant for economic, political, and social activities.

He was also accused of stealing more than \$40 million in funds intended to help the West African country combat the Covid-19 outbreak.

The former Prime Minister was arrested alongside former Mines and Geology Minister Mohamed Lamine Fofana and former Presidency of the Republic Secretary-General Sékou



*There have been growing concerns on the health and political future of Ibrahima Fofana.*

Kourouma.

Fofana was set to be freed with a fine of 20 billion Guinean Francs and placed under court supervision after being detained for more than a month, but the prosecutor for the

Court of Repression of Economic and Financial Offenses (CRIEF) opposed his release.

On March 23, the defence lawyer for Fofana filed a new request for release with the Supreme Court. However,

the court dismissed his appeal, calling it «unfounded.»

Fofana's lawyer, Sidiki Berete, accused the Supreme Court of prejudice since preventive detention in the Republic of Guinea is for four

months, renewable once, yet his client had been jailed for 11 months.

Following the court's decision Fofana and his co-accused failed to appear in court at the start of their trial on March 16, 2023. In an open letter written from prison, he criticized a targeted and selective witch hunt before announcing that he would not appear in court unless his fundamental human rights were honoured.

Additionally, due to health issues, the trial of Fofana was postponed once again until May 15. According to fraud prosecutor Josephine Loli Tinkiano, the trial was postponed because Fofana was receiving «perfusion treatment» for an ailment that was not clearly medically related.

As a supporter of democracy, friends of PM Kassory Fofana think the US government should champion for his release so that he can undergo medical treatment as stipulated in international laws. They also believe that the US government should do more in trying to push for better respect of human rights and a return to constitutional democratic rule in Guinea.





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# African ICT Insights With Victor Mbarika

By Ajong Mbapndah L

Information and Communication Technology (ICT's) represent the best hope for Africa to bridge the development gap with the rest of the world, says Prof Victor Mbarika Founder and Board Chair of the ICT University.

Based in the USA, the ICT University Foundation that Mbarika champions, funds and designs quality education to people who do not have to leave Africa. The Foundation establishes Campuses across the world that have similar standards and curricula to those in the USA. With over 20,000 students served annually, from basic certificate programs to Ph.D. programs, offered onsite and online, the ICT -U has emerged as a formidable hub for education that meets 21st century development challenges.

With a plethora of programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels, including diploma and certification programs, the ICT University offers a dynamic and flexible learning environment that inspires innovation and creativity and lays emphasis on student access.

"We have brought America to Africa, that is what I am most proud of, the quality that we offer. Our fees have not been very different for the last ten years and I think that is amazing," says Prof Victor Mbarika in an exclusive interview with PAV.

"ICT University has spread its wings and we are in discussion now to expand to Congo, Benin, and Equatorial Guinea. In the next 48 months, we will have at least two to three new campuses of the University. We are excited about it, and we keep growing," Professor Mbarika says.

The contributions that ICT University alumni are making towards African development are palpable, says Mbarika in the interview which also dwells on trends and perspectives across the continent.



*Through ICT's Africa can leapfrog the traditional approaches in development, says Prof Victor Mbarika.*

***Could we start with your reading of the ICT landscape in Africa today, what progress have you seen and what are some of the setbacks?***

Prof Mbarika: It is not where it is supposed to be, however, it is not where it was five years ago. I want us as Africans to see the strides we have made in terms of ICTs on the continent. The problem with many Africans is that we like to complain about what we don't have instead of making good use of what we have now for the future. For example, when I wrote my first book on ICT Transfer to Sub-Saharan Africa, the tele density (number of telephones per hundred people) of most African countries was less than one.

Today, there is nothing prestigious about having 2 or 3 phones in Africa, it is common. The rate for paying for data on phones is steadily going down, they are not as expensive as they used to be, but they are not as low as they are supposed to be. The landscape is not where we are supposed to be, but it is promising.

***Just how important is the ICT equation in helping Africa meet***

***its development priorities?***

Prof Mbarika: It is extremely important because we have to leapfrog the traditional approaches in development. In the United States and Europe, they still have a lot of lines going underground for people to be connected. Now with wireless, African countries do not have to spend so much money on infrastructure to dip trenches to be able to put in lines and connectivity and so on. We can leapfrog that and move directly into wireless telephony as we are already doing by the way for Africans to communicate with each other and do business to improve their livelihoods. There are challenges with wireless in that there are issues of security. They are prone to a lot of security issues in the IT world, but we cannot refrain from maximizing the use of these technologies we have just because we are afraid of cybercrimes and things like that.

***As you crisscross the continent, do you get the feeling that African countries are aware of the stakes with ICT?***

Prof Mbarika: Absolutely, almost all African countries are aware. I

give credit to many African governments; before many did not understand what this was all about. Many governments in Africa looked at ICT as a cost centre and not a centre for the productivity of resources. They looked like these IT guys only wanted money, but now they are beginning to see how they can sell their economies, and products online, and they can be competitive internationally by using e-commerce. Many governments now use ICT to communicate with their citizens and their citizens communicate with them in what we call e-governance and others.

The way we talk about the African continent is horrible but using technology we can

now promote the beauty of Africa and not make us look at ourselves as just poor black people. We are smarter than most people around the world, we can brag about our continent and its resources and do a lot for the continent.

***Looking across the continent, may we have some worthy examples of countries where you see genuine and impactful progress?***

Prof Mbarika: My beloved Cameroon is one. The cost of access to data to voice has gone down. There are countries where it is more expensive than in Cameroon. Today, the Minister of Secondary Education has made it so that parents can pay school fees for their kids through the Internet. I see great strides in Cameroon today, you establish a passport in Cameroon, and it takes just 48 hours. In America, the regular establishment of a passport takes 6 to 8 weeks. Cameroon is using technology in that domain better than America. Rwanda, Kenya, and Nigeria are other countries that are amazingly using technology. The majority of African countries are



investing in ICTs.

**Can we have insights into the current state of the ICT University that you have been promoting over the years?**

Prof Mbarika: It is amazing; ICT University has trained over a hundred thousand students around the world. Many times, people just talk about our numbers here in Cameroon, which is anywhere between 1200 and 1500 students, but we have trained well over a hundred thousand students if we include the certificate students we have trained in India, Uganda, Nigeria and more. We have touched a hundred thousand students in our last ten years of existence or so.

ICT University is growing and has now ventured into things like artificial intelligence, robotics, internet of Things. Our students are some of the best programmers and researchers anywhere in the world. One of our students developed the IntelliBra, a bra that a woman can wear, and it can help detect cancer. We have students who have developed smart trash cans and smart watering systems. I am excited at the great innovations that are coming out of ICT University by our great students.

**At its inception, your vision was to have ICT Universities across the continent, may we know the progress that has been made in this direction?**

Prof Mbarika: Many people know about the Cameroon campus, but we have the Ugandan campus that is doing well, we have a lot of PhD students from there. In Nigeria, we do a lot of things in technology, healthcare, and public health specifically in African traditional medicine. In India, we are doing a lot of work in digital literacy. ICT University has spread its wings and we are in discussion now to expand to Congo, Benin and Equatorial Guinea. In the next 48 months, we will have at least two to three new campuses of the University. We are excited about it, and we keep growing.



Prof Mbarika says the ICT University has trained over a hundred thousand students across its campuses in Africa and India

**How affordable is it for students to get education in the ICT Universities considering that you try to make them meet international standards in all forms?**

Prof Mbarika: The average MBA student in America will pay over 40 thousand dollars. In Cameroon, for the ICT University campus MBA Program, they will pay I think about 3 thousand dollars for the whole year. Our bachelor students pay the equivalent of a thousand two hundred dollars per year which is about 730 thousand FCFA to get an education like you will get at any American university in America or even better than quite several American

universities.

If you look at the masters defences that students defend here at ICT University, I can tell you, most masters defences in America do not do that level of research that we do here at our Cameroon campus. The theses are there online, and people can go and check. I am very proud of our quality, but you get all these at a reduced cost than going abroad to get the same quality of education. We have brought America to Cameroon. We have brought America to Africa, that is what I am most proud of, the quality that we offer. Our fees have not been very different for the last ten years, so we have kept them within the same range, maybe 80-100

thousand francs different in ten years. I think that is amazing.

**In terms of the alumni of these Universities, how have they fared, any mechanisms you have in place to keep track of their progress or impact on the development process in their respective countries or the continents as a whole?**

Prof Mbarika: The alumni are doing very well. What I am proud of about them is that when they finish, many of them created their businesses and are doing well. Many have created companies and are employing many youths in Africa as opposed to putting the burden of employment on the government. We Africans have a very wrong mentality, we think the government should hire. The government does not have a lot of money, that is what people don't realize. Our students create jobs for themselves and others and that is the pride of ICT University.

The Cameroon government does not owe anyone jobs, people should create jobs. Cameroon is a fertile country, why not go to the farm if I say that they will say I am insulting people; how can I have a PhD and go to the farm? Good farmers are some of the richest people in the world. I am going into farming, not only here in Cameroon but also in America. There is a lot of money in farming and the land is fertile.

**May we know the kind of support or partnerships that ICT Universities have received from governments across the continent?**

Prof Mbarika: Yes, a lot of government officials love this University, and support this University including the Head of State himself. We are thankful to this government, starting with the head of state himself for the support we get. Many private businesses have supported ICT University a lot. Some banks send their staff here, like NFC Bank. I am thankful to them and others for sending their staff to be trained



Professor Victor Mbarika was recently distinguished with the African Achievers Award at a ceremony that took place in Westminster,

here in their MBA program and we ask for more to come.

**Prof Victor Mbarika recently bagged the African Achievers award in London, may we get insights on this award and what it meant to you?**

Prof Mbarika: I am thankful to the organizers as I received the Excellence in Leadership Award. It was an honour because I see where I am recognized for the work done in Africa; it brings such fulfilment to me than all the other awards that I have received in America and Europe for the work I do in those countries. Africa is where my placenta lies and I am honoured with the quality, and calibre of people that have received this award before such as Nelson Mandela (my hero) and Thomas Sankara, to be named even amongst such names is very humbling.

**When you received the award, you were flagged with the Cameroon colours, what was your reason for doing that?**

Prof Mbarika: I wanted the Cameroon flag to enter the British House of Lords, they colonized us and stole a lot from us. I am not ashamed to say that; I know many politicians will say don't speak like that because it is not good for diplomacy. Europe has stolen a lot from us, and we owe them nothing. So, I am proud to show the flag of Cameroon everywhere I go, and I am coming after them. We will get their resources and invest them here like we have started doing.

**On the heels of the award, you were received by the Prime Minister of Cameroon, what was the message he had for you, and how is the government of Cameroon doing when it comes to promoting the kind of vision you have for ICT?**

Prof Mbarika: I was honoured to be received by the Prime Minister Head of Government, Chief Dr Joseph Dion



Prof Mbarika received strong words of encouragement and support from Cameroon's Prime Minister Chief Dr Dion Ngute.

Ngute. The Prime Minister is not only a government official, but he is also a bona fide University professor. He understands what a University is all about. The Prime Minister congratulated me, although he said he wasn't surprised. He encouraged me to keep doing the things I do, not just for ICT University but for the state universities in Cameroon. He encouraged collaborations between the ICT University and State Universities in Cameroon. It is a win-win situation between the institutions.

The government of Cameroon has been supportive of the ICT University

vision. When I started the ICT University, registering the University in Cameroon, no one asked me for a bribe. That proves that there are many good-hearted people in the country who want to see the country develop. The government has gone beyond my expectations for the things we do and the support we get. We had over 6 or 7 government ministers at our last graduation about a week ago. This was amazing, the prime minister personally sent an envoy to represent him and speak at the graduation.

**When you look at the dynamics in Africa, what gives you hope for the future and what are your fears?**

Prof Mbarika: Africa has a great future when it comes to ICTs. My biggest fear is that we keep complaining about what we don't have and not looking into the technologies that we have at hand to see what to do to improve our situation in Africa. Complaining will not take us anywhere. Most people, even in the villages in Africa, have smartphones. The question is not whether we have the technology but how we use it for the future, how we use it for business, and how we use them to make our lives and families better on the continent. My fear is

people not optimizing the use of existing technologies while we look to improve in the future.

My second fear is that I don't want many youths to leave hands-on work or what they are doing professionally and join politics. Yes, some people have to do politics, but I want the majority to get into many areas of vocational ICTs to improve the long-term development of the country. Again, I want to emphasize, I have nothing against politics or politicians. I am just saying that youths should not all dream of being big politicians. I think 20 per cent should go into politics and 80 per cent go into other areas of work.

**Any other words of wisdom to the youths in Cameroon and Africa as we round up this interview?**

Prof Mbarika: The President's speech on 31 December every year acknowledges that there are challenges. The president of the Republic does not refuse that there are challenges but how we navigate those challenges is what matters and he encourages us to do so. I will point our youths to look at the number of foreigners who fly into Cameroon. I fly first class; I am blessed to do that. In first class when I fly into Cameroon, it is full of white people from different countries. Sometimes it could just be two to three black people in first class, and I know how much it costs to fly first class. If there was nothing in Cameroon what would all these foreigners be flying in to do?

There is something, they are not just flying in for the love of Cameroon, they are flying in to make money. I encourage the youths not to sit and cry about their country but to be productive and ready to compete with these people, coming to get all our country's resources and use them elsewhere. There is a lot of potential in our home country and above all, let us remember that you can never go wrong with the land of Cameroon. The land is fertile, if it means going into agriculture, you will make it and make it big.



ICT alumni have created companies and are employing many youths in Africa as opposed to putting the burden of employment on governments





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# Nigeria: Tinubu Talks Tough On Economy

By Prince Kurupati

Closing off the month of July, Nigeria's newly elected President Bola Tinubu took time to talk to the nation. The agenda of his televised address was to explain the reasons behind recent economic policy changes one of which includes the scrapping of the fuel subsidy.

Starting his address, President Tinubu stressed that he wants his message to resonate with every citizen in the country. This of course necessitated by the fact that the recent economic policy changes affect every citizen in the country either positively or negatively. Owing to this, he said he would refrain from addressing using "difficult terms by dwelling on economic jargon and concepts". Rather, he opted to use "plain, clear language" that's understandable to all.

Starting off, President Tinubu said as soon as he assumed office, one thing that became clear to him, was that several of the country's economic policies were no longer working for the common man. Rather, they were serving the elites at the expense of the intended recipients – the common man on the street. He proceeded to say that for democracy to thrive, there is a need for the people – both ordinary citizens and elites – to benefit from their country's resources hence the need to revise and change the current elitist policies.

The first such 'elitist' policy that President Tinubu referenced is the fuel subsidy which he scrapped in the first few weeks of his inauguration as president. Justifying his decision, the president said, "This once beneficial measure had outlived its usefulness. The subsidy cost us trillions of Naira yearly. Such a vast sum of money would have been better spent on public transportation, healthcare, schools, housing, and even national security. Instead, it was being funnelled into the deep pockets and lavish bank accounts of a select group of individuals".

The Nigerian president went further stating that another measure



*It will be tough before it gets better, President Tinubu warns Nigerians.*

which he earmarked in his mission to "reform the economy for the long term good" is the preferential exchange rate system. He said that the system in recent times has been used as a "highway of currency speculation". In his vision, he sees the reformation of the exchange rate system as a leeway to create jobs, build factories and businesses for millions of people if the money is diverted and channelled to other good causes.

While noble as they are geared towards the full economic emancipation of ordinary citizens, President Tinubu acknowledged that the economic measures he is implementing are going to be "tough" at first. He said that just like all other austerity measures, the sudden change from one spectrum which had become a norm to another opposite spectrum will cause some hardships in adjusting. Anxiety and uncertainty also feel the atmosphere as people question the efficacy of the measures. Allaying the fears of those who are anxious about the policy changes, President Tinubu said the route he took is the best possible as if there was another route, he "would have

taken that route as I came here to help not hurt the people and nation that I love".

To help ordinary citizens navigate the treacherous path brought about by the recent policy changes, Nigeria's newly elected leader said he is ready to ease the burden on "businesses, the working class and the most vulnerable among us". He said this would be done as a multi-sectoral task which sees the Federal government work closely with states and local governments to implement various interventions. One such includes suspending and deferring the "commencement of some taxes" to businesses in the manufacturing sector.

Furthermore, the president promised to strengthen the manufacturing sector saying it will increase "its capacity to expand and create good-paying jobs, we are going to spend N75 billion between July 2023 and March 2024. Our objective is to fund 75 enterprises with great potential to kick-start sustainable economic growth, accelerate structural transformation and improve productivity. Each of

the 75 manufacturing enterprises will be able to access N1 billion credit at 9% per annum with a maximum of 60 months repayment for long-term loans and 12 months for working capital".

To ensure that the nation is well fed now and in the immediate future, the president assured the creation of a multi-stakeholder engagement with various farmers' associations and operators within the agricultural value chain. "In the short and immediate terms, we will ensure staple foods are available and affordable. To this end, I have ordered the release of 200,000 Metric Tonnes of grains from strategic reserves to households across the 36 states and FCT to moderate prices. We are also providing 225,000 metric tonnes of fertiliser, seedlings and other inputs to farmers who are committed to our food security agenda," President Tinubu said.

In his concluding remarks, President Tinubu urged his fellow Nigerians to endure the current hardships but in doing so, to also look beyond the "temporary pains and aim at the larger picture".



# Kenya: Ruto's Hustler Blues

By Prince Kurupati

Many say the hottest seat is the presidency. Well, if Kenyan President William Ruto's first year in the presidency is anything to go by, then indeed, the presidency is the hot seat. In the month that he is meant to celebrate his first anniversary as the Kenyan President, William Ruto is facing a whole lot of challenges chief among them bi-weekly (Mondays and Thursdays) organised nationwide protests which threaten to usher in anarchy in the country.

One of the main reasons that propelled Ruto to the top seat in Kenya was his promise to make life and business smoother and more convenient for the 'hustlers', a term used to describe the huge middle-aged population age group largely consisting of informally employed individuals. The message that Ruto sold during his campaign was that the ordinary man on the streets was being reaped off by the government of the day whose main interest was to advance the interests of the elite. This message resonated well with the masses whose dreams and aspirations



President Ruto's domestic agenda is under increasing scrutiny . Photo credit CNN

were to uplift themselves in a more conducive 'informal' business environment.

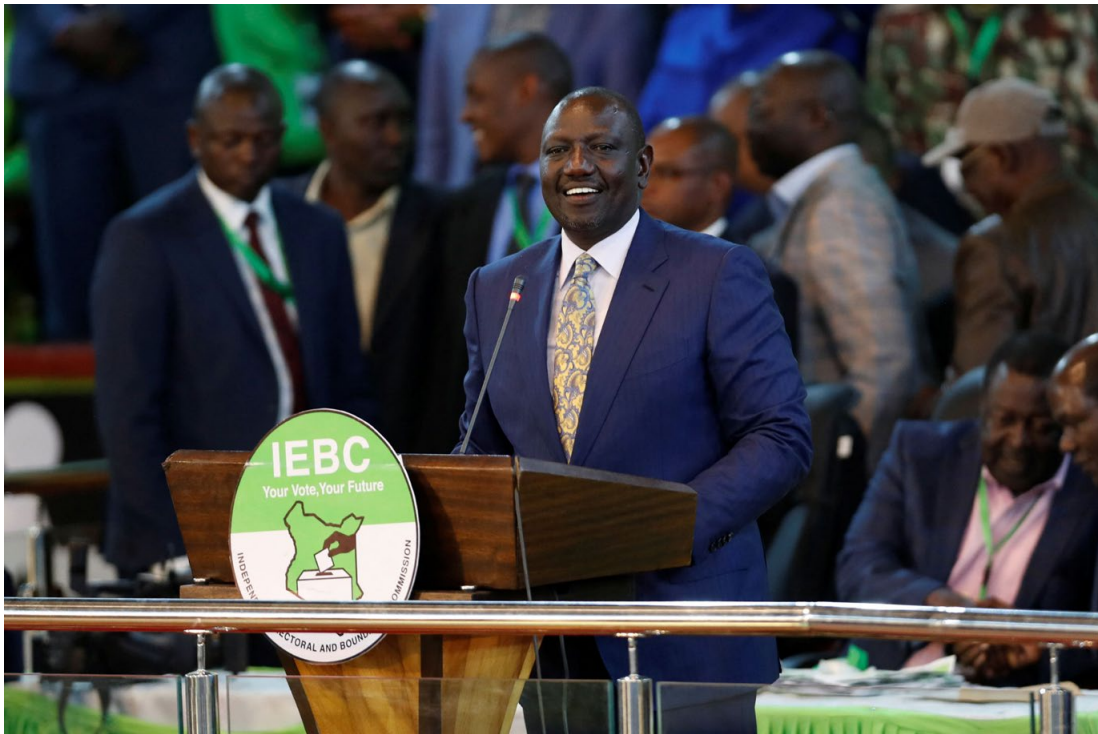
Fast forward to a year later, President Ruto's austerity measures have made life even tougher for the 'hustlers'. This in essence created a rift between him and the population that voted him into power. Though

noble when considering the intended purpose which is to service Kenya's debt and avoid defaults and forced restructuring, President Ruto's austerity measures which include subsidy cuts, steep tax hikes and deferment of public servant wages has made life unbearable for ordinary Kenyans. Even more concerning

for ordinary Kenyans is that other austerity measures which include more tax increases via the amended Finance Bill were stopped by the High Court meaning life could even be tougher.

Feeling betrayed by the man who had promised to transform their lives and livelihoods, ordinary citizens in the past few months have resorted to reminding President Ruto of the promises he made on his campaign trail. The reminder has however come more violently as to be expected with a population that feels betrayed. Several rounds of nationwide protests have taken place in the country in the past couple of months with the situation not showing any signs of calming down. Rather, the rift seems to continue widening with each day.

While the austerity measures are genuinely making the life of the ordinary citizen unbearable, on the macroeconomic scale, they seem to be bringing in some sort of relief. As reported by the Financial Times, "Higher interest rates and a stronger dollar have made financing options more expensive. Kenya spends about US\$10 billion annually on debt repayments to China and other lenders and has a US\$2 billion Eurobond due next year. Debt



There is a growing perception that President Ruto's austerity measures have made life even tougher for the hustlers.

servicing costs jumped from 59.5% of total state revenue in the 2021-22 fiscal year to 63.5% in 2023-24". By trying to contain and correct this situation, many economic analysts believe that implementing austerity measures and cutting government expenditure is the only way to achieve the intended objective.

Writing for the Institute for Security Studies, Peter Fabricius said that the implementation of the austerity measures is being done to right the wrongs which were left by former President Uhuru Kenyatta. Fabricius notes that "Uhuru Kenyatta, Ruto's predecessor, borrowed heavily from Beijing and the international financial markets to fund rail, road and port projects. Many of these failed to generate enough to pay the debts. So Ruto is resorting to austerity to remedy Kenyatta's legacy".

The Chairman of Transparency International's International Council John Githongo shared the same sentiments with Fabricius albeit

going further in stating that the implementation of the austerity measures has been done wrong and marred by poor governance practises hence the disdain the ordinary citizens have for the measures and the President. "The unpopular measures were not accompanied by any measures to halt profligacy or graft and conspicuous consumption. There is a deeper angst around governance – economic mismanagement, corruption, fiddling elections, our demography – that is driving the discontent," Githongo said.

Adding fuel to the fire is the emergence of protest organisers – the reason behind the bi-weekly planned nationwide protests. Long-time opposition leader Raila Odinga has assumed the leadership of the protests calling upon the citizens to show their dissatisfaction at the rising cost of living. However, he has also added another inflammatory cause to the protestors in the form of electoral malpractices. Odinga is calling on the

Ruto administration to acknowledge that last year's presidential election was marred with electoral practises and in turn, have them rectified in the courts of law.

On Mondays and Thursdays, Nairobi and other main cities and towns in Kenya turn into fighting zones marred with police tear gas, chaos, large demonstrations and water canons as the citizens clash with the security agents. The fear among political analysts is that if left as is, the protests may descend into full-blown conflict. Considering Kenya's ugly and bloody post-election violence history, an escalation into a full blow conflict will not go down well for President Ruto. Already, it's been reported that 23 people have lost their lives during the protests.

Moreover, Raila Odinga's call for the bi-weekly protests to increase their frequency to three times a week poses a greater danger. "Going forward, the peaceful protests will be held on Wednesday, Thursday

and Friday next week in line with the request from the public," he said. This in essence means the working time for Kenyans living in big cities and towns has been further reduced as the streets will be unpassable during protest days. Considering the largely informal nature of the Kenyan working populace, it means more and more people who would normally be working on the streets will remain there albeit for a different reason.

An end to the protests looks highly unlikely though considering President Ruto's bold and stern statement of intent in which he said, "The elections are over. You cannot look for leadership by using the blood of Kenyans and destroying their property. These demos will not happen. Listen to me carefully; you cannot use extrajudicial, extra-constitutional means to look for power in Kenya". This shows how he is prepared to keep 'fighting' the protestors and their leaders.

## A Niche For Elder Statesmen In The WAEF

By Prince Kurupati

On 4 March 2021, former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan launched the West African Elders Forum (WAEF). The key mission of the Forum is to build "democratic accountability, strengthening governance and building leadership towards ensuring a transparent and peaceful transition of power". In achieving its objective, WAEF aims at leveraging the peace-building and mediation powers of constituent members.

The co-convenor of the Forum Dr Goodluck Jonathan couldn't have come up with a more fitting and relevant organisation considering that the West African region is bedevilled with instances of electoral malpractices and coups. In the past couple of years since the launch of the Forum, the West African region has witnessed coups in Mali, Burkina Faso as well as the recent Niger coup. Owing to this, it's crystal clear to see that the mission of WAEF is not just



Former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan has kept former leaders actively engaged with the WAEF.





*A delegation of the WAEF poses for cameras after a meeting with APC flagbearer Ahmed Tinubu. The WAEF has been active in election monitoring and peace missions.*

fitting for the West Africa region but very much appropriate.

Other constituent members of the Forum who are tasked with using their leadership skills in mediating between conflicting parties to diffuse tensions and address electoral and democratic conflict in the region include former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, former Liberian president Amos Claudius Sawyer, former Burkinabe prime minister Kadre Desire Quedraogo, former Nigerian president General Abdulsalami Abubakar, former Cape Verde president Pedro de Verona Rodrigues Pires, former Liberian president Madam Ellen Sirleaf, former Benin president Thomas Boni Yayi, former Sierra Leone president Ernest Bai Koroma, former Senegalese president Aminata Toure and one time Mali president Dioncounda Traore.

In all the recent events that have happened in West Africa, particularly on the electoral and governance front, WAEF has been very active in offering much-needed assistance. In the lead-up to the Nigerian election, the Forum through its head of Election Mediation Mission to Nigeria Dr. Goodluck Jonathan called upon the responsible authorities to respect

the will of the people and to conduct the election in an environment that promotes peace. In a statement, the Forum said the creation of the Election Mediation Mission to Nigeria is to explore "preventive diplomacy to reduce electoral-related tension and violence in Africa".

"In the recent past, some of our countries have been backsliding in terms of democracy that we could advance in other countries. We expect Nigeria to get it right. To send a signal to those other countries, that democracy is the way to go," Dr Jonathan said. At the same time, the Forum also revealed that one of its members Abdulsalam Abubakar played a pivotal role in initiating the National Peace Committee and the signing of the Peace Accord by political parties and their candidates.

Former Gambian Vice President Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang who is also a Forum member called upon women from Nigeria and the wider West African region to be more involved in civic matters as there are just as critical stakeholders as their male counterparts in governance issues. "As a woman, I'm concerned about the marginalisation of women in politics. We know our fundamental constraints, we see the cultural

constraints... despite all this, we members of the Forum, we encourage government and civil society to work together and also women to be involved," Jallow-Tambajang said.

Members of the Forum also visited Liberia in July with the mission of advancing preventive diplomacy as the country gears up for elections. The Forum was welcomed by President George Weah with whom it deliberated key electoral issues. During its 3 day stay in the country, members of the Forum also met with leaders of the main opposition parties, the Electoral Management Body, the Police Chief, the National Security Chief, and the Diplomatic Corps. In its pre-election engagements with all these individuals, the Forum stressed the need for good governance practises to be followed at all times to create a conducive and peaceful environment that allows a peaceful election to take place.

Co-convenor of the Forum Dr Goodluck Jonathan while addressing the media in Monrovia called upon presidential hopefuls to embrace issue-based campaigning saying that's one way of promoting peace on the eve of an election. "I caution Liberians and politicians to embrace issue-based campaigning, abusive

languages and insults have no place in our society and should have no place in our elections," Dr Jonathan said.

To the electoral body, Dr Jonathan said, "As a way of boosting confidence in the elections, we urge the National Elections Commission and the security apparatus to regularly communicate their programs and activities for the elections to reassure the citizens that elections are going on in accordance with the plans."

After Senegalese president Macky Sall renounced his aspiration for a constitutionally prohibited third term on July 3, 2023, Dr Jonathan through WAEF was one of the first statesmen to congratulate him for showing "sacrificial leadership".

In Sierra Leone, Dr Jonathan and other members of the Forum arrived in the country just days before election day. The message the Forum carried to Sierra Leone was that of peace before, during and after the elections. In a statement released soon after WAEF members landed in Freetown, WAEF said its mission in Sierra Leone is to urge "citizens of Sierra Leone to approach the election with utmost patriotism by prioritising the nation's peace and stability and refrain from acts capable of undermining the nation's democracy."

A stylized map of Africa is the central element, rendered in two shades of green. The top half is a lighter green and contains silhouettes of three wind turbines and two solar panels. The bottom half is a darker green and contains a silhouette of a large cargo ship. The map is set against a light gray background with some faint green foliage on the left and right sides.

# A JUST TRANSITION

MAKING ENERGY  
POVERTY  
HISTORY WITH  
AN ENERGY  
MIX

N J A Y U K



# Russia Ups Stakes In Africa

By Prince Kurupati

Russia's ongoing war with Ukraine proved not to be a hindrance for President Putin who successfully managed to host several African leaders during the Africa Russia Summit. Of course, this is in part necessitated by the fact that the war front is in Ukraine rather than Russia. The Summit which ran from July 27 to 28 2023 was a second gathering of this nature. The Summit had to be held this year following its postponement in October of last year. Last year's postponement had nothing to do with the war as it was scheduled to be hosted at the African Union headquarters.

49 delegations from African nations attended the Summit, an increase from the 43 who previously attended the first Russia-African Summit. Of the 49 delegations, 17 of them were led by the respective countries' presidents. Also, in attendance at the Summit was President Putin's former friend turned foe (and presumably friend again) Yevgeny Prigozhin, the leader of the Wagner Group. Earlier on, Prigozhin and his group advanced on Moscow intending to depose Putin before reaching an appeasement deal with the Russian leader and heading to Belarus for 'exile'.

The Summit consisted of three main events. First were the side-line events which saw various African leaders take turns to deliberate and discuss various issues with the Russian leader. There was also a plenary session where President Putin led the discussion with all Summit attendees under the theme, "Technology and Security in the Name of Sovereign Development for the Benefit of Humankind". At the end came the deal-making phase where bilateral and trilateral agreements were signed between and among the Summit attendees including non-state actors such as the Wagner Group and the BRICS New Development Bank led by former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff.

During his discussions with African leaders on the sidelines of



49 delegations from African nations attended the Summit, an increase from the 43 who previously attended the first Russia-African

the Summit as well as during the main plenary session, the one main thing which became crystal clear was Putin's desire to strengthen ties with Africa. In all the deliberations, Putin went on a charm offensive as he uncharacteristically gave a whole load of freebies and reached 'charitable' deals.

Most notably, the Russian President agreed to write off \$23 billion of African debt. Several countries over the years relied on Russian credits to supplement their budgets and cater to social and economic projects. This therefore meant that they were indebted to Russia but by the end of the Summit, many of these countries saw their debts written off. Speaking on this, the Russian leader said that almost 90% of the total African debt to Russia has been scrapped. He went on to say that this means Africa now no longer has 'direct' debts for Russia but only some financial obligations.

Moving on, just days before African leaders arrived in St Petersburg for the Russia Africa Summit, President Putin had cancelled the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The initiative largely benefited the countries in the Horn of Africa and surrounding countries with 'affordable' grain. The cancellation of the initiative therefore meant these countries had to source for grain on the world market something which spelled doom for

the thousands of their citizens. This is necessitated by the fact that sourcing grain via the global supply chain is a tall task which requires enough funds, something countries in the Horn of Africa don't readily have. There was thus a fear that the cancellation of the initiative would turn the poverty in these countries especially in Somalia into famine.

At the Summit, President Putin relayed what he had earlier said saying that his decision to cancel the Black Sea Grain Initiative was motivated by the need to directly award grain to the rightful intended recipients. He said that the initiative which was brokered by the United Nations to allow safe passage of agricultural goods through Ukraine's ports in the Black Sea had been 'hijacked'. He went on to say that the conditions of the initiative had been 'ignored' and there was a need to look for another feasible alternative.

The feasible alternative which the Russian leader proposed was to directly ship grain to six African countries in most need. Namely, the six are Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Somalia, Eritrea, Mali and Zimbabwe. These six countries will receive between 25,000 to 50,000 tonnes of free grain over the next months. While the recipient countries gladly accepted the offer, the UN Secretary-General

was quick to condemn Putin's offer saying, "a handful of donations to some countries" will not correct the dramatic impact that the cancellation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative brings.

The only African country which explicitly condemned Russia's decision to cancel the Black Sea Grain Initiative was Kenya. Kenya's Principal Secretary for Foreign Affairs Korir Sing'Oei called Putin's decision a "stab in the back of global food security prices". President William Ruto was one of the presidential absentees at the Summit hence signalling Kenya's disapproval of the Russian leader's stance.

Other notable deals that African leaders came back with include an arms deal which will see African countries increase their 44% major arms import from Russia, a bauxite deal signed by Guinea and Russia, construction of a nuclear power station in Egypt financed by Russia, nuclear power deals for Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, as well as the extension of Russian scholarships.

Rounding up the Summit, African leaders also took time to call upon President Putin to help stop the war with Ukraine. They preached the gospel of peace saying that peace will help to move the world forward.

# South African Court Urges Authorities to Arrest Putin

By Prince Kurupati

**S**outh Africa's High Court in a bold ruling ordered the country's law enforcement officials to arrest Russian President Vladimir Putin if he sets foot in South Africa. South Africa is set to host the BRICS Summit in August running from 22-24. As is the case with past BRICS Summits, the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa always attend hence the expectation of Putin visiting South Africa in August.

In passing down the ruling, the High Court said that the legal obligation for South Africa in line with domestic and international law statutes as well as legal precedent is to arrest Putin once he sets foot in the country. The Court said that its ruling complies with the International Criminal Court's (ICC) directive ordering all signatory members to arrest the Russian President. South Africa is a signatory to the Rome Statute since 1998.

Boldly, the High Court said that the implementation of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court Act should supersede all other decisions as it "enjoys legislative authority, having passed through Parliament, and it cannot be displayed by a notice promulgated by a Minister or by a Cabinet decision".

The High Court had been approached by the main opposition party the Democratic Alliance (DA) which sought to compel the South African government to arrest Putin upon arrival in South Africa if he is to attend the BRICS Summit. In a statement issued by the DA's Shadow Justice Minister Glynnis Breytenbach, the party said that it is "seeking this declaratory order to ensure that there is no legal ambiguity relating to the procedure to be followed, and the obligations placed upon the state, should President Putin set foot in South Africa."

In passing its ruling, the Gauteng



Russian President Putin and South African President Ramaphosa are key actors in BRICS. Photo credit Sergei Chirikov.AP.

High Court in Pretoria ordered the National Director of Public Prosecutions, Shamila Batohi to issue an arrest warrant for the Russian President. In issuing an international arrest warrant for Putin, the ICC said that the Russian leader is accused of perpetrating war crimes during Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as the forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia as part of Moscow's full-scale invasion.

The Russian president has kept the world at large and South Africa specifically in suspense as it's playing a Russian roulette game when it comes to the question of whether Putin will attend the Summit in person or not. The clearest that the Russian government has said thus far is that Russia will "take part in this Summit at the proper level" according to the Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov.

Even after the passing of the High Court ruling, the South African government has also tried to keep cards close to its chest. The country's foreign ministry issued a statement saying it will grant immunity to BRICS meeting participants as this is "standard" procedure for an international summit host country. However, the statement went further saying, "These immunities do not override any warrant that may have been issued by any international

tribunal against any attendee of the conference".

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa in court papers made public last month said that arresting Putin would be tantamount to a declaration of war as "Russia has made it clear that arresting its sitting President would be a declaration of war". This perhaps gives the clearest intentions thus far as to the action that his government will do if Putin attends the Summit. Echoing the same sentiments with President Ramaphosa albeit offering his own best possible solution to the whole fiasco is South Africa's deputy president Paul Mashatile who said, "It's a big dilemma for us. Of course, we cannot arrest him. It's almost like you invite your friend to your house and then arrest them. That's why for us, his not coming is the best solution. The Russians are not happy, though. They want him to come".

Further justifying his 'implicit' desire and intent not to arrest Putin, President Ramaphosa said arresting Putin would be "Irresponsible" and "inconsistent with our constitution to risk engaging in war". Moreover, the arrest would also undermine South Africa's peace mission to end the war in Ukraine and "foreclose any peaceful solution".

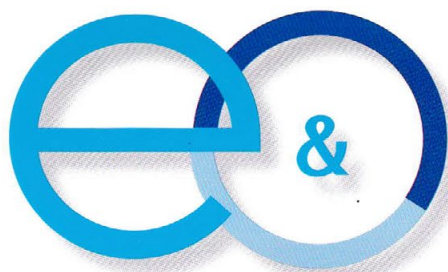
President Ramaphosa's reluctance or inability to explicitly state that he

will not arrest Putin if he sets foot in the country has been condemned by the leader of the opposition party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Julius Malema. Speaking at his party's 10th-anniversary celebration, Julius Malema said, "We call on the president of the People's Republic of China, India and Brazil not to come to BRICS Summit in solidarity with President Putin, they must say: You touch one of us, you touch all of us... It is Ramaphosa, the coward Ramaphosa, who could not guarantee that we would not arrest Putin. We are Putin, and Putin is us, and we will never support imperialism against President Putin".

The recent ruling by the High Court follows the many calls done by opposition parties, legal activists and rights groups in calling for the arrest of Putin. Adding his voice calling for the arrest of Putin is Dr Msipa Roux of the Centre for Human Rights who said, "The current legal obligation on South Africa in terms of domestic and international law and legal precedent is absolutely clear: the government must arrest and surrender Vladimir Putin to the International Criminal Court (ICC) should he enter South African territory".

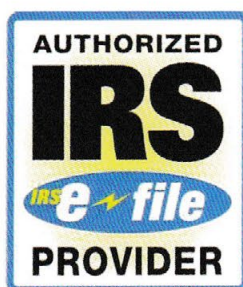
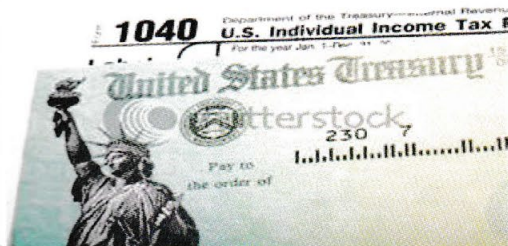
If South Africa fails to arrest Putin if ever, he decides to attend the BRICS Summit, the relations between South Africa and the West will likely turn frosty. Already, there is a rift between South Africa and the West owing to the former's reluctance and refusal to castigate Russia for its invasion of Ukraine as well as the former's willingness to accommodate Russia's Lady R ship which is under U.S. sanctions for allegedly transporting weapons for Moscow. Moreover, the joint military drills done by Russia, China and South Africa cast doubts on the latter's non-aligned stance in the Russia-Ukraine war something which irks the West.





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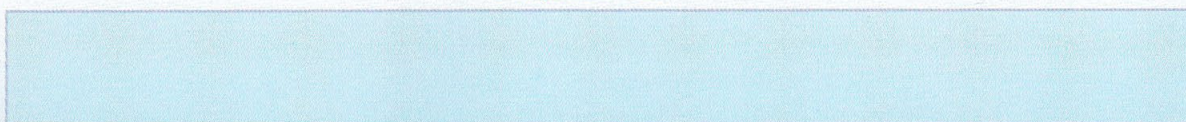
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# Wagner Group to Continue Africa Operations Following Truce with Putin

By James Mwanza

Towards the end of June, the world was shellshocked to hear that there was an advance on Russian President Vladimir Putin. The advance was not by Ukraine, the country currently fighting Russia but rather, it was by the Wagner Group under the leadership of Yevgeny Prigozhin. For many people around the world, the names Wagner Group and Yevgeny Prigozhin were new. This, therefore, led to the questions, of who is Yevgeny Prigozhin and why was he advancing on Putin, one of the world's scariest leaders.

Surprise, surprise - in learning more about Yevgeny Prigozhin and the Wagner Group, one thing that quickly emerged is that Prigozhin is a mercenary and paramilitary leader whose group has a huge presence on the African continent.

The Wagner Group operates in select African countries and some of these, it has a long history. The Financial Times reports that the group "for years... has been the main vehicle of Russia's power projection in Africa, engaging in military, mining and propaganda activities across the continent from Libya and Sudan to Mali and Mozambique". This in essence meant that the Wagner Group's operations had the 'blessings' of the Russian president.

Following Prigozhin's botched mutinous behaviour in advancing towards Moscow in a widely reported attempt to topple Putin, many questions arose - the main one being if Prigozhin's group was going to be disbanded and if not, how would Putin curtail its operations. Though not explicitly stated, there was a general feeling that the Russian President wouldn't just let Prigozhin go scot-free without facing any repercussions for his actions. The repercussion that most people thought would hurt Prigozhin the most was the disbanding of his group or at least the curtailing of its activities and funding



Central African President Touadera and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. The Wagner Group has very strong presence in Central Africa. Photo courtesy.

sources.

To the disbelief of many, however, when Prigozhin aborted his advance to Moscow and travelled to Belarus instead after his truce with Putin, only lenient repercussions were instituted. Namely, the Kremlin ordered that Prigozhin turn back and seek exile in Belarus. His group's operations in Russia and Ukraine were to be at the command of the Kremlin while its weapons were to be handed over (though no deadline was given). With regards to the group's operations in Africa, the head of Russian diplomacy Sergei Lavrov while speaking in an interview with RT said Prigozhin's actions would not affect business relations between Moscow and its allies as well as the operations of the Wagner Group with Russian allies.

Lavrov went on to state that the Wagner Group's activities in Mali and Central African Republic would continue. In those countries, Lavrov said the Wagner members are working "as instructors". He said that the Wagner Group entered the

countries after France and Europe had abandoned them hence the reason Russia gave Prigozhin the greenlight to provide military instructors and "ensure the security of their leaders".

In the group's operations on the African continent both in military and mining spheres, its widely reported that gross human rights abuses and atrocities are recorded. However, the Central African Republic President is convinced that the group's role in providing military support more than compensates for the alleged abuses.

In a statement, the Central African Republic President Faustin-Archange Touadera said "If Moscow decides to withdraw them (Wagner) and send us the Beethovens or the Mozarts... we will have them". Writing for the Financial Times, David Pilling, Andres Schipani, Aanu Adeoye and Samer Al-Alrush said the sentiments by the Central African Republic president expose the close links between the Wagner Group and Russia and how the group is an extension of Russian influence on the continent. They went

on to state that President Touadera's allegiance to the Wagner Group and Russia specifically is down to the help he received in 2020 in thwarting an attempted rebellion.

The senior author of the Architects of Terror report Nathalia Dukhan said that the Wagner Group was doing a great job of spreading Russian influence on the African continent without expending much resources. Dukhan said the group's self-financing model which it had adopted contrary to Putin's claims that the Wagner Group is "completely financed" by Russia had endeared it with the Russian authorities. It's against this background that Russia reluctantly chose not to disband it.

Dukhan does believe however that going into the future, "the monster (Wagner Group) will evolve, but it will not die". She said that disbanding the Wagner Group would work against the Russian government and as such, enabling the group to evolve would be the better strategy. In summing up how the group would evolve in future,



Dukhan said, "A virus survives. It will adapt to the new environment".

If the Wagner Group's existence in Africa is reliant on evolving as Dukhan states, then the issue of funding becomes the central question. Will Moscow take full financial responsibility for all of the group's operations on the African continent? If this happens, then the Wagner Group will most likely remain in Africa. However, if Russia insists that the group self-finances, then its operations will most definitely diminish if not end. This is necessitated by the fact that in countries such as Mali, Sudan and Burkina Faso, the group does not have access to economic levers. In all, the fate of the Wagner Group in Africa, therefore, lies with the Russian government and President Putin.



Human Rights Groups have often flagged the Wagner Group for violations, Picture credit Council On Foreign Relations.

## Antonio Oburu Ondo Reveals Strategies to Explore, Drill and Unlock Offshore Potential in Equatorial Guinea

In an exclusive interview with the African Energy Chamber, President of OPEC and Equatorial Guinea's Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons, Antonio Oburu Ondo, dives deep into the country's exploration and drilling Strategies.

**OPEC members recently met in Vienna for the 8th OPEC International Seminar. What measures is OPEC currently taking to stabilize the market given recent price increases?**

The global oil market has experienced a relatively volatile few years but OPEC remains committed to contributing towards market stability, both for producers and consumers alike. We have been closely monitoring the market and the associated global dynamics, and our recent seminar in Vienna featured in-depth discussions about production, and maintaining a balance between supply and demand. OPEC will continue to monitor the market while cooperating with our member and non-member countries to address any market imbalances.



**African Energy  
Week 2023**

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE  
**AFRICAN ENERGY CHAMBER**



**Antonio  
Oburu Ondo**

President of OPEC and  
Equatorial Guinea's Minister of  
Mines and Hydrocarbons

**MAKING  
ENERGY  
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African Energy Chamber

**Equatorial Guinea's Gas Mega Hub (GMH) initiative continues to make progress with a Heads of Agreement signed with Marathon Oil Corporation for the second and third phases of the project. What does the timeline look like for the project? Can we expect any milestones to be achieved in 2024 and 2025?**

Phase one of the GMH comprised

the tie-back of the Alen Field to the Punta Europa Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal on Bioko Island. This phase delivered first gas in February 2021, and soon thereafter, the government, alongside its project partners, have been working towards getting phase two onstream. In March this year we signed an agreement with Marathon Oil and Noble Energy for the next two phases of the project and we expect phase two to come online as early as January 2024. This stage involves processing gas from the Alba Field while phase three will facilitate gas processing from Noble Energy's Aseng oil and gas field. Marathon Oil is also currently evaluating two infill drilling opportunities to improve the Alba production performance.

So, we will be starting 2024 with a major milestone and are aiming to reach many more after that. We have recently also established a bilateral trade agreement with Cameroon on

cross-border oil and gas development while other exploration projects continue to make progress. A similar agreement was signed with Nigeria in 2022. These endeavors open up new opportunities for the expansion of the GMH by maximizing feedstock for the terminal.

**With production decreasing due to natural declines in legacy fields, what efforts are being taken by the Ministry to boost output?**

In addition to drilling works being undertaken to improve and maintain production levels at existing fields, the Ministry is making great strides towards accelerating exploration across the country's offshore acreage. Our recent agreement with Cameroon will see the two countries jointly develop oil and gas projects along our maritime borders, including the Yoyo and Yolanda fields, the Etinde gas field and the Camen and Diega fields.

The country's enabling environment for investment and strong record of successful offshore finds have also seen new E&P players join the market. Earlier this year we also signed three production sharing contracts with Panoro Energy and Africa Oil Corporation. These contracts are expected to further open up the upstream market. Additionally, we have several global

energy majors and independents progressing with exploration and are optimistic about these campaigns. The only way to address production declines is to explore, drilling more wells and unlocking the potential of offshore basins.

**Equatorial Guinea has recently inked agreements with regional neighbors Nigeria and Cameroon to expand energy cooperation. How is the government strengthening local content within the natural gas industry and how will these agreements help bolster capacity building on a regional scale?**

Local content has and will always be a top priority for Equatorial Guinea. In our oil and gas sector, local content is enforced through the National Content Regulation and Hydrocarbons Law as well as additional ministerial decrees, individual production sharing contracts and local labor laws. Through clear regulation and regular engagement with both local and international energy companies, we continue to strengthen our local content and drive capacity building and opportunity.

In addition to policy, the government carries out skills and technology transfer through

initiatives and training. We have a number of training and education institutions open and constantly engage our partners about exchange programs and bilateral skills development. Our agreements with neighboring countries fall under these efforts to up-skill and re-skill the workforce. We also believe that regional cooperation will help advance opportunities for oil and gas entrepreneurs. Our partnerships with other West African countries aim to increase trade, commerce and collaboration between Equatorial Guinea and its regional counterparts. These efforts are introducing opportunities for domestic and regional market growth as well as bilateral knowledge sharing.

**African Energy Week 2023 takes place under a mandate to make energy poverty history by 2030. How does Equatorial Guinea plan to leverage its resources to achieve this objective and what messages will you be driving during this year's conference?**

Equatorial Guinea, like many other African countries, believes that in order to make energy poverty history, we need to monetize and maximize all of our natural resources. Our efforts to increase investment and bolster development across the entire

energy value chain has already been instrumental in alleviating energy poverty. Equatorial Guinea has a wealth of natural gas resources and we are making progress to leverage these resources for domestic power generation. The Bioko Turbogas thermal power plant provides reliable power to the population and as the GMH expands, so will opportunities for gas-to-power.

The country is also capitalizing on its renewable energy wealth, and invites investors and project developers to invest in the country's green energy sector. We are also working with other countries in Africa to expand trade and regional connectivity.

This year, I am looking forward to participating in a number of panel discussions, investor summits and ministerial forums, and will drive the message that gas is good for Africa. Equatorial Guinea has made significant progress to monetize both domestic and regional gas but a lot more needs to be done to maximize resources and drive industrialization and economic growth. Gas, as a clean and readily available resource, is the best way for Africa to achieve energy security while facilitating a just energy transition.

*\*Source African Energy Chamber*

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# The African Union at 20

African perspectives on progress,  
challenges and prospects



Edited by Wafula Okumu and Andrews Atta-Asamoah



# South Africa's Energy Ministry Has His Priorities Right; It's Time for the World to Respect Them

By NJ Ayuk\*

**S**outh Africa needs to use its natural resources to address energy poverty and grow its economy, as do countries throughout the continent.

In a televised speech earlier this summer, South Africa's Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, Gwede Mantashe, pushed back strongly against environmental groups' efforts to block oil and gas production in his country.

Even before his speech, Mantashe has been an outspoken advocate for driving oil and gas production in South Africa, where several major discoveries have been made in recent years. Cumulative output for TotalEnergies' Brulpadda and Luiperd natural gas discoveries, when developed, are estimated to be 50,000 barrels per day (bpd) of liquids and 125,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd). These discoveries represent huge opportunities for South Africa to strengthen its economy and build energy security.

But if climate activists were to have their way, South Africa would give up on the idea of oil and gas production. Look at what's happening with Shell Oil: Environmentalists filed legal action last year that blocked UK-based Shell Oil from conducting seismic tests along South Africa's Wild Coast — potentially bringing Shell's hydrocarbon exploration efforts there to a halt.

Mantashe, however, is drawing a line in the sand. Speaking from Johannesburg, he insisted South Africa must balance goals to cut emissions with the need to develop the country's natural resources and increase access to electricity.

These statements were not well received by those who want the country to move away from fossil fuels. But for anyone, of any nationality, who's arguing that South Africa shouldn't produce its oil and gas resources, Mantashe's remarks



Gwede Mantashe, South Africa's Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy.

provide a reality check.

"We can't be only about decarbonization," he said. "We must deal with energy poverty. We must never allow ourselves to be encircled by the developed nations who fund lobbyists to pit our country's developmental needs against their own self-serving protection of the environment. Our country deserves an opportunity to transition at pace and scale determined by its citizens."

I couldn't agree more.

## Mantashe Is Right

The African Energy Chamber (AEC) wholeheartedly endorses Minister Mantashe's stance. South Africa needs to use its natural resources to address energy poverty and grow its economy, as do countries throughout the continent.

As the executive chairman of the AEC, I have warned that a premature transition from fossil fuel production to renewable energy will leave hundreds of millions in Africa quite literally in the dark.

It is wrong for Western environmental lobbies to interfere with Africans' chance to build a better

future with their oil and gas resources — just as the environmentalists' home countries have. Renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and green hydrogen will not be enough to fuel industrialization in Africa's countries. They're not enough to address Africa's massive energy poverty.

South Africa — and the African continent — should have the freedom to use every resource at its disposal to bring reliable energy to its people.

Looking at our continent, energy poverty remains a pressing problem in 2023, particularly for sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Bank's data, electricity deprivation varies widely from country to country, with 10.7% of South Africans and 49.4% of all sub-Saharan Africans without electricity, a total of approximately 600 million people.

The contrast between sub-Saharan Africa and most of the world is so stark that this region can be seen in a nighttime NASA photo as a swath of the southern globe sitting in near-complete darkness.

Energy Poverty Adversely

## Affects Health

While minimizing greenhouse gases will be necessary around the globe to prevent catastrophic climate change, African countries should not be expected to take those measures on the same timetable as wealthy Western nations. In sub-Saharan Africa, far too many people face the more pressing problem of air pollution — air pollution in their own homes — every time they're forced to find alternatives to electricity to fuel their cooking.

The poorest cook and heat with crop waste and animal dung, while those who can afford it use coal. All of these fuels, burnt on open fires or in rudimentary stoves, expel toxic chemicals and smoke, making indoor pollution much worse than outdoor levels found in the world's most polluted cities.

I call attention to this in my new book "A Just Transition: Making Energy Poverty History with an Energy Mix," citing 1.5 to 4 million annual deaths worldwide — most among women and children — from illnesses and accidents caused by cooking with these fuels. Diseases



and injuries traceable to these include burns, pneumonia, COPD, and lung cancer. Children are harmed even before they are born, and stillbirths increase.

Neither kerosene nor wood provides answers. Kerosene fumes are linked to lung cancer, pneumonia, heart disease, and other health problems, and kerosene lamps are a major cause of house fires. Even where wood is available, its use hastens the decline of African forests and substantially contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.

Even worse than indoor air pollution, the World Health Organization has named “unsafe water, hygiene, and sanitation” the largest environmental health risk factor and highest cause of mortality on the African continent. Lack of access to clean water affects some 45% of residents of sub-Saharan Africa. This problem, also, is tied to energy poverty because the region lacks energy-based technologies to purify and distribute water.

Energy shortages even pose a risk for those seeking treatment in a hospital or healthcare facility in sub-Saharan Africa. Only 28% have reliable power, so treatment must sometimes be done without electric-powered lights and modern equipment. Continual climate-controlled storage of blood, medications, and vaccines is impossible.

### Energy Poverty Impacts Economic Growth

Not only is energy poverty a huge public health risk, but it also impedes African countries’ abilities to create better lives for their people.

Economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa slowed to 3.6% in 2022, from 4.1% in 2021. It is projected to slow

to 3.1% in 2023, starkly highlighting the need to raise the region out of energy poverty. True, energy poverty isn’t the only factor at play, but it is a significant one.

Habitat for Humanity makes the connection clear, stating, “Insufficient energy usually translates into the impossibility to develop agriculture and manufacturing, thus keeping the poorest countries trapped in a vicious circle: they cannot afford the energy that can drive them out of poverty.”

Even where electricity is available, it is costly. A recent World Bank article revealed that sub-Saharan African consumers pay up to 20-50 cents per kilowatt-hour against a global average of around 10 cents.

“Most economic activity is impossible without adequate, reliable, and competitively priced modern energy. This is why access to energy is so important in the fight against poverty,” the World Bank stated.

For Africa’s industrial sectors to grow significantly, access to reliable, affordable energy is key.

### Natural Gas Must Be Part of the Solution

As I have said before, the petroleum sector has created more African jobs and revenue than any other industry. It has increased life expectancy, lowered infant and maternal mortality rates, and helped fight malaria.

Natural gas in particular holds promise for extending these improvements to the lives of millions more Africans: Gas-to-power programs can help deliver electricity to more Africans, which would allow them to replace harmful cooking fuels, access clean water, and enjoy the benefits of industrialization and economic growth.

As electrification progresses, solar,

hydrogen, and wind power will be part of the African energy mix. But growing that mix — and building the necessary infrastructure to transmit and store renewable power — will require time and capital. By monetizing natural gas as feedstock for chemical and fertilizer manufacturing, African countries can generate some of the revenue necessary to build that infrastructure — and create more job and entrepreneurial opportunities for their people.

As I’ve stated more than once, combining natural gas and renewables can help Africa transition to a sustainable future with natural gas providing reliable, flexible power that supplements intermittent renewables.

### South Africa Needs to Use Its Natural Gas

Approximately 80% of South Africa’s electricity is produced by burning coal, but with the recent discoveries there, the country has massive natural gas potential.

This potential must not be thwarted by environmental groups blocking oil and gas exploration and production, as Minister Mantashe said so eloquently in his speech. The lawsuits against Shell must not set a precedent that impacts the development of the Brulpadda and Luiperd discoveries.

The sound and fury coming from Greenpeace and other anti-fossil fuel groups who object to the use of 3-D seismic studies (sound waves) to quickly locate and map oil and gas reserves are misguided. Claiming harm to marine life, environmentalists cited a beached whale and dead fish that appeared on shore during a seismic study. Shell carried out before the ordered

shutdown. However, as I’ve written, none of the considerable research into the impact of seismic surveys on marine life, including fish and marine mammals, has indicated any direct physical injury or biologically significant negative impacts.

Mantashe is right to stand up for ongoing hydrocarbon exploration and production in his country. Natural gas can provide reliable, clean energy for South Africa, while liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports generate income to help finance the country’s transition toward renewables.

South Africa has marked out a path forward in its Integrated Resource Plan, calling for technology generating 6,000 megawatts (MW) from combined-cycle gas turbines, including 3,000 MW from LNG-to-power, 726 MW from gas-to-power, and 1,500 MW from non-specified gas. This plan can make a world of difference to many South Africans’ quality of life.

With this in mind, the Western schedule for transitioning to renewables cannot be South Africa’s schedule, nor can it be the continent’s schedule.

I urge the international community, especially climate activists, to respect Mantashe’s words: Environmental concerns must be balanced with the development of South Africa’s hydrocarbon resources. Until energy poverty is resolved, reducing emissions cannot be any African country’s sole priority.

The 2023 theme for the AEC’s 2023 African Energy Week sums it up: “The African Energy Renaissance: Prioritizing Energy Poverty, People, the Planet, and Free Markets.”

\*NJ Ayuk is Executive Chairman of the African Energy Chamber

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# 24th World Petroleum Congress To Harp On Africa's Future Energy Landscape

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

**B**UEA, August 10, 2023 – The World Petroleum Congress, the premier oil and gas conference in the world will from September 17 to 21, 2023, host the most senior government and industry leaders in the global energy industry aimed at shaping the future of Africa's energy landscape. The program for the 2023 event in Calgary is being managed by WPC Canada, which is the Canadian National Committee of the World Petroleum Council (WPC) organization composed of Canadian energy professionals.

To cover society's growing need for basic access to energy, better and healthier living and increased mobility, innovation is key. With the industry's potential to build upon its leadership, creativity, technology and expertise, the oil and gas sector can help develop innovative solutions which adapt to social diversity and provide scalable, customisable and sustainable energy for the world.

"This event is not just another conference; it is a strategic program that showcases the African Petroleum Producers Organization's global influence and commitment to sustainable energy solutions," a communique from Africa Energy Futures stated.

"Join us on Sunday, September 17th at 8:00 AM at the iconic Stampede Park, where industry leaders, visionaries, and policymakers will gather to discuss

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**The World Petroleum Congress is the premier oil and gas conference in the world.**

Africa's energy potential. Be prepared to engage in captivating storytelling sessions that will unveil the untapped opportunities and challenges faced by the continent."

The 24th World Petroleum Congress in Calgary will welcome an estimated 15,000 visitors, delegates, exhibitors and media from around the world and is centred on the theme: «Energy Transition – the Path to Net Zero.»

Africa Energy Futures added: "This is your chance to be part of a movement that is shaping the energy landscape of Africa. Don't miss out on this unique opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals, exchange ideas, and forge partnerships that will drive Africa's energy future."

According to Rystad Energy - «Energy Addition for Africa» - Sub-Saharan Africa holds 140 billion barrels of oil equivalent, of which only one-third is developed and two-thirds of undeveloped resources are natural gas. New investment in oil and gas exploration and production is necessary, not only to maximize recent discoveries along Africa's 40,000-km coastline but also to meet rising energy demand globally and stabilize price hikes.

With over 600 million without access to electricity and over 900 million without access to clean cooking solutions, Africa cannot afford to leave its oil and gas in the ground, Ayuk says. When faced with an energy crisis, Europe has once again turned to coal, and yet

Africa continues to be told to abandon its oil and gas, Ayuk argues.

Many African countries are also unhappy that developed countries have exploited their gas and are now seeking new sources because of soaring prices and supply constraints following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Africa has major gas reserves in countries including Nigeria, Mozambique and Senegal but many are still largely unexploited.

## About the World Petroleum Congress

The World Petroleum Congress, otherwise known as the "Olympics" of the petroleum industry gathers industry and government leaders from across the world to address all aspects of the industry from technological advances in upstream, midstream, and downstream operations to the role of natural gas and renewables, management of the industry and its social, economic, and environmental impact.

The World Petroleum Congress is led by the World Petroleum Council which is an organization of nearly 65 member countries from around the world. Including both OPEC and Non-OPEC countries with the representation of National Oil Companies (NOCs) as well as International Oil Companies (IOCs). Headquartered in London, since 1933, the World Petroleum Council represents over 96% of global oil and gas production and consumption.

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**The 24th World Petroleum Congress in Calgary will welcome an estimated 15,000 visitors, delegates, exhibitors and media from around the world.**



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# South Sudan: Trinity Group Chairman Hails UN's Financial Support to Youths, Women-Led Enterprises

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

The Founder and Chairman of Trinity Group, Akol Ayii has applauded the United Nations, UN Women, and United Nations Development Programme-UNDP, Africa Development Bank and Stanbic Bank's move to provide financial services to women and youth-led enterprises from seven states in South Sudan.

Speaking about the launch of the UNDP's Youth Enterprise Development Capacity Building Project YEDCB and UN Women's Private Sector Development in Fragile Context, PSDFC Financing Facility on August 01, Akol Ayii expressed satisfaction with an initiative that looks forward to assisting 2.2 million food-insecure individuals and enabling them to start or expand their enterprises.

"I am thrilled about this new partnership where M-gurush are the implementing partners of an initiative aimed to address acute food insecurity and malnutrition in South Sudan. Together with The African Development Bank, in collaboration with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women the partnership will provide crucial financial support to youth and women entrepreneurs in South Sudan," Akol Ayii said. "Creating opportunities and empowering our women and youth is critical to sustain peace and stability of our nation. Additionally, technical support will be provided to formalize their businesses, develop business plans, and ensure long-term sustainability. This speaks to our vision and philosophy as Trinity Group where we aim to be an impactful business through all our subsidiaries," Akol enthused.

Youth unemployment in South Sudan is both a cause and a consequence of fragility. It is a source of political instability and



*Akol Ayii expresses satisfaction with the initiative that looks forward to assisting 2.2 million food-insecure individuals and enabling them to start or expand their enterprises.*

social upheavals. With the growing number of returnees, the government is challenged to ensure that more South Sudanese are absorbed into the labour market. Reintegrating South Sudan's 1.6 million internally displaced, 2.3 million refugees, and members of armed groups into the labor market is a major challenge. The government is challenged to ensure that more South Sudanese are absorbed into the labour market. Experience has shown that in areas where youth are engaged in

productive undertakings, such areas do not experience widespread conflict. Therefore, the development of micro and small enterprises (MSEs) and job creation through this project will not only address youth employment but it will also contribute to peace building. To sustain peace and development in South Sudan, widening the opportunities for youth who account for 72% of the population, and engaging them through entrepreneurial skills enhancement and economic empowerment are

essential. With micro and small enterprises (MSEs) accounting for about 92% of total businesses in the country, it serves as one of the few avenues for youth to have jobs and income.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women with support from the African Development Bank and in partnership with Stanbic Bank and mGurush, along with leadership and oversight from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare are providing the financing facility components of UNDP's Youth Enterprise Development Capacity Building Project (YEDCB) and UN Women's Private Sector Development in Fragile Context (PSDFC) project.

According to a press statement shared with PAV, "The financing component of both UNDP's and UN Women's projects provides financial services to women and youth-led enterprises from seven states in South Sudan. Women and youth who meet the loan requirements and who are organized in Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), or establish micro and small enterprises (MSEs), or form a business cooperative will receive start-up capital in the form of interest-free loans ranging between \$2,000 USD and \$10,000 USD from the revolving fund currently hosted with Stanbic Bank," the release noted.

According to UNDP, the money will help them to start an enterprise, grow and add value to an existing business, and/or link them to wider markets adding that the VSLAs, MSEs, and Cooperatives will also be provided with technical support to formalize their business



*Creating opportunities and empowering our women and youth is critical to sustain peace and stability of our nation, says Akol Ayii.*



*The project has the backing of the UNDP, UN Women with support from the AfDB and in partnership with Stanbic Bank and mGurush, along with leadership and oversight from several ministries.*

venture, to develop their business plans, and to execute a sustainable business.

"With funding from the African Development Bank (AfDB) along with leadership and oversight from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Gender, Child, and Social Welfare, UN Women and UNDP are committed to ensuring that youth who have the potential to grow as entrepreneurs are self-employed and/or create employment for others through their sustainable businesses," the release noted.

The release added, at the end of the project, the revolving fund will be invested in the Youth Enterprise Development Fund, which will be established by the Government of South Sudan and administered by the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

"Stanbic Bank, UNDP, and UN Women hosted the "YEDCB and PSDFC Financing Facility Launch" on August 1, 2023 at the Multi-service Training Centre (MTC) in Juba. The event highlighted the contribution of the private sector partnership and the collaborative efforts being made by development agencies and the private sector to improve lives of youth and women entrepreneurs in South Sudan through the financing facility. Stanbic Bank is the current provider of the financing facility that provides the interest free loans to MSEs, VSLAs, and Agricultural Cooperatives.

mGurush will deliver the loans to the recipients and receive loan payments through their mobile money transfer service," the release added.

"Stanbic Bank's involvement in UNDP's and UN Women's economic empowerment projects underscores our strategic commitment to investing in the untapped potential of youth and women. By facilitating access to resources such as work opportunities, leadership roles, financial services, credit, technologies, and markets, we are not only empowering these individuals but also fuelling the expansion of their businesses. This, in turn, catalyses sustained economic growth and development in South Sudan. Our investment in financial inclusion and economic empowerment aligns seamlessly with Stanbic Bank's ethos which is 'It Can Be'. This creed stands for the unwavering belief in the realm of possibilities and the actualization of dreams and aspirations of our partners, clients, and our wider communities," said Lorna Mwangi, Head, Corporate Investment Banking, Stanbic Bank Ltd, South Sudan during her opening remarks.

"The route out of poverty is through financial inclusion and our product allows citizens to better manage their existing financial resources. Greater financial inclusion also has indirect impact on promoting shared economic growth (SDG 8), innovation and sustainable industrialization

(SDG 9), and equitable and peaceful societies (SDG 10 and 16). mGurush aims to bridge the financial gap by empowering women and youth through availing access to financial services in a convenient, affordable and secure way. We offer a customer-oriented user-friendly interface that is easy to understand and operate real-time and instant transactions at an affordable rate. Our work takes a multi-dimensional approach to financial inclusion and provides a framework on how to incorporate and link financial literacy to digital literacy" said Hon. Mou Ambrose Thiik, Chief Operating Officer, mGurush.

Dr. Rukaya Mohammed Deputy Country Representative of UN WOMEN spoke about the significance of these projects to the work of UN WOMEN in South Sudan. "Economic empowerment of women is fundamental for growth, sustainable development, durable peace building, and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Expanding women's ownership and control also has benefits for their families, communities, and the country. UN Women's Private Sector Development in Fragile Context (PSDFC) project in Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal supports the establishment of and growth of 300 micro and small enterprises (MSEs) through business development services, technical

training, links to markets, and facilitating access to financing. The partnership with Stanbic Bank will ensure women and youth have access to financing, thus allowing them to diversify and sustain their MSEs."

Dr. Samuel Doe, Resident Representative of UNDP in South Sudan also stressed the importance of such projects for South Sudan, "Youth have tremendous potential to grow as entrepreneurs and create employment for others through their sustainable businesses. UNDP's Youth Enterprise Development Capacity Building Project (YEDCB) aims to enhance employability and create jobs for more than 3,000 youth, half of whom are young women aged 18-35 years in five states. Working together with private sector financing facilities, such as those currently provided by Stanbic Bank, we are strengthening the private sector, building entrepreneurship skills, and improving the enabling environment. UNDP is committed to fostering economic recovery and peace building through private sector development and youth economic empowerment."

A small marketplace featuring a selection of MSEs showcased a small selection of products and services provided the beneficiaries. The local implementing partners, such as SPEDP (Support for Peace and Education Development Program), VOSDO (Vocational



Skills Development Organization), and SAADO (Smile Again Africa Development Organization) who work directly with the MSEs to provide training and business development support were also on hand and interacted with donors, VIPs, and invited guests. Representatives from VSLAs, from MSEs, and from cooperatives also spoke about the impact the financing facility loans has on their efforts to improve their ability to generate income.

June Ojukwu Joseph from the Pure Organic South Sudan Honey was on hand to receive her loan and spoke on behalf of the cooperatives and women entrepreneurs.

"This opportunity to be part of this program will ensure that the women working at Pure Organic South Sudan can support their families, and more than that, it encourages us to build our business so that we can contribute to the development of South Sudan."



*At the end of the project, the revolving fund will be invested in the Youth Enterprise Development Fund, which will be established by the Government of South Sudan.*

## Farmers decry low efforts to curb vanilla price volatility

By Adonis Byemelwa

Tanzania's Kagera farmers have asked the government to stabilize the fluctuating vanilla price of the high-value export crop amid concern about the low demand, delayed harvests, and a few buyers' failure to use standard measurements, potentially impacting their livelihoods alongside financial stability.

Nothing has gone as planned: the alternative crop to coffee for most farmers in Kagera Region was Vanilla, whose market had recently become unstable, with over 300 tonnes of unsold pods piling up in growers' fields and farmers' warehouses.

A Kimbugu village farmer, Muleba District, Brighton Mtafungwa, says the plummeting vanilla price has affected his family income as he remorse the decision to abandon coffee farms at the expense of the value export crop.

'By this time many traders would be coming around to buy vanilla, but we are not seeing them. A kg used to sell at Shs40,000, but this time it costs as low as Shs3,000 because



Minister of Agriculture Hussein Bashe.

many farmers have a lot of vanilla in their gardens,' says Mr. Mtafungwa. Speaking to vanilla farmers recently, Acting Kagera Regional

Administrative Officer, Isaya Tendega, called on companies to come in huge numbers and buy vanilla at competitive prices,

directing agricultural departments to ensure reliable major vanilla farmers' statistics are input place. "I direct all district agricultural

and cooperative officers from across the eight councils in the region to have vanilla farmers registered to the Agricultural Marketing and Cooperative Societies (AMCOS)," said Mr. Tendega.

Currently, vanilla sells between Sh3,000 to 15,000kg depending on the nature of the market. The prices have gone down from Sh30,000kg in 2021, thanks to daring farmers for embarking on optimum productivity.

The government had announced a series of measures to support the agriculture sector and ensure fair pricing for food products.

Minister of Agriculture Hussein Bashe, spoke about the government's plans while discussing the visit of the Tanzanian Union President to Davos and Senegal in January.

"The government will not remove the price controls on agricultural products, instead focusing on improving the profitability of the farming process," he said.

As a backbone of the economy, employing over 75percent Tanzanians, the agricultural sector's budget has been raised from Sh294 billion to Sh954 billion so that Tanzania can produce enough food and seek markets.

Outlining other priority areas, Mr. Bashe said, "Funds have also been allocated to strengthen agricultural research, crop storage infrastructure, seed production, enhanced access to crop markets and subsidies and execution of the Build Better Tomorrow (BBT) programme."

Vanilla farmers had a reason to smile following assurance that the government was working out modalities to ensure they are supplied with quality seeds for increased productivity.

The minister had also planned to mobilize local farmers to go for quality and best seeds, including importing some from Uganda.

The growing clean-label trend and consumer demand for all-natural foods and drinks have boosted the demand for traditional vanilla beans. The cost has increased greatly and supply depends on availability, price, and quality.



*The alternative crop to coffee for most farmers in Kagera Region is Vanilla. Photo courtesy.*

A Katoke village vanilla farmer in Muleba District, Loyce Tegamaisho, told the author of this think piece that, the falling prices of the produce had shuttered her dreams completely, explaining that in 2018 she sold a kilogram of vanilla at Sh40,000 and currently she struggles to fetch customers at Sh5,000kg but to no avail.

I am really discouraged. In the recent past vanilla was a real boon to our family income. Nowadays, I don't even take the trouble to do cross-pollination. The business is very unprofitable," she says.

Currently, less than 1 percent of vanilla is derived from actual vanilla bean production, according to the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries, internationally known by its Dutch acronym (CBI).

Simply put, the demand for natural vanilla cannot be met by the small amount of cultivated vanilla beans globally.

Since the 19th century, vanilla has been grown and harvested in tropical areas such as Madagascar, Mexico, Indonesia, and Tahiti, the highest and

largest island in French Polynesia lying close to Mo'orea island.

Today, the majority of natural vanilla comes from smallholder farms in Madagascar, but Indonesia has also become a large supplier. And while its popularity has certainly not declined over the centuries, availability has long been an issue.

Demand quickly exceeded the supply from farms, resulting in chemists turning to the production of synthetic alternatives as early as the 1900s.

Most European trade is concentrated in France, Germany, and the Netherlands. The continuing growth is based on the demand for natural ingredients, clean labels, traceability, and sustainability certifications (For example, organic, Fairtrade). Demand exceeds the current supply, leaving room for companies to enter the market.

"Europe is a very important destination for vanilla. France, Germany, and the Netherlands together account for about 32 percent of global imports (and 75 percent of all European import volumes), compared to 42 percent for the entire

USA," says a statement from the CBI data.

European vanilla imports from developing countries increased from 1,186 tonnes in 2017 to 1,470 tonnes in 2021, according to the CBI statistics.

Worth noting is that since 2020, no import statistics are included for the United Kingdom. In 2021, €356 million worth of vanilla was imported into Europe. This value has decreased since 2018. This is most likely the result of the relatively high prices in 2017 and 2018 due to the failed harvest in Madagascar.

The CBI data put it that, vanilla is a leading flavour used worldwide. The vanilla market is expected to grow in the years ahead, driven by the ice cream, chocolate products, drinks, and bakery industries.

It is a leading flavour used worldwide. The vanilla market is expected to grow in the years ahead, driven by the ice-cream products, drinks, and bakery industries.

In Kagera, there has been a trend of smallholders abandoning traditional cash crops such as coffee in recent decades due to various factors such as



fluctuations in global prices, changes in market demand, and heightened competition from other producing regions.

Additionally, smallholders struggle to access credit, inputs, and technology to enhance their production and competitiveness in the global market.

However, growers have no reason to boast of agribusiness as the backbone of their economy due to a myriad of challenges shattering their set dreams.

"It is like farmers have dug their own graves, but no one has any interest in letting the market plummet. When prices are too low, we abandon our farms and, a few years later, the drop in production would be paid for by a new surge in prices. I actually don't see any light at the end of the tunnel. Vanilla is no longer backing my prosperity," says Ephraim Katunzi, a farmer based in Kimbugu Village, Muleba District.

However, agribusiness experts from Sokoine University of Agriculture say, vanilla demand has declined, especially since food companies have decided to source more synthetic vanillin to avoid prices deemed exorbitant.

Other producers such as Papua New Guinea and Uganda have also taken advantage of this to strengthen their position.

"The price control policy launched at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic has not only brought down the country's most prosperous region, but it has also deepened the financial and monetary imbalances of Tanzania's economy, by drying up one of the main sources of foreign currency," said Sokoine University agribusiness Prof. Damian Gabagambi in one of his academic

papers.

To grapple with the unemployment challenge, most graduates had opted for farming against white collar jobs, whose chances look too slim to absorb the surging number of learned citizenry, this is why the fall in prices of vanilla hits the youth to a large extent.

Vanilla production in East Africa originally started and focused around the Lake Victoria basin and the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains in the Albertine Rift Valley.

Uganda is the leading vanilla-producing country in the SSA region. Vanilla cultivation was introduced as a cash crop in the mid-1990s in the Kagera Region.

Thus, smallholders are faced with an increased need to diversify their production to compete in the global market. For example, smallholders from Tanzania started to plant vanilla (*planifolia*) as their new cash crop to improve their livelihoods and get themselves out of poverty around two decades ago.

In 1997, one farmers' organization named Maendeleo Ya Wakulima (Mayawa) brought vanilla cuttings from Uganda and started to promote crop cultivation in the Kagera Region.

The past three decades have seen a rise in vanilla cultivation among smallholders in Tanzania, beginning in Kagera in the northwest and spreading to the rest of the country.

Notwithstanding Tanzania's vanilla production being on a very small scale from a global perspective, more than 6,000 farmers in Kagera Region have been engaged in the same crop.

Due to its high price compared with other traditional cash crops like coffee, the local government of Kagera Region continues to encourage and motivate more smallholders to grow

vanilla.

Despite the falling prices in Kagera Region, vanilla cultivation is not an easy business as well because it requires technical skills, financial investment, time, and labor resources from smallholders from the beginning to the end.

A Kashasha Village farmer in Misenyi District, France Tibe'sigwa, says it is a difficult and time-consuming process to cultivate vanilla from planting, harvesting, and curing with manual pollination—all to see a farmer remaining on receiving end over volatility.

"Even though there are some bees that can do cross-pollination for vanilla in South and Central America, such bees do not exist in Tanzania. Moreover, manual pollination is needed each day during the whole flowering period, which lasts three to five months," says Mr. Tibe'sigwa.

He explains that hand pollination is a daily task for a period of three months—the reason that makes vanilla a more labor-intensive crop, and if plantation maintenance is neglected, yields suffer.

Even though it is not sustainable, vanilla still is a profitable alternative cash crop for smallholder farmers.

If price fluctuations had been grappled with, cultivating vanilla would have multiple benefits, from education, living conditions, houses, gender equality, and other businesses.

The produce contributes to the farmers' livelihoods in general. Besides, the improvement potential for smallholder farmers' income is huge from vanilla cultivation compared to other seasonal crops.

There is a huge variation in green vanilla beans' production from year to year and from farmer to farmer. The average production is almost 50

percent lower than the international average production.

With his maiden Agricultural plan, Building Better Tomorrow (BBT), Tanzania's minister of Agriculture, Hussein Bashe, should come up with a raft of measures that will see Vanilla price volatility nipped in the bud.

Vanilla production, export and earnings trends in Tanzania show that between 2006 and 2015, farmers earned close to Sh2 billion from exports, with Mayawa, a cooperative union dealing in the crop exporting 14.3 tonnes of cured vanilla.

In 2007, 32.1 tonnes were exported. This was followed by another export of 47.1 tonnes in 2008. Furthermore, 75.6 tonnes were exported attracting Sh244.6 million in 2009, while in 2010 over 102 tonnes were exported providing farmers with Sh319 million.

Mayawa exported 70.8 tonnes in 2011 generating Sh229.4 million as 35.8 tonnes were sold in 2012 worth Sh147.9 million. In 2013 and 2014 respectively; 39.2 tonnes and 27 tonnes were exported generating Sh215.4 million and Sh213.5 million each season. In 2015, 33.9 tonnes of cured vanilla were exported bringing in Sh406.8 million

Instead of relying on selling raw vanilla, it is time farmers under the tutelage of the agricultural ministry devised value chains, which will enhance setting up an industry whose raw materials depend on vanilla. This can be easily done if there are concerted efforts and political will.

Adonis Byemelwa is a Master in International Relations Graduate, teacher, author, and columnist and was formerly a sub-editor with Tanzania's English Newspaper, The Citizen. Hyperlink, [adonisbyeme@yahoo.com](mailto:adonisbyeme@yahoo.com). +2555884436.

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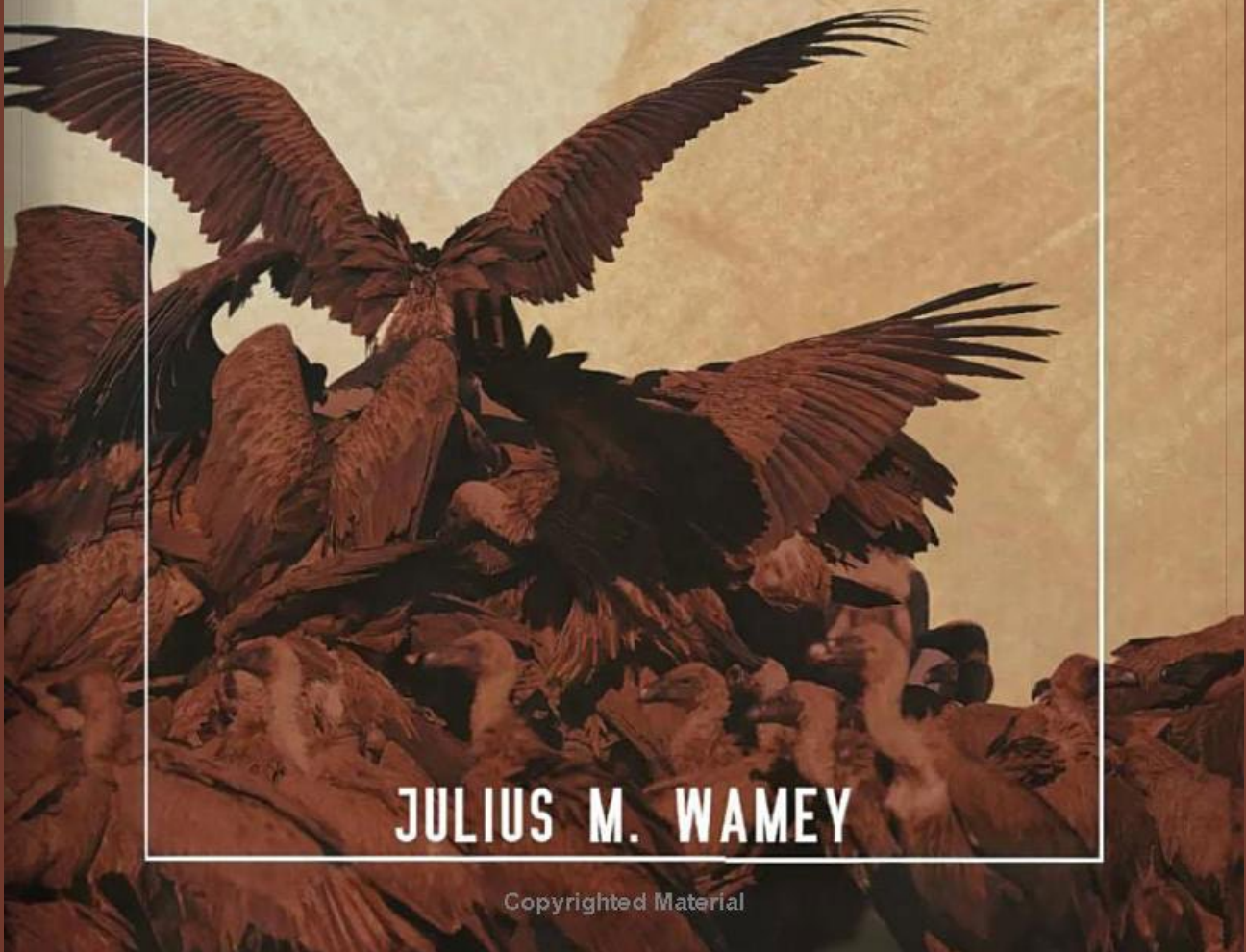
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A NOVEL OF CAMEROON LIFE

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# Africa Could Become A Global Supply Chain Destination- Report

By Jean-Pierre Afadhali

Africa can become a prominent manufacturing destination for tech-intensive industries and a key link in global supply chains by tapping into its abundant resources coupled with growing consumer market, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development said in its Economic Development (UNCTAD) in Africa Report 2023 launched today in Nairobi, Kenya.

African economies can play a major role in global supply chains by harnessing their vast resources of materials needed by high-technology sectors and their own growing consumer markets, revealed the report published by UNCTAD, the UN trade and development body.

Supply chains encompass the systems and resources needed to develop, produce and transport goods and services from suppliers to customers.

«This is Africa's moment to bolster its position in global supply chains as diversification efforts continue. It's also an opportunity for the continent to strengthen its emerging industries, foster economic growth and create jobs for millions of its people,» UNCTAD Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan said.

According to UNCTAD, Africa's abundance of critical minerals and metals, including aluminum, cobalt, copper, lithium and manganese, vital components in technology-intensive industries, positions the continent as an attractive destination for manufacturing, as recent upheavals caused by trade turbulence, geopolitical events and economic uncertainty compel manufacturers to diversify their production locations.

Africa also offers advantages such as shorter and simpler access to primary inputs, a younger, technology-aware, and adaptable labour force and a burgeoning middle class, known for its growing demand for more sophisticated goods and services, stated UNCTAD in a press release.

Kenya was cited as one tech-savvy countries in Africa with rising digital



UNCTAD press conference to launch Africa Economic Development report 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya. Photo credit Jean-Pierre Afadhali, PA

innovations that contribute to the country's economic growth and global economy.

According to Paul Akiwumi, the director of UNCTAD's division for Africa, least developed countries and special programmes, the continent hosts more than 600 incubators that support businesses and innovations.

Strengthening African supply chains will boost region's growth

The report highlights that creating an environment conducive to technology-intensive industries would help raise wages on the continent, currently set at a minimum of \$220 per month according to the UN trade and development body, compared to an average of \$668 in the Americas.

«Deeper integration into global supply chains would also diversify African economies, boosting their resilience to future shocks,» noted the report authors in a press release.

The 2023 report states that expanding energy supply chains into Africa is also an opportunity to accelerate climate action. The continent's vast renewable energy potential, particularly in solar power, can help reduce production costs and decrease reliance on fossil fuel-based energy sources.

Africa needs more investment in renewable energy to help bridge the significant investment gap and tackle other obstacles to the manufacturing

of solar panels on the continent. However, only about 2% of global investments in renewable energy go to Africa, said the report. The growth of investment in renewable energy, as shown by UNCTAD, could promote the manufacturing of solar panels on the continent. Kenya is set to host the inaugural Africa climate Change Summit in September, clean energies investment is on the agenda.

The report notes in 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was the largest producer of copper in Africa, at 1.8 million metric tons – and beyond exploration and extraction, the country is a potential destination for refining metal products for the electric vehicles industry.

Unlock Africa's supply chain opportunities: Invest in infrastructure, technology and financing

The report advocates for significant investment in infrastructure to bolster Africa's position as a supply chain destination.

«Seventeen African countries, including Angola, Botswana, Ghana and South Africa, have already implemented local content regulations to support the growth of local supply chains, foster technology transfer, create jobs and add value within their borders, stated UNCTAD in a news release about the economic development report.

Additionally, the report suggests

African countries to secure better mining contracts and exploration licenses for metals used in high-tech products and supply chains. «This would strengthen domestic industries, enabling local firms to design, procure, manufacture and supply the necessary components.»

The adoption of innovative digital technologies is also critical to optimizing supply chain processes. UNCTAD commends Kenya for notable progress in this realm, with rising rates of digital skills adoption in Africa.

UNCTAD urges governments to create sound policies, foster an enabling regulatory environment and scale up programmes to promote the widespread adoption of these technologies.

The UN trade and development body also reiterates its call for better financing solutions to offer African countries and businesses affordable capital and liquidity to invest in strengthening their supply chains.

According to the Secretary General of UNCTAD, African countries borrow four times higher than United States while its cost of borrowing is eight times higher than Europe.

UNCTAD also underlines the need for debt relief to offer African countries fiscal space to invest in strengthening their supply chains.

A key challenge cited during the report launch that causes Africa's difficulties in accessing finance is the perception as rating agencies portray image that is not accurate.

International ratings agencies don't help [Africa], said the Secretary General, UNCTAD.

Meanwhile, the study suggests that the continent can mobilize more funds by removing barriers to supply chain finance, including regulatory challenges, high-risk perception, and insufficient credit information.

According to the report, the value of the African supply chain finance market rose by 40% between 2021 and 2022, reaching \$41 billion. But this is not enough, said UNCTAD.



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