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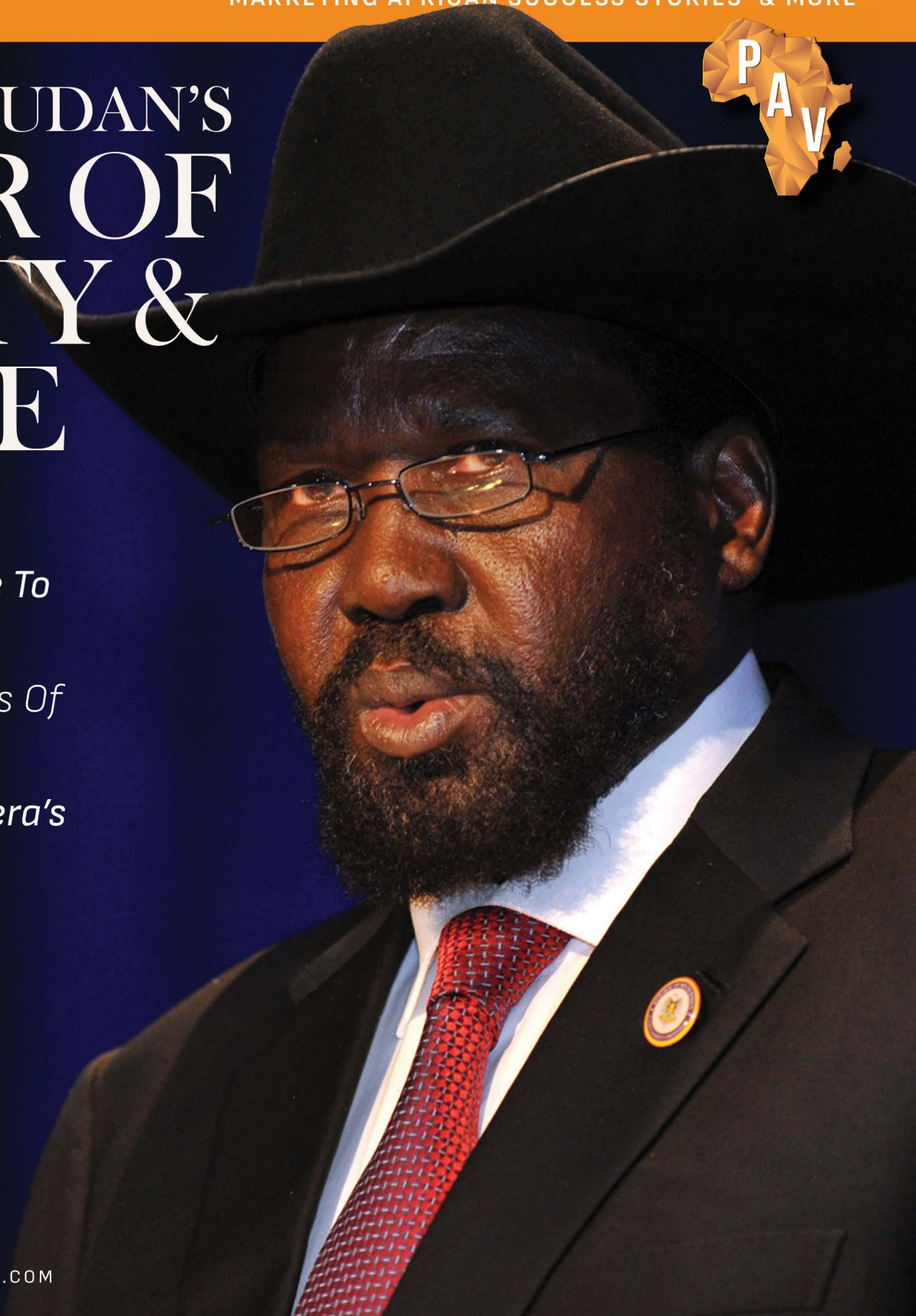
Gabon: 100 Days Of
Oligui Nguema

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A Salute To Mister George

By Ajong Mbapndah L

As a footballer, George Opong Weah left an indelible mark and is a legend by every metric you can use. From Young Survivors, to Bong Range United, Mighty Barrolle, and Invincible Eleven in his native Liberia, Weah's early years were challenging but full of promise. He later plied his trade with Cameroon giants Tonnerre of Yaoundé, before excelling with Monaco in France and joining the club of legends with epic performances in the colors of French giants Paris Saint Germain and Italian powerhouse Milan AC. Till date, he remains the lone African player to have won the prestigious France Football Ballon D'or.

In the dark and sordid civil war Era, there was a point when George Weah was literally the source of smile and hope on the faces of many Liberians. With his popularity and patriotic zeal, it was understandable when Weah started nursing Presidential ambitions. Faced with the incredible odds and minefields typical in the political arena, the competitive sportsman that Weah is learned the hard way. When his educational level and qualifications were questioned, he went back to school to bolster his academic qualifications. When labeled as too ambitious for angling for the Presidency in his first foray into politics, he went in for lower office for the much-needed apprenticeship. When he lost in successive Presidential elections, he never gave up and kept trying until 2018, when Liberians elected him as President. Five years later, the same Liberians who gave him confidence did not deem him worthy of confidence to continue for another term. Yet in defeat, it is the sportsmanship and sense of fair play with which George Weah took his defeat that may define his political legacy.

Politically speaking, it has been a checkered year for Africa, a military coup in Niger, flawed elections in Gabon that led to coup to dislodge the Bongo dynasty. In Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe, it was the all too familiar refrain of the opposition crying foul and labeling elections as rigged. That Liberia successful organized elections and the opposition candidate won is a feat that only happens on very rare occasions in Africa. That the incumbent



Ajong Mbapndah L, Managing Editor

publicly conceded defeat and rallied all to put country first is a major source of hope, not just for Liberia, but for Africa as a whole.

Shortly after the elections, outgoing President Weah urged his team to collaborate with the incoming administration for an orderly transition. He followed the call with a meeting with President elect Boakai. With the fragmented nature of African politics fraught with chaotic if not acrimonious successions, Weah is making sure that he leaves his mark in politics, just like he did in the world of football.

For all the sins that African leaders may commit in power, for all the gapping shortcomings, and litany of unfulfilled promises, there is nothing that makes Africans quick to forgive as leaving power or an orderly transition. It therefore may not be surprising down the line to see that Weah may have done more to bolster his legacy and leave an indelible bowing out with grace than rigging to stay in power or using force to truncate the democratic process and keep himself in power.

From the accomplished footballer that he was, Weah joins the club with limited membership of African statesmen...a club where you find people like Joachim Chissano of Mozambique, Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma of South Africa, Ian Khama of Botswana, Peter Mutharika and Joyce Banda of Malawi, John Mahama of Ghana and a few others who bowed out with grace.

In a continent where some leaders hold the record for longevity in power, George Weah is sending the message that issues of power should

not be a question of life and death. There should not be about a leader prioritizing his political ambition over the collective interest of the people and the survival of the country.

Relatively young, Weah will discover that post presidential life may not be so gloomy after all. The options are still plenty for him. He may decide to lie low, go back to the drawing board and prepare for a political come back in future elections. He may decide to leverage the experience garnered in his one presidential term with his global image in sports for development in Liberia and Africa. He may write a book on his journey from the dusty football pitches in Liberia, to the highest office in the land. Who knows, it may inspire others. He may join the West African Elders Forum cobbled by former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan to continue playing a leadership role in shaping the destiny of Africans.

It is by respecting the will of the people the way Weah did that Africa will spare itself the spectre of coups gaining currency on the continent. Like the late US President John Kennedy said, those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable. By dabbling in the complex equations of changing constitutional term limits Alpha Conde damaged his political legacy and gave the military a pretext to boot him out. Thanks to real and perceived opinions that he was trying to change constitutional term limits, Macky Sall's legacy may have a dent. If Cameroon is a volcano waiting to explode, history will fault President Biya for over staying his welcome in power.

The challenges of the times, the global stakes, the potentials, and ambitious nature of today's visionary generation of young Africans call for a different kind of political leadership. From the energy sector, to sports, trade, cross border travel, agriculture and more, Africans are increasingly ready to embrace a new dawn. A dawn that makes them masters of their own destiny, a dawn that gives them a greater say on global decisions affecting their continent. We see this in the energy sector with the African Energy Chamber organized African Energy Week leading the charge in not only amplifying the problems, but articulating succinct solutions. We see

this in the IATF hosted by Afreximbank to promote continental trade. The examples of a continent on the move are legion.

With \$6.2 trillion worth of natural resources, 65 percent of the world's uncultivated arable land, and a vibrant youth population, Africa has no excuse to be poor, African Development Bank Group President Dr Akinwumi Adesina said recently in Lagos, where he delivered a lecture to mark the 40th anniversary of The Guardian, Nigeria's foremost independent newspaper. According to Adesina, Africa should not be where it is today and urged its resource-rich nations to strengthen good governance, transparency, accountability, and sound management policies to turn things around. He said the continent must look inward urgently to solve its many challenges and urged citizens to hold governments accountable for poverty.

As challenging as the times are, there is every reason to remain hopeful for the future of the continent. In the November issue of PAV Magazine, we used the tale of resilience and heroic of Francis Ngannou to harp on the spirit that young Africans must continue to emulate. The lessons and message from Liberia are harbingers of more hope.

Building on this spirit of hope to end the year is the selection of South Sudan and President Salva Kiir to serve as the new leader of the East African Community. It may only be a rotary Presidency, but for the youngest country in the world, one that has faced incredible odds since its independence in 2011, the sense of pride in Juba was totally understandable. The cover story of the end of year issue, is dedicated to developments in South Sudan with a mix of challenges, progress, and prospects.

Complementing the issue are a look into the first one hundred days of General Oligui Nguema, the election of President Boakai in Liberia, the travails of President Chakwera in Malawi, the mega deals of President Joao Lourenco during his visit to Washington, developments in the oil and gas, a preview of the upcoming African Nations Cup, and more. Happy Reading, Merry Christmas, and wishes from PAV to you for a most prosperous New Year 2024 in advance.



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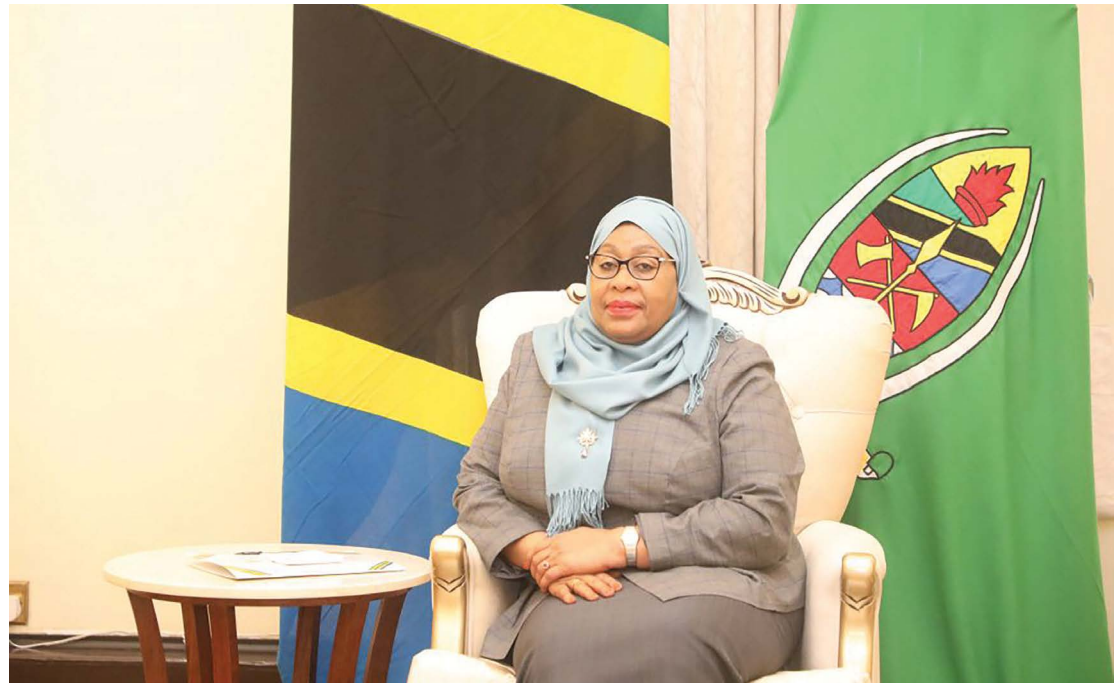
Tanzania: Samia Carves Her Niche

By Adonis Byemelwa

A few years into a Presidency that many did not anticipate nor gave it much of a future when it started, Samia Suluhu Hassan has continued defying the odds with a leadership style and volume of achievements that make many envious in the male dominated club of continental leaders.

In her maiden address to Parliament on 22nd April 2021, President Samia Suluhu Hassan said the following: "This is the first time in the history of our country that we have a female President. For that reason, I know that some people believe that I will not be able to shoulder the heavy Presidential duties and responsibilities.

"I want to assure such doubting people, that the almighty God did not create 'weaker minds for females and stronger minds for males. That is not the case at all, since all human beings are born equal. It depends much on the person's upbringing and the environment in which he or she was brought up. I want to assure everyone that I was brought up under proper care and attention; and that I have



Tanzania's Head of State Samia Suluhu Hassan the lone African female President stands in a league of her own with a refreshing leadership style .Photo courtesy.

accumulated sufficient experience in matters relating to governance".

President Samia Suluhu Hassan's 4Rs philosophy, which includes Reconciliation, Resiliency, Reforms, and Rebuilding, is a prerequisite and a necessary tool in addressing

the contemporary issues affecting the country's social, political, and economic systems after 60 years of independence.

Notably, Tanzania is one of the global and regional communities dedicated to executing Agenda 2030's

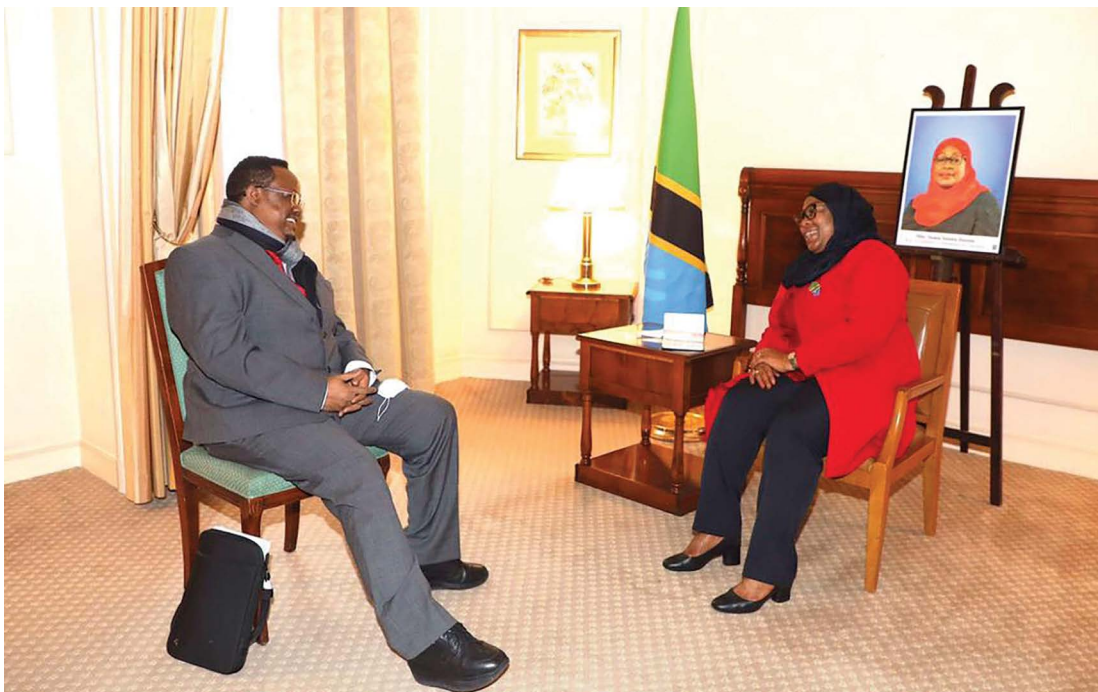
Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063's objectives to improve people's prosperity in social, cultural, political, and economic realms.

As a result, with continual changes and developing issues at the national, regional, and global levels, the economic and governance systems used 60 years ago are unlikely to produce the desired results in the contemporary setting.

For example, since the process of developing the new constitution halted in 2014, some members of the opposition, activists, and academics have called for the process to be restarted.

Furthermore, there have been concerns raised about the difficulties that political parties face, particularly about rallies. President Samia, on the other hand, has vowed to develop the multiparty system since taking the helm, and in March 2022, she received the preliminary report from the task force tasked with coordinating stakeholders' perspectives on multiparty democracy in Tanzania.

"My government is dedicated to and will always seek to bring about improvements in the political and



President Samia in face-to-face talks with opposition leader Tundu Lissu has opened up on some political freedoms in the country.

economic institutions, as well as legal election reforms.” The goal is to ensure that we meet current demands. It is consequently critical for us to understand when to make changes that affect all parts of life, even if such changes face opposition from some quarters at the moment.” Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan made the observation.”

Among President Samia’s commendable measures is the construction of 15,000 classrooms for primary and secondary schools across the country.

Highlighting President Samia’s achievement during her first year in office, the Minister for Education, Science, and Technology, Prof Adolph Mkenda, noted that the government is also constructing new 245 secondary schools to specifically provide education to girls, with the assurance of having teen mothers reinstated to continue with studies, a move that was vehemently repudiated by her predecessor.

«The new schools will be built inwards without secondary schools, and this is aimed at reducing the distance covered by girls to and from school. A total of 180bn/- has been allocated for this purpose,» Prof Mkenda said during a news conference in Dar es Salaam.

In addition, a total of 11.20bn/- was dispatched in June last year for upgrading teachers’ training colleges in Sumbawanga (Rukwa), Dakawa, and Mhonda in Morogoro.

Through the Tanzania Covid-19 Socioeconomic Response Plan (TCRP), the government has also spent 5.44bn/- to improve infrastructure in 17 teachers’ training colleges countrywide.

Even though in the five years of her predecessor, the late John Magufuli, parents and guardians of the students in Standard 1 up to Form Four were relieved from paying school fees, Samia had since extended the free education program to Form Five and Six students.



President Samia shares a light moment with Namibia’s Hage Geingob in Windhoek .Photo courtesy.

In the same vein, part three of the Written Laws, Miscellaneous Amendments (No.4) Bill, 2016 proposed an amendment of the Higher Education Student’s Loan Board (HESLB) Act, 2004 to take diploma courses on board and ensure they benefit from the loans. This is the new move that had most diploma students smile broadly as the opposite was the case during the past administration which saw only bachelor’s degree students benefit from the higher education students’ loans board.

Unlike Magufuli, President Samia reopened Tanzania’s diplomatic relations with the world and resumed Tanzania’s frequent travels by a head of state. This has seen her tour from Beijing to Brussels. Dakar to Davos. Dubai to Doha, London to New York. Nairobi, Los Angeles to Kinshasa,

and this week, Pretoria. She helped resolve most of the petty trading quarrels with Kenya on her state visit and boosted ties across the East African Community.

Samia has attended dozens of meetings from a regional level to international, in a quest to repair old ties and cement existing ones while at the same time building new ties. She used trips and meetings to boost Dodoma’s Foreign Direct Investment and source funds to finance Tanzania’s ambitious projects such as the standard gauge railway, the Julius Nyerere Hydropower project, roads, and other projects.

President Hassan has transformed the country’s economy with the GDP growing from USD 69.7 billion in 2021 to USD 85.42 billion in 2022.

The country’s economic growth has been impressive, and it is anticipated

to continue as a reckoning force in East Africa and the region.

The president has been credited with implementing policies that have helped to improve the country’s economy. The implementation of strategies from government subsidies and credits in agriculture is attributed to scaling up the economy.

Nevertheless, liberalization policies in the form of import tariffs on remittance services facilitated greater trade and investment opportunities. In terms of massive-scale development, President Samia secured funding from the African Development Bank for &2.7 billion for a new railway project between Dar es Salaam and Isaka in Shinyanga Region.

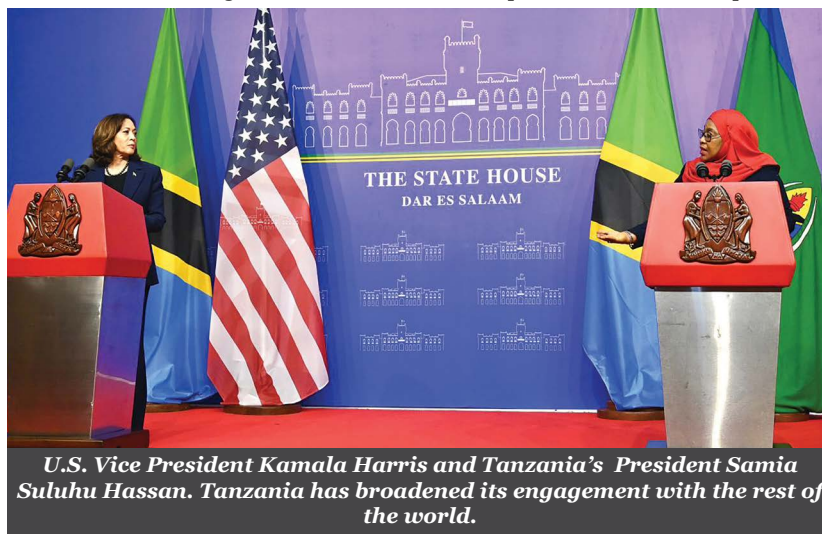
The contribution of the railway is expected to update the country’s transportation infrastructure, provide millions of jobs, and stimulate economic growth.

Despite significant strides, critics have been wary of the ballooning national debt, with the finance ministry allaying fears of the public that the debt looks ‘sustainable’. The government has allocated a whopping Sh10.48 trillion to service the national debt in the Financial Year 2023/24.

The amount is a 15 percent rise from the Sh9.1 trillion that the Parliament approved for paying the loans that the government took from various sources in the current 2022/2023 Financial Year.

Meanwhile, Tanzania’s total national debt stock, which included both the public and private sectors stood at \$42.26 billion (about Sh97 trillion) at the end of April 2023.

But Finance Minister, Mwigulu Nchemba says the debt was sustainable in the short, medium, and longer terms, explaining that Tanzania’s debt-to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio currently stands at 31.8 percent which is well below the capacity of 55 percent.



U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and Tanzania’s President Samia Suluhu Hassan. Tanzania has broadened its engagement with the rest of the world.



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Liberia: Weah Bows Out With Grace

By Prince Kurupati

From his sporting career to his political career, George Weah has always made it a habit of breaking records – albeit good records. Weah did break another record in the recent Liberian presidential election (runoff) albeit the wrong one to break. Weah's defeat in the recent presidential race made him the first incumbent to lose a re-election bid in Liberia's 176-year history!

George Weah became Liberia's 25th president in 2018 when he defeated Joseph Boakai. Weah's victory in 2018 was celebrated in every corner of the country as the man who for so long had raised the Liberian flag high owing to his footballing prowess had taken the reigns to stabilise a country yearning for a true socio-economic transformation. Unfortunately,

Weah's prowess on the football pitch couldn't transcend to the presidential office. This in turn saw him spend just one term in office as he was defeated in the 2023 election by the same man, he defeated back in 2018 to become the president that is, Joseph Boakai.

In his inaugural speech in 2018, Weah said, "It is my belief that the most effective way to directly impact the poor and to narrow the gap



Weah turned defeat to a moment of glory by conceding to opposition challenger Joseph Boakai. Photo courtesy.

between the rich and poor is to ensure that public resources do not end up in the pockets of government officials". Ironically, Weah's bid for re-election according to most political analysts was hampered by corruption!

While he vociferously declared «that the overwhelming mandate I

received from the Liberian people is a mandate to end corruption in public service,» during his inauguration speech, Weah's tenure as president witnessed some of the biggest protests the country has seen since the end of Liberia's second civil war in 2003. The protests were fueled by Weah's

failure to clamp out corruption.

An ever-present feature on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Liberia reached a new low getting a 136 ranking during Weah's term from an average of 39 points. Weah himself set the tone as he failed to declare his assets something which his peers in his administration copied. As reported by Al Jazeera, «Just nine months into this presidency, the Liberian press reported the alleged disappearance of 15.5 billion Liberian dollars (US\$96m at the time) in banknotes, approximately five per cent of the country's gross domestic product. An inquiry by Kroll, a Philadelphia-based firm funded by the United States government, revealed that the banknotes had not gone missing but had been illegally printed. The investigation also found that US\$16.5m had been printed in excess and was unaccounted for.»

Several individuals were arrested at the time mostly from the Central Bank of Liberia including Charles Sirleaf, a son of former President Ellen



A democratic adventure on course for Liberia as Weah's concession paved the way for second peaceful transfer of power in recent times. Photo courtesy.

Johnson Sirleaf. However, they were just detained for a short time before they were released and their charges dropped. This significantly put a dent on Weah's supposed crackdown on corruption.

Compounding matters was the death of four auditors in just over a week in 2020. The public refused to accept the autopsy reports citing possible foul play and collusion between top government officials and medical practitioners.

Commenting after the announcement of election results, Anderson Miamen, the lead campaigner at the Centre for Accountability and Transparency in Liberia, a partner of Transparency International, believes President Weah was booted out owing to his lackadaisical approach to tackling corruption.

"Everywhere we went, people asked questions about the situation of corruption in the country and what the government is doing about it. In the different reports that we've done over the years, citizens have expressed disappointment in the government's lack of strong will to deal with corruption," Miamen said.

Catapulting Weah to the presidency was also his inspiring message of hope. On his campaign trail, Weah lamented how the then administration had impoverished the people owing to the implementation of elitist policies. His message of eradicating poverty accentuated by his background of emerging from the slums of Monrovia in Clara Town to gracing the world stage as a top footballer gave many hope, especially the youth.

Weah encapsulated all his ideas of transforming Liberia in the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) blueprint. Having been entrusted to implement the PAPD strategies in his first term, Weah spectacularly failed to the extent that his failures were all that his nemesis needed to highlight to the electorate to win their votes. In what is essentially a carbon copy of Weah's 2018 manifesto premised on combating poverty, developing the country's ailing infrastructure,



President elect Boakai has been urged by Weah to avoid any witchhunt of the outgoing administration. Photo courtesy.

and cracking down on injustice and corruption, Joseph Boakai sold the same message and managed to wrestle power.

Despite the heartbreak of being thrown into the political dustbin just after one term, George Weah did the noble act of graciously conceding defeat. He didn't even wait for the official results from the National Elections Commission to be announced. In his concession speech on the night of 17 November, Weah said, «The results announced tonight, though not final, indicate that Ambassador Joseph N. Boakai is in a lead that we cannot surpass. Therefore, a few minutes ago, I spoke with President-elect Joseph N. Boakai to congratulate him on his victory.»

Weah's early concession came as a relief to the West African region which in the past few years has witnessed several coups as well as fiercely contested elections whose outcomes needed courts to be accepted by all parties. Current ECOWAS Chair and Nigerian president Bola Tinubu in a statement relayed on his behalf by Ajuri Ngelale, the Special Adviser on Media and Publicity to the Nigerian president said, «I commend President George Weah for his sterling example, undiluted patriotism, and

statesmanship. He has defied the stereotype that peaceful transitions of power are untenable in West Africa.»

Former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan who led the West African Elders Forum to Liberia as election observers commended Weah for graciously conceding and letting democracy prevail. Jonathan also congratulated Joseph Boakai on his victory and urged him to continue unifying the nation. The former Nigerian president now holds the unwanted record with Weah of incumbents who failed to win their reelection bids. Goodluck Jonathan is the first and currently only Nigerian incumbent to lose a reelection bid since the return of democracy in Nigeria in the 90s.

ECOWAS also weighed in saying it commends Liberian leaders and the country as a whole for demonstrating that democracy is alive in the "ECOWAS region and that change is possible through peaceful means." The ECOWAS statement also went further stating «The next phase of Liberia's democratic journey is crucial; ECOWAS, therefore, calls on the people of Liberia to maintain and safeguard the peace and security of the country at all times. ECOWAS will continue to support the people

of Liberia to consolidate peace and security, deepen democracy, and foster socio-economic development.»

As he departs the centre stage - at least for the next six years - Weah will find comfort and solace in that he narrowly lost the presidential race 50.64% to 49.36%. This in essence means he still commands a lot of support and hard work on the ground for the next six years will likely bring about a positive outcome.

The outgoing Liberian president also needs to pat himself on the back for conducting the country's first self-sponsored postwar election. As he promised at the 78th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that his country would uphold the "principles of free, fair, and transparent elections," he surely delivered.

Reinforcing his desire to stick to democratic principles, Weah during his concession speech said, «Under my leadership, these elections were organized with a promise to the Liberian people - a promise of fairness, transparency, and credibility. I am proud to say that, for the most part, we have fulfilled that promise. The Liberian people have spoken, and their choice will be honoured and obeyed.»



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South Sudan's Year Of Unity & Hope

By Ajong Mbapndah L

In what was arguably one of the proudest moment of 2023 for South Sudan, President Kiir returned home to a hero's welcome from the 23rd session of the East African Community (EAC) Summit in Arusha, Tanzania. At the Summit which took place on 24th November, South Sudan scored one of its biggest diplomatic victories since independence with the selection of President Kiir as the new Chairperson of the EAC.

In a palpable sign of the steady progress that the youngest African nation has been making, the teeming crowd that received President Kiir at the Juba airport included Vice President Dr Riek Machar and other senior government officials.

While the EAC presidency may be rotational and for a year only, the responsibility is a sign of how far the country has come from the bumpy years that followed independence.

«Guided by our vision for a prosperous, competitive, secure, stable and politically united East Africa, I will focus on enhancing integration within the region during my tenure and shall continue to focus on regional peace initiatives, strengthen security measures, advance political processes and establish emergency response mechanisms. All these will be aimed at promoting good governance,» President Kiir said as he called for peace to continue reigning at home.

For his main opponent, First Vice President, Dr Riek Machar, President Kiir taking over the EAC chairmanship is a sense of pride for the people of South Sudan. It's a big recognition that we head the EAC, and this is for the first time. We are all happy that we are part of EAC, and our President is the chair of this community. For Vice President for Economic cluster, Dr. James Wani, President Kiir taking the EAC mantle raises the status of the country in the region and beyond.

For a country still fighting to



A moment of pride for South Sudan with the selection of President Kiir to lead the EAC. Photo courtesy.

completely quench the embers of the post-independence civil war and finding it hard to convince skeptical international partners that the country was back on the rails, the leadership of the EAC for President Kiir could not have come at a better time. In addition to serving as a response of sorts to critics, the diplomatic victory caps off years of painstaking efforts from him, challenging, and often times with failure, but never giving up.

The EAC is one of the most vibrant sub regional blocs in Africa and if South Sudan is getting its turn at the Chairmanship, it is a mark of confidence from member countries with expectations that will be no less had it been under the leadership of President Kagame, Museveni, or any other more established leader in the bloc.

President Kiir's leadership of the EAC equally starts on a good note as South Sudan used the 23rd Summit to sort out issues related to outstanding payments. President Kiir speaking after taking over the leadership of

the EAC indicated that South Sudan had purged its outstanding debt of \$15 million following a waiver of the remaining portion from its \$ 36 million arrears.

“I sincerely appreciate the EAC heads of state for waving the arrears accrued to South Sudan. From now onwards, South Sudan commits to remit its required annual contribution on timely basis,” President Kiir said.

“As a partner state, South Sudan is fully aware of its treaty obligations, particularly on harmonization of laws and policies. We are equally aware of our required obligations for the functioning of the community,” Kiir said.

While opinions and perceptions on South Sudan under President Kiir may differ, President Kiir and his team believe their efforts have slowly but steadily put South Sudan back on the rails. The revitalized peace agreement is holding on and making faster progress than some partners think, says Philip Jada Natana, the outgoing Ambassador of South Sudan to Washington, DC.

“While people look at South Sudan as a place that may be dangerous and so on, most of the neighbors look at it as a land where they can find opportunities. This has been positive for South Sudan because it is helping the local population to realize this potential that has always been there; before they didn't know. Yes, we have our share of challenges, but the focus is so much on looking at things in the rearview mirror which does not give you the actual situation on the ground. Now, some countries have more problems in terms of fighting and instability; we are now taking in refugees in South Sudan. When you get refugees coming into your country, that is already an indication that they find it safer,” Ambassador Natana told PAV in September.

Instead of other countries trying to help South Sudan solve its problems, instead of South Sudanese thronging to neighboring countries, the images we see are also of different nationalities seeking refuge in South Sudan. Juba has become a Pan-African city with thriving successful



President Kiir says he will focus on enhancing integration within the region while continuing to focus on regional peace initiatives.

businessmen and women from the East African nations.

The images which unfortunately do not get enough traction are those of President Salva Kiir trying to bring reason to bear on the warring factions in fighting in neighboring Sudan. President Kiir's quest for peace has been unrelenting. He is one of the leaders who has held multiple engagements with the leadership in Khartoum and some of the warring factions in the quest for solutions to the crisis in Sudan. His latest meeting with the Chairman of the Sovereign Council of Sudan, Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan was on the sidelines of the Saudi-Africa summit in Riyadh in November. In meetings with Kenyan President William Ruto, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki and the Djibouti President, Ismail Omar Guelleh, the peace efforts of President Kiir in Sudan have gained currency.

In addition to engaging with leaders in Riyadh during the Saudi -Africa Summit on the crisis in Sudan, a statement from the Press Department of the President indicated that President Kiir scored big on progress for increased cooperation in the areas of trade and industry and commitment to the opening of a new

alliance with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

South Sudan's global offensive also saw the participation of President Kiir at the Russia-Africa Summit in St Petersburg, where he held discussions with President Putin and agreed to expand ties and cooperation in diverse areas notably energy, trade, and oil.

As important as the presence on the continental and global stage is, the reality of charity beginning at home is not lost to President Kiir and the people of South Sudan.

South Sudanese are the ones who are feeling the brunt of whatever is happening in terms of the implementation of the peace agreement. Officials in Juba think the country is on the right path in the implementation process of the agreement. When the Revitalized Peace Agreement was signed in September 2018, many countries, especially in the West never believed it was going to hold. It has been five years today. That is more than a term for the U.S. President. This is a sign of commitment of the leadership, despite challenges presented by the implementation. Those challenges are not unique to

the country. Nation building and democracy is an ongoing experience. With all good will, dismantling and healing the scars of a decade's civil war and transition to a democratic regime cannot happen overnight. The international community must understand the intricacies of the country, and encourage progress made, government officials told PAV.

Peace is also about trust; building trust after a time of conflict also takes time. progress on the implementation of the security measures, on constitutional process, and the political process is ongoing. Soon, there will be registration of these political parties. The electoral commission was established, and elections will take place in 2024 and the people of South Sudan will finally choose the government that will run the country, the officials say.

U.S Ambassador to South Sudan Michael Adler recently shared his thoughts on developments in South Sudan during the political parties forum on November 15th.

"With the transitional government almost a year behind in meeting commitments in the peace agreement, it is imperative to spend the time left between now and December 2024 to

focus on what is absolutely essential for free, fair, credible, and peaceful elections," Ambassador Adler said.

Going further, Ambassador Adler said "We seek to see the South Sudanese people achieve a political system consistent with the foundational values that decades ago launched U.S. engagement in what is today South Sudan. These values include human rights, democracy, freedom of expression, and people's right to a government that uses public resources to address public needs,"

That South Sudan has evolved to the level of holding is another milestone for the transitional government. Under his leadership, President Kiir says the constitution in South Sudan guarantees free access to education for all children. The government has religiously implemented the policy to ensure free primary and secondary education across the country to some great results, the President said at the recent UN General Assembly.

"The policy has directly led to enrolment of 2,3 million children in our schools, and to ensure that girls stay in school, we have banned child marriages through an act of Parliament," President Kiir told the UN.

In the health sector, President Kiir also announced plans to dedicate resources towards providing affordable and standard health care. This will be done through a primary healthcare approach that is inclusive and cost effective, he says.

Even on the thorny issue of security, 2023 saw some positive developments with the first deployment of former rebels and government troops in South Sudan's unified force to meet the security needs of the country as it braces for elections billed for December 2024. A battalion of about 750 soldiers including 150 female combatants was ferried to Upper Nile's capital Malakal in the area of Tonja in November to beef up security, following a deployment ceremony held at the Luri Military Training Center, west of Juba's capital of South Sudan.

While South Sudan may still score low on development indexes, its

potential is not in any doubt. In the energy sector for instance, South Sudan has emerged as a central actor in regional energy cooperation. According to South Sudan Oil & Power (SSOP), the nation's official energy event, the country continues to attract interest from leading oil and gas players while global partners like the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Norway, Egypt, and Turkey continue to assess development opportunities.

In 2023 South Sudan Oil & Power (SSOP) celebrated its sixth anniversary as the nation's official energy event under the theme the Engine of East African Growth. The theme positioned South Sudan as the nexus of petroleum exploration and production, innovation and energy cooperation for the East Africa, MENA, and Central Africa regions. The event hosted in official partnership with the Ministry of Petroleum invited investors to explore and engage with opportunities across the upstream, midstream, mining, power generation and distribution, services, and infrastructure sectors.

A U.S State Department advisory cautioning businesses against doing business in South Sudan is one of the things that did not sit well with Juba in 2023. By not doing business in South Sudan, the US and Western businesses were creating a vacuum that will be filled by others, one official told PAV. Despite the advisory and the dent it may have created, Kiir administration officials



A show of unity as Vice President Dr Riek Machar and other senior government officials joined in celebrations to welcome President from the EAC Summit.

remain optimistic on working with Americans in terms of trade. It is their belief that if American businesses invest in South Sudan especially in the agricultural, mining and oil sectors, it will be a win-win for everyone. According to officials in Juba, while business opportunities are open to everyone, there will be a continuous focus to engage directly with American businesses in the hope that they eventually come to terms with the fact that the realities in South Sudan are different from what they hear, and the opportunities far outweigh the risks.

Some in the US are however questioning the wisdom of US policy towards South Sudan and other African countries especially when it

creates openings for rival powers to come in.

"South Sudan's current situation has been exacerbated at every turn by U.S. policy decisions that have forced the young nation into the arms of enemies we should be holding accountable for their own terrible actions, China, and Russia. It's time that we take a hard look at how our policies can best support economic growth and stability in South Sudan — beginning with recognizing them not as pawns or commodities but as equals on the global stage worthy of respect like any other nation," said Justin Thomas Russell, Executive Director of Believe In Africa in a recent op-ed.

"The West continues to chide South Sudan's Government and thinks that South Sudan's failure to adopt a democratic form of government is a reason for its lackluster cooperation with the world's youngest country. In hindsight, this is not how countries such as Chile, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, and Botswana transitioned to democracy. These countries first required visionary leadership and decisive political authority to set the tone for that vision. It is that vision that led these countries to more viable economic development before they became democracies. South Sudan, as such, cannot invent the wheel. It can

only become democratic through measured stages of economic and political development," Russell wrote.

People tend to forget that South Sudan became independent only about 12 years ago after decades of fighting, another official told PAV. The comparison with more established democracies has no place or should be measured at the very least, the official said. Amid the challenges though, there seems to be a sense of hope and confidence in the future. At the UN General Assembly in New York, President Kiir himself expressed determination to build on the commitments of the nation's Revised National Development Strategy (2021-2024) to consolidate peace and stabilize the economy.

"In order to conclude the transitional period peacefully through fair, transparent and credible elections in 2024, we have also engaged in dialogue and consultation with various stakeholders, including civil society, women, youth, traditional leaders, and opposition groups, to ensure that our peace process is owned and driven by our people," President Kiir stated. As the country moves toward this direction, President Kiir calls on the United Nations to lift the arms embargo imposed on it which has impeded the implementation of some security arrangements, he says.



Under his leadership, President Kiir says the constitution in South Sudan guarantees free access to education for all children.



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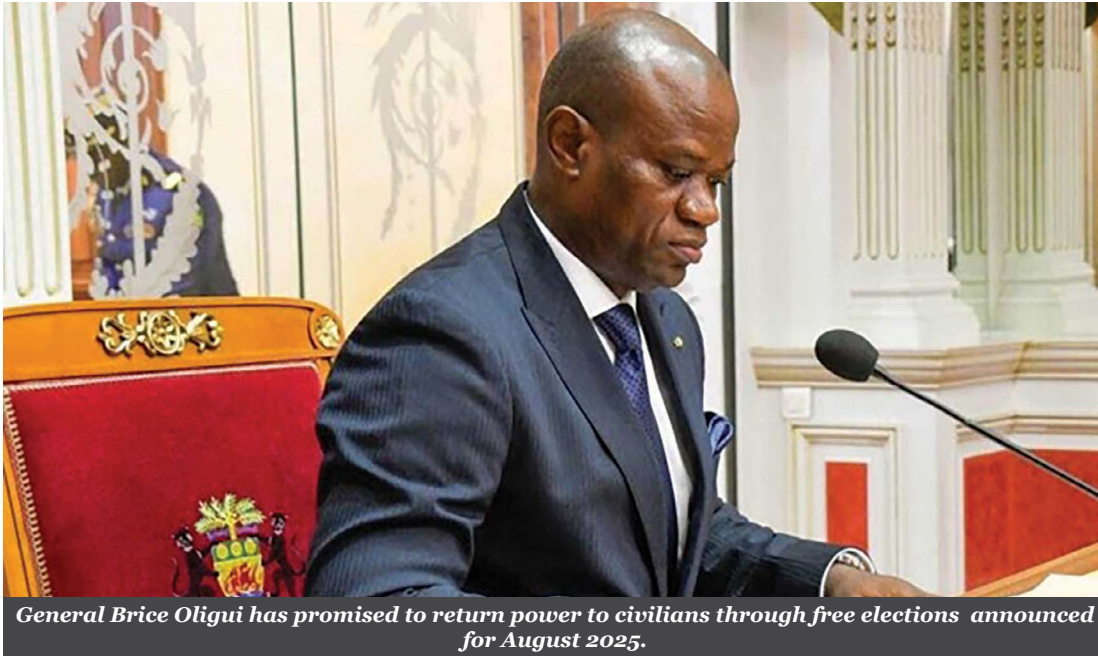
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General Nguema Seducing Gabonese People with Wide Range Reforms In 100 Days.

By Ajong Mbapndah L



It is over one hundred days since the world woke up to the military coup in the Central African State, Gabon, putting to an end, the 56-year reign of the Bongo dynasty. Political analysts would agree that all the ingredients were in place for such an upheaval to take place, given the tense atmosphere that surrounded the holding of the recent presidential election in that country.

Despite being an oil-rich country, a 2019 study showed that 43.5 percent of Gabonese lived below the poverty line, making it the fourth highest rate amongst Africa's upper middle class income economies. By 2020, 40 percent of youth were jobless and corruption scandals had gradually eroded the population's trust in the government. This was worsened by the absence of a transparent and inclusive electoral system, conspicuously demonstrated in the 2023 Presidential election by the regime's refusal to accredit international observers and journalists. The outcome was an election whose results were vehemently contested, just like it was the case in 2009 and 2016.

Since the Transitional Government

took office under coup leader, General Brice Oligui Nguema, they have been on a charm offensive to win the hearts of Gabonese citizens and reignite the spirit of patriotism, which some argue was killed by Ali Bongo's disregard for democratic values and freedoms. The junta has reinstated the signing of the national anthem in schools and hoisting of the flag in public offices, a practice that was long abandoned

under the old regime.

The commitment of the military leaders to crackdown on corruption has undoubtedly won the sympathy of the masses. Immediately after taking office, General Oligui created an anti-corruption Task Force to track down companies that received money for projects they had either abandoned or not executed at all. The President held a meeting with over

200 Gabonese businessmen during which he warned them against over-billing and threatened contractors to resume work at construction sites or be arrested. The former President is believed to have championed the financial haemorrhage of Gabon's treasury, as he and his close aides are said to own companies that were hitherto good at receiving money for no work done.

Over 300 luxury cars and huge sums of money, which the coup leaders describe as "ill-gotten wealth," have been recovered from top officials and the Bongo family, and the military leaders have promised to invest over ten million US dollars of that money on projects such as water, electricity, and roads, which they consider a top priority. It is no secret that some family members of the former President, notably, the former First Lady, Syvie Bongo and close aides are facing the music of the law for alleged embezzlement of public funds. Besides, the coup leader has been criss-crossing the country and visiting suburbs where projects had been abandoned to ensure that work resumes immediately.

The Task Force has also uncovered



over 4,000 ghost workers who had been draining the State of its scarce resources and the government now has a clear idea of its man power. The work of the said Task Force has also enabled the government to have a clear idea of the debt situation of the country, and the leaders have begun paying off debts owed the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank.

Another initiative of the junta that has been warmly saluted by Gabonese is the granting of free access to primary and secondary education in public schools, the return of scholarships and free school manuals, which will certainly increase and improve the literacy level of the country.

Under Ali Bongo, a good number of key positions were held by foreigners, including his Director of Cabinet, but General Oligui has embarked on what he termed the "Gabonisation of posts," which is aimed at ensuring



Rwandan President Paul Kagame is among the leaders who have received Gen Oligui Nguema.

that those top jobs are returned to Gabonese citizens.

In a recent article published online, the Institute for Security Studies noted that "transitions in Central Africa could become tools to strengthen political and economic governance and avert instability," adding that the Bongo dynasty had come to symbolise both political continuity

and calamitous governance.

General Brice Oligui has promised to return power to civilians through free elections which have been announced for August 2025, but concerns have been raised that the Transition Charter is silent on whether or not he will be eligible to run for the election. These and many other issues are expected to be on the

table when they converge for the national dialogue scheduled to take place in April 2024.

The seriousness of General Oligui Nguema to his new political duties is also seen in the outreach that he has done with more established leaders in the region. While there may have been some initial apprehension associating with or legitimizing someone who came to power through a coup, General Oligui has since been received by Sassou Nguesso of Congo, Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, Faustin Touadera of Central Africa, Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and others. He equally attended the maiden edition of the Saudi-Africa forum.

Stroking the right notes so far, embraced by Gabonese and seemingly catching up first, some analysts think it may not come as a surprise if General Oligui Nguema eventually nurses political ambitions beyond the transition period.

Malawi: An Economy On A Sick Bed

By Joseph Dumbulla

The Reserve Bank of Malawi recently announced the devaluation of the Malawi Kwacha by 44 percent, a mark which one influential religious group has used as basis to tell President Lazarus Chakwera right at the State House that Malawians have lost hope in his leadership.

The devaluation has left a huge mark on the economy with prices of goods and services, in an economy some critics believe is now on its sick bed.

The devaluation coincided with Malawi receiving an Extended Credit Facility, a form of financial assistance, from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at a time when the Southern African nation is faced with an acute shortage of petrol and diesel, as well as high inflation.

The nation also faced a 25 percent devaluation in May 2022 and since January this year, the local unit has depreciated by 13.1 percent through forex auctions, losing about 82.1



Chakwera is under intense criticism.

percent.

However, in a scathing statement, the Public Affairs Committee, a grouping of religious leaders with long history for advancing change

said they told the President in the face that they are dismayed with his indecisiveness.

At a time, when the grouping met the President, the nation marked a

year on, when the government was tricked into a grant purportedly worth US\$6.8-billion at a high-profile state launch with a Belgian registered private foundation – Bridgin.

But the recent economic downturns have led to a hike into prices of basic commodities, with one second hand car dealer Timothy Martin stating that the “cost of importing vehicles has become way of a hurdle which has affected his family and his entire trade from Blantyre’.

However, Chairperson for PAC Monsignor Patrick Thawale has said the ongoing economic turmoil imply that Chakwera is rather indecisive and slow to act on crucial issues.

“You may have been insensitive to the complaints and pieces of advice from stakeholders leading to the perception that the Tonse Alliance administration seems to be clueless. You have no choice, but to act decisively on some recommendations made in order to jump start the economy,” he said in a statement that has earned praise in some online circles although others slam the body of making similar calls before.

On his part, economist and former Reserve Bank of Malawi Governor, Dalitso Kabambe who apparently is one of the presidential candidates in the opposition Democratic Progressive Party led by former leader Peter Mutharika is accusing the government of being reckless in its decision-making processes.

“ This devaluation will further deepen the suffering of Malawians as



Members of PAC pose with Chakwera after their eye-fel engagement.

it will trigger a rise in prices of basic goods and services like fuel, fertilizer and even food items. The timing of the devaluation is questionable given that fundamentals of the monetary policy stance remains helpless and fiscal consolidation is nonexistent, “ said Kabambe.

As means of controlling the situation, among other things, the finance ministry has forbidden residents from obtaining more than US\$2,000 in foreign currency in cash.

Although the narrative in the wake of the devaluation has been negative, the Malawi Confederation of

Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCCI) has defended the move, saying it will instead encourage more formal trading rather than informal trading which has starved the formal market of foreign exchange, leading to recurring shortages of basic commodities.

According to the MCCCI President Lekani Katandula, the exchange rate realignment will help the country to unlock \$174 million under the IMF’s three-year Extended Credit Facility.

The blame on the government has not spared Mutharika. The 82-year-old insisted that during his reign, he

improved the economy slamming the Chakwera’s government for overspending and lacking clues to manage the economy.

“This government is very reckless and clueless. They ended an IMF program [in 2020] ignorantly. Now they are just devaluing the kwacha by up to 44 percent. Chakwera must show Malawians how much money the government is pumping into the financial sector to resuscitate the economy. He must reduce careless expenditures to save money that can be pumped into the financial sector so that interest rates can be reduced,” said Mutharika said from his Lakeshore retirement home-Mangochi.

Earlier on, government spokesperson Moses Kunkuyu said Mutharika should be the last person to accuse the current regime stating that ‘Malawi’s mess started during his [Mutharika’s] leadership’.

Apparently, Chakwera has come to the defence of his measures as a leeway to improving the economy.

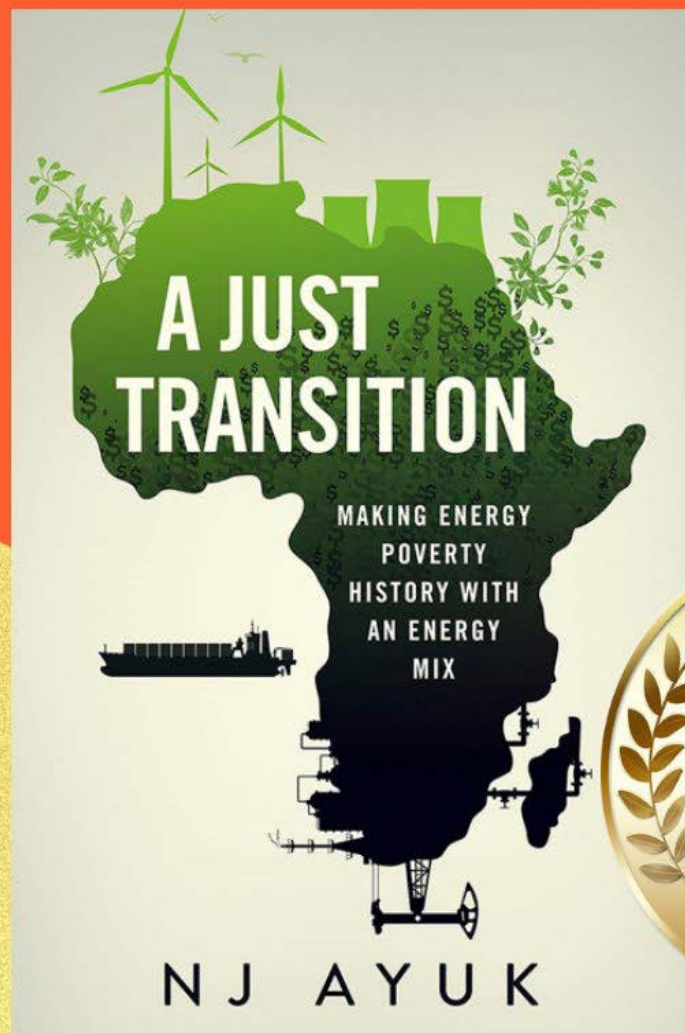
For instance, the 68-year-old has halted all his international travel, reduced fuel benefits for ministers and other stringent austerity calls.

However, industries have upgraded their pricing which remains a pinch on common Malawians as crucially as they are, civil servants have only been served with a 10 percent salary hike.



Chakwera (L) looks on as ex Finance Minister Sosten Gwngwe signs a deal that came out to be bogus.

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Resource-Rich Africa Has No Excuse To Remain Poor, Says African Development Bank President.



Our governments must realise their responsibility to lift people out of poverty and into wealth as quickly as possible. It is doable, says Adesina.

“Our governments must realise their responsibility to lift people out of poverty and into wealth as quickly as possible. It is doable”—Adesina

Lagos, 29 November 2023—With \$6.2 trillion worth of natural resources, 65 percent of the world’s uncultivated arable land, and a vibrant youth population, Africa has no excuse to be poor, African Development Bank Group President Dr Akinwumi Adesina said on Tuesday.

He said the continent must look inward urgently to solve its many challenges and urged citizens to hold governments accountable for poverty.

The Bank President made the call in Lagos where he delivered a lecture to mark the 40th anniversary of The Guardian, Nigeria’s foremost independent newspaper. The lecture was held under the theme, For the World to Respect Africa.

Adesina, who won The Guardian’s ‘Man of the Year’ Award in 2021, stressed that Africa should not be where it is today and urged its

resource-rich nations to strengthen good governance, transparency, accountability, and sound management policies to turn things around.

He said considering the vast natural resources that Africa has, it must become a continent that grows inclusive and well-distributed wealth.

“If we manage our natural resources well, Africa has no reason to be poor. We have \$6.2 trillion in natural resources,” he said. “So how in the world are we still poor? We simply need to pull up our socks, stamp out corruption, and manage our resources in the interest of our countries and our people,” added Adesina.

He explained further: “Saudi Arabia has oil, as does Nigeria. Kuwait has oil, as does Nigeria. Qatar has abundant gas, as does Nigeria and other countries. Yet, Nigeria is the country with the largest share of its population living below the extreme poverty line in 2023 in Africa. Clearly, there is something fundamentally wrong in our management, or rather mismanagement, of our natural

resources.”

As an example, the Bank president cited South Korea, which raised its GDP per capita from \$350 in the 1960s to approximately \$33,000 by 2023. “That is the kind of quantum leap that we need,” Adesina said: “We must ask ourselves, when will we make the shift that South Korea made, from being a country that was once on the low end of the development ladder to the rich, industrialised nation that it is today.”

“I am optimistic about Nigeria. I am optimistic about Africa. I believe in Africa,” he added.

Adesina said: “Africa needs the right policies, investments, infrastructure, logistics, and financing...We must make sure that this is driven by a highly skilled, dynamic, and youthful workforce,” he told the audience of ministers and other senior government officials, former state governors, business leaders, academics, and media at The Guardian event.

The Bank President commended The Guardian, for continuing to “guard the truth”.

He said: “Over the years, this world-class publication has set a benchmark for journalistic excellence. It has helped to shape public discourse, champion accountability, and serve as a people’s watchdog. In doing so, The Guardian has justifiably earned the respect of Nigerians and readers across the world.”

The Guardian’s Chairman and Publisher, Lady Maiden Alex-Ibru, described the Bank President as “one of Nigeria’s greatest exports to the world.”

The World’s Breadbasket

Adesina said Africa could play a leading role in resolving not only its own challenges but global ones. “While we must deal with bread-and-butter development issues, we must think strategically as we set ourselves on a path to becoming wealthy nations. Our countries must become great contributors to global wealth and development financing for others.”

He highlighted the African Development Bank’s interventions to drive inclusive development in Africa,

including boosting food security.

The African Development Bank has invested about \$8 billion in agriculture over the past seven years, improving food security for 250 million people across the continent. In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which disrupted wheat and maize supplies to Africa, the Bank rapidly approved a \$1.5 billion emergency food production facility for countries across the continent.

"Today, this facility is supporting 20 million farmers in 36 countries to produce 38 million tonnes of food valued at \$12 billion. This is 8 million tonnes above the 30 million tonnes of food Africa was importing from Russia and Ukraine," Adesina said.

"But even as we do this, we must do more than simply producing more food and agricultural commodities," Adesina added. "The export of raw commodities is the door to poverty. The export of value-added products is the highway to wealth."

The African Development Bank and its partners have provided \$1.6 billion to develop 25 Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones to support private



Dr Adesina with The Guardian's Chairman and Publisher, Lady Maiden Alex-Ibru and the newspaper's Chairman of Editorial Board, Prof Wale Omole.

sector processing and add value to commodities across 15 countries.

With partners, the Bank this month launched a \$3 billion Alliance for Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones to support the development of these zones in 11 more countries.

Ahead of the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference starting on 30 November in Dubai, Adesina said the African Development Bank will amplify Africa's calls for climate justice and greater investment in climate action, including adaptation.

The Bank has launched a \$1 billion Africa Climate Risk Insurance Facility for Adaptation to scale up climate risk insurance for African countries.

Narrow Escape Saves Nigeria \$11 Billion

By Prince Kurupati

The general talk when it comes to seeking and formulating African solutions to key African problems or even just putting Africa on the same economic trajectory as other continents is to leverage the power of foreign investment. Foreign investment is considered to be the key ingredient to fostering economic growth. Thanks to this, most African leaders and their administrations go on unending foreign trips to attract foreign investment. Millions of dollars are also used to organize investment drives and expos on the continent.

Despite all the efforts taken by African countries to attract foreign investment, what has become crystal clear is that some foreign entities now regard Africa's propensity for foreign investment as desperation. As such, they come up with ridiculous deals aimed only at benefitting one party



The Judgement proved conclusively that nation states will no longer be held hostage by economic conspiracies between private firms and solitarily corrupt officials, says President Tinubu.

while reaping the other. A good case in point and a great reference for this unbecoming behaviour is the case of Nigeria in its deal with Process and Industrial Developments Company (P&ID).

The history between the Nigerian government and P&ID dates back to 2010. Determined to find a lasting solution to Nigeria's energy problems, then Nigerian President Umar Yar'Adua entered an agreement with P&ID. Nigeria's responsibility as part of the deal was to build a gas processing plant in Cross Rivers State - on land bought by P&ID - and supply the gas. Once Nigeria fulfilled its obligation, P&ID was to boost power generation by refining and supplying gas to the national grid.

Nigeria according to its deal with P&ID was supposed to lay the groundwork for the gas plant and afterwards, P&ID would chip in. Unfortunately, just two years down the line, the deal fell through. P&ID had not bought any land and thus the Nigerian government could not start building the plant. As related by former Nigerian President

Muhammadu Buhari, the deal was wittingly written such that P&ID was absolved of any wrongdoing in the case that the deal failed to kickstart. «The plant was never built. Construction was not started. P&ID did not even buy the land for the facility. But the contract, incredibly was clear: P&ID could sue Nigeria and claim all the profits it might have made over 20 years if everything had been collected,» Buhari said.

Owing to the clever wording of the deal, P&ID once the deal fell through sought recourse against the Nigerian government in the courts of law. P&ID approached a UK arbitration court in March 2023 laying breach of contract charges against the Nigerian government. The court agreed with P&ID and ruled that the Nigerian government should pay compensation to P&ID. Successive Nigerian presidents who came after the ruling however refused to obey the ruling. With each passing year, the laid down compensation amount accrued interests reaching \$6.6 billion in 2017 and \$11 billion by 2023.

For individuals who keenly followed the Nigeria vs P&ID case, one thing that boggled the mind was how and why P&ID was selected to be the partner for such a huge project as up until now, this British Virgin Islands registered company neither has a trackable reference of past projects nor does it have a simple address, staff and assets. If not a case of brazen corruption, then due diligence was not done by the Nigerian government before entering the deal. Well, the genesis of the deal ended up being the one thing that exonerated the Nigerian government as P&ID was adjudged to have been awarded a contract contrary to public policy.

The ruling which ultimately gave Nigeria a lifeline and hence paved the way for a narrow escape was handed down by the Business and Property Court in London presided over by Justice Robin Knowles of the Commercial Courts of England and Wales. The judgement exonerated Nigeria on the basis that P&ID fraudulently got the contract. The ruling also cleared the former Lagos

Attorney General Olasupo Shasore of wrongdoing in representing Nigeria in the arbitration. Shasore had been accused of obstructing Nigeria's legal proceedings against the British Virgin Islands' based company and was charged with negligence and lack of due diligence in handling the case.

Nigerian President soon after the ruling was passed on October 28 said the victory is not just for Nigeria but for the entire continent which has for long been held hostage by economic conspiracies between «private firms and solitarily corrupt officials who conspire to extort and indebt the very nations they swear to defend and protect.»

Carmel Rickard the editor in chief of the Judicial Institute for Africa Newsletter at the University of Cape Town said the ruling sets a precedent for many other countries. He said the case demonstrates how arbitration as a means of resolving cases if it weren't private allowed better scrutiny of what a state was doing to protect the interests of its people.

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African Development Bank Revises Economic Forecast For Africa Downwards Amid Continued Global Shocks

In the face of regional and global shocks, the Bank remains resolute in supporting African countries to better navigate these challenges and put economic growth back on track.

The African Development Bank has revised its short to medium-term macroeconomic forecast for Africa, for 2023 and 2024 downwards to 3.4% and 3.8%, from 4.0% and 4.3%.

The slightly lower figures reflect the persistent long-term effects of COVID-19, geopolitical tensions and conflicts, climate shocks, a global economic slowdown, and limited fiscal space for African governments to adequately respond to shocks and sustain post-pandemic economic recovery gains.

The updated data were published on Thursday, 29 November in the 2023 Africa's Macroeconomic Performance and Outlook (MEO) update, a follow-up to the Bank Group's 2023 Africa Economic Outlook released in May.

While inflationary pressures are receding globally, they are persistent in Africa and continue to weigh heavily on the continent's short-to-medium-term economic performance, according to the update. Africa's inflation is now projected to average 18.5% and 17.1% in 2023 and 2024, respectively.

The Bank Group's Chief Economist and Vice President, Prof. Kevin Urama said: "The challenging global economic environment and multiple shocks continue to shape Africa's macroeconomic performance. The entrenched inflationary pressures threaten to reverse all the macroeconomic gains made since the easing of pandemic risks while the continued depreciation of domestic currencies in many countries has exacerbated debt service costs."

"In the face of regional and global shocks, the Bank remains resolute in supporting African countries to better navigate these challenges and put economic growth back on track," he added.

In the short term, the MEO update urges countries to continue to implement restrictive monetary



policies to contain inflation. This should be supported by fiscal policies that promote economic diversification and remove supply-side constraints.

Over the medium- to long-term, it calls on governments to scale up efficient investment in human capital and physical infrastructure to boost productivity, regain momentum in economic growth, and create opportunities for more inclusive and sustainable development.

The revised inflation rates represent an acceleration of 3.4 and 7.6 percentage points, respectively, from the earlier projection. Ongoing inflationary pressure has largely been fuelled by supply shocks in agriculture, stronger imported inflation due to weaker local currencies, relatively high commodity prices, and the persistence of fiscal dominance in several African countries.

The elevation of cost-of-living pressures has eroded Africans' purchasing power, stoking the risk of further increases in the incidence of poverty.

Among the update's findings: slow global economic growth is impacting demand for Africa's exports, a trend that is projected to persist for much longer than previously anticipated.

It also stressed that the projected economic slowdown in advanced economies and lacklustre growth in China relative to historical trends

have weighed down global growth.

"This has placed additional strain on African countries, especially those dependent on the Chinese market for commodity exports. Stronger policy support in China could bolster global economic recovery and trigger positive spillovers to African countries for which China remains a major trading partner. These factors can help moderate adverse risks to the economic outlook," the report notes.

On the downside, the 2023 MEO update observes that climate shocks coupled with deepening geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the prolongation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine could lead to deeper disruptions in global trade and foreign investment flows. This can trigger another round of prolonged tightening of global financial conditions that could further exert depreciation pressure on domestic currencies, increase debt-service costs, and exacerbate the increase in debt service costs and compound the continent's funding squeeze.

Staying afloat amid local and global shocks

The MEO update notes that coordinated monetary and fiscal policies underpinned by a reduction in fiscal dominance will be essential to rebuild buffers against the shocks.

Targeted and sequenced investments to address supply constraints, including addressing structural weaknesses, would help reverse the downturn in the momentum of economic recovery and put African economies on a higher and more sustainable growth trajectory.

To sustainably reduce inflationary pressures, the report urged African countries to remove the obstacles preventing domestic supply from responding to higher international commodity prices and to boost labour productivity through targeted infrastructure and human capital investment.

Tackling impediments to increased domestic resource mobilisation will help address the current funding squeeze.

Launched in January 2023, Africa's Macroeconomic Performance and Outlook report complements the African Development Bank's annual African Economic Outlook report, which focuses on key emerging policy issues relevant to the continent's development. The MEO is published in the first and fourth quarters of each year; the update comes ahead of the 2024 edition of the MEO, which highlights the evolution of macroeconomic conditions in the face of multiple and unprecedented shocks.

African Oil & Gas and the Rest of the World: What Changed in 2023?

By NJ Ayuk*

There is still a distance between Africa and the rest of the world in terms of what the continent can do to establish closer ties to energy markets in Europe and elsewhere and to expand the development of its own hydrocarbon resources.

It's undeniable that the Russian invasion of Ukraine proved highly disruptive to world energy markets. This geopolitical clash led to the imposition of Western sanctions on the export of Russian oil and fuel and the imposition of a price cap on Russian crude by the G7 group.

It also led to the redirection of world oil trade flows. Asian countries such as China and India, for example, began absorbing considerably more Russian oil and fuel than they had done previously, and many European countries began seeking new suppliers or buying more from existing suppliers outside Russia so as not to run afoul of sanctions.

Meanwhile, European buyers of Russian natural gas also started looking for alternative sources in 2022. They did so with slightly less urgency, it is true, given that natural gas imports were never subjected to sanctions. But they were still keen to find other suppliers, especially after Russian gas deliveries started becoming erratic a few months into the war.

These considerations drove Italy, for instance, to send representatives of the government and of Eni, a partially state-owned company, to Africa for talks with Egyptian, Algerian, and Angolan officials on expanding the scope of existing supply contracts. These talks were successful, as they allowed Eni to secure commitments for the delivery of an additional 7.0-7.5 billion cubic meters of gas beyond the originally planned amount in 2022, plus additional volumes in the following years.



NJ Ayuk is Executive Chairman of the African Energy Chamber.

New Links with Europe?

The talks also took place against a backdrop of speculation about how the rearrangement of world oil and gas trade flows had the potential to benefit Africa.

The idea was that Africa could, with a little help, become a natural partner for Europe. The two continents had the advantage of relative geographical proximity (at least along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea) and existing infrastructure connections (such as the subsea pipelines that link Algerian and Libyan gas fields to Italy and Spain). Major European companies — such as the British majors BP and Shell, France's TotalEnergies, and Norway's Equinor, as well as Eni — already had sizeable greenfield and brownfield portfolios in Africa.

So (advocates of this view argued) why not build on these pillars that were already in place and turn Africa into Europe's closest key supplier of fuel and energy?

But that's not how it happened.

New Gaps Between Africa and Asia, South America

Instead, Asian countries awarded far more new exploration acreage to investors than did African states after the conclusion of COP27, the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt.

As the African Energy Chamber (AEC) notes in its newly released 2024 African Energy Outlook, Asia has accounted for the single largest portion of post-COP27 exploration acreage awards, equivalent to more than 52% of the offshore total and almost 45% of the onshore total. Africa lagged significantly behind, accounting for 28% of the offshore total and only 5% of the onshore total.

There were also significant discrepancies between Africa and other regions of the world with respect to recent oil and gas discoveries. As the AEC's outlook points out, South America's deepwater zones have yielded nearly 13 billion barrels of oil equivalent (boe) in new commercial

finds since 2019, with 3 billion boe per year discovered in 2019 and 2020, 1.5 billion boe in 2021, 2.6 billion boe in 2022 and 2.8 billion boe since the beginning of 2023.

By contrast, Africa's deepwater zones have yielded about 7.65 billion boe in new commercial finds since 2019, with 2.9 billion boe per year discovered in 2019, 425 million boe in 2020, 1.135 billion boe in 2021, 1.94 billion boe in 2022 and 1.27 billion boe since the beginning of 2023.

What's more, South American fields have generally contained more oil than their African counterparts, with the mix being 80:20 in favor of oil in the former region, compared to 65:35 in the latter region. And since oil generally commands a higher price than gas, this has made the South American discoveries easier to monetize — and thus more immediately valuable — than those in Africa.

This gap could prove somewhat less significant later in the decade,

assuming that the transition away from fossil fuels gains momentum. This shift is expected to have a bigger impact on crude oil-derived petroleum producers than on natural gas, which many African countries view as the best available bridge fuel. (Nigeria, Africa's biggest producer of both oil and gas, is one such country, and its "Decade of Gas" policy is designed to promote and expand domestic gas utilization for electricity production and industrial use.)

In other words, if global demand for crude oil fades as many energy consumers switch from petroleum products to renewables, investment in South America's relatively oil-rich acreage will dwindle over time. However, investment in Africa's

relatively gas-rich acreage will remain at peak levels for a longer period, as gas is a cleaner-burning fuel than petroleum derivatives, and African states such as Nigeria will continue to use it for several more years even after they close the last power station to use refined petroleum products.

In the meantime, though, there is still a distance between Africa and the rest of the world in terms of what the continent can do to establish closer ties to energy markets in Europe and elsewhere and to expand the development of its own hydrocarbon resources. The Russia-Ukraine could have helped close that gap to a much greater extent, but instead, other regions have attracted more attention.

This is an All-Hands-on-Deck Moment

That said, I do not believe for one second that we should accept lagging energy industry investments as an inevitable reality for Africa. Instead, energy industry stakeholders should view our report's findings as a call to action. It is not too late to reverse course.

African governments must act immediately to make exploration and production in Africa investor friendly. Now is the time to offer tax incentives, fast-track projects, show more transparency in processes, and do everything possible to minimize investor risk.

Operators have a role to play as well. They should be working cooperatively

with government administrations and implementing measures to bring down unit costs, which would allow breakeven prices to be brought down.

Prompt action and cooperation will create a win-win that will allow African nations to reap the socioeconomic benefits of their oil and gas resources and companies to capitalize on the significant opportunities our continent's oil and gas offer.

For more insight on these and other topics, download the 2024 African Energy Outlook at www.EnergyChamber.org.

*NJ Ayuk is Executive Chairman, African Energy Chamber

NIES Strategic Focus Is To Elevate Nigeria's Global Energy Presence- Dr. James Shindi

*By NJ Ayuk**

Dr. James Shindi is the Chief Executive of Brevity Anderson, a trade advisory consultancy specializing in strategic meetings and facilitation to enhance international trade and business efficiency. He is renowned for organizing the annual Nigeria International Energy Summit (N.I.E.S), previously known as Nigeria International Petroleum Summit (N.I.P.S). In this interview, Shindi discussed his vision for the future of Nigeria's energy industry, provided insights into the upcoming N.I.E.S 2024 amongst other issues. Excerpts;

We have heard from numerous quarters how past and indeed, the present government have routinely bounced ideas off you before making final calls. How do you react to these stories?

I am not in a position to either confirm nor deny stories about how the government decides to conduct their business. However, what I would say is that we run an international consultancy outfit that provides non-political world class



Addressing security, transition, and finance are vital for a sustainable, more secure, and economically viable energy future, says Dr James Shindi.

advisory services to governments. We have the expertise to translate ideas into actionable policies for governments and that is a valuable service, especially in the complex field of oil and gas.

The Nigeria International Energy Summit, which is the only official oil and gas trade event of the Federal Government, is one of our flagship projects. The government engaged us to produce this conference on

their behalf. Part of our mandate is to crystalise the ideas coming from the event and streamline them into workable policies that government can take a look at and possibly implement.



Nigeria must prioritize ending energy poverty as a key goal, says Dr James Shindi.

This, I believe is the reason why the event has grown in popularity and is now a must-attend industry event with top level attendees from no fewer than 65 countries. The fact that the event has gained international recognition and attracts attendees from numerous countries speaks to the significance of the work you do.

The networking opportunities are incredible, and I guess this explains why clients keep coming back and in February 2024, we expect to again play host to key stakeholders and

run a side exhibition that allows companies market their services directly to decision makers. But don't forget, we work for and advise several other governments.

Maybe we should take a step back and talk a little bit more your background and how you got here.

I had my primary education at the University of Jos, Staff School, and then attended Federal Government College Azare. Looking back, I think Azare was the making of me. Boarding school life at a young age

accelerated my mental growth. I later earned a Law Degree from Benue State University and attended Law School in Abuja. After being called to the Bar, I worked for the African Business Roundtable and then joined a London-based Trade Advisory firm before eventually founding Brevity Anderson. Throughout my career, I have been involved in government-to-business advisory work and organized High-Level B2B and G2B events.

Can you reflect on your role in

the launch of Nigeria's Decade of Gas agenda, a seismic initiative, considering that Gas is now taking center stage? Can you look back with pride at what you achieved?

I am definitely proud of the Decade of Gas (DoG) project. When we launched it, the then President, Muhammadu Buhari, attended, in spite of COVID. That is a statement on its own. It marked a very significant journey for Nigeria.

The then Honourable Minister

of State for Petroleum Resources, Timipre Sylva, worked with an amazing team who had been designing the framework and driving a massive emphasis to Gas. We gave the idea the wings to fly as it were.

Let us not forget that it was also that it was Sylva who took the proposal to the President to sell it. Buhari was totally on board after meeting Sylva. They both agreed launching the Decade of Gas could literally make a generational impact. It was after that meeting that I went back to the drawing board with my team to come up with a proper roadmap.

I need to also praise NNPC Ltd led by Mallam Melece Kyari, the NNLG Ltd and their entire leadership at the time. They were and still are very instrumental in driving the whole DoG agenda. There are individuals like Dr. Justice Derefaka one of the technical advisers to the Minister of State for Petroleum at the time, and Philip Afolami at NLNG together with his team and also Ed Ubong from the Nigerian Gas Association (NGA) who currently chairs the steering committee on Decade of Gas. The current Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources, Ambassador Gabriel Aduda, has been phenomenal too. This country is blessed to have these people running things and I know history will be kind to them. I am honestly more than delighted that DoG has now taken a life of its own, with a proper structure and resources to succeed.

Can you elaborate on the key objectives of the Nigeria International Energy Summit and how it aims to position Nigeria in the global energy landscape?

The Nigeria International Energy Summit (NIES) is a significant event endorsed by the Nigerian government, aimed at positioning the country in the global energy arena. It serves as a platform for discussions, interactions, and high-level deals involving governments, oil companies, investors, and service providers. The focus is on attracting investments, showcasing Nigeria's energy potential, and

fostering global collaborations and technology transfers. Looking ahead to NIES 2024, it is anticipated to be transformative, promising a prosperous and sustainable future for Nigeria's energy sector through innovation, collaboration, and excellence.

What is the main theme of NIES 2024, and how does the theme reflect the current challenges and opportunities in the energy sector?

The theme of NIES 2024 is «Navigating the new world order: Security, Transition, and Finance.» This theme highlights the challenges and opportunities in the global energy sector.

Securing energy infrastructure is vital due to rising geopolitical tensions and cyber threats. Nations need to invest in physical and digital security measures, diversify energy sources, and combat energy poverty. Ending energy poverty requires a concerted effort from the government, private sector, civil society and implementing a combination of strategies that includes all the energy sources from fossil fuels to renewables. Financing energy projects is also a challenge that requires sustainable investments, and collaboration between governments and financial institutions. Thus, addressing security, transition, and finance pillars is vital for a sustainable, more secure, and economically viable energy future.

In your opinion, what role does Nigeria play in shaping the future of the African energy industry, and how can NIES 2024 contribute to this vision?

Nigeria holds a pivotal role in shaping the future of the African energy industry due to its abundant natural resources, economic importance, and growing population. The Nigeria International Energy Summit (NIES) acts as a catalyst for collaboration and innovation, bringing together industry leaders and policymakers to address challenges and find sustainable solutions. NIES promotes local talent, attracts international attention and

investment, and contributes to the growth and sustainability of the entire African continent. Efforts like NIES are crucial for fostering a progressive and sustainable energy industry in Africa.

Can you share your vision for the future of the Nigerian energy sector?

In the future, Nigeria needs to take her destiny in her own hands. Nigeria must prioritize ending energy poverty as a key goal. While renewable energy opportunities should not be ignored, all energy sources must be considered for inclusivity. Economic and energy independence go hand in hand, and diversifying the energy sector is crucial. This includes increased investment in renewables like solar and wind power, reliance on natural gas for cleaner energy, and implementing energy efficiency measures. Rural areas will receive electricity through decentralized systems, and innovation through digital technologies, research, and international partnerships will drive sustainable practices. However, the future of Nigeria's energy sector will be shaped by various factors such as political, economic, social, and technological considerations, as well as government policies, market demands, and environmental concerns.

How can the country involve local communities to actively participate in the energy transition process?

To engage local communities in Nigeria's energy sector, a comprehensive approach is needed, involving education, infrastructure development, financial support, skill enhancement, collaboration, policy development, and cultural integration. By respecting local customs and traditions, actively involving communities, and making them stakeholders, a smooth transition to sustainable energy practices can be achieved. This approach, if implemented genuinely, not only empowers local communities but also contributes to Nigeria's energy transition goals, potentially

serving as a model for other regions dealing with energy poverty.

How can the energy sector incorporate opportunities for the youth to actively contribute to the sector's growth and innovation?

Developing the energy sector in a country like Nigeria, with a significant youth population, requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates skill development, employment opportunities, and active participation in the sector's growth and innovation. Initiatives such as vocational training, specialized energy courses in universities, mentorship, funding, and grants for energy innovation are crucial. Energy companies should offer apprenticeships, and government agencies should allocate funds for research involving youth. Incentives for companies investing in youth development can drive sustainable economic growth and energy security in Nigeria.

What benchmarks or indicators should be in place to evaluate the progress made in the energy sector in the coming years?

While I am not a government official, I can provide general guidance on how policymakers and stakeholders could measure the success of their vision for the energy sector and the indicators they might consider.

Key indicators include tracking electrification rate, renewable energy percentage, energy infrastructure improvements, sector investments, energy-efficient technology adoption, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, electricity affordability, employment opportunities, research progress, and consumer feedback.

These indicators, among others, can provide a comprehensive view of the progress made in the energy sector and help in evaluating the success of any vision or plan. It is crucial for policymakers to regularly assess these metrics to make informed decisions and adjust strategies as needed to achieve their goals.



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Natural Gas Is Key to a Just African Energy Transition

By NJ Ayuk*

Natural gas has a critical part to play in the energy mix needed for the continent to meet its current and growing energy needs.

It would be an understatement to say Tanzania's Songo Songo gas field has been good for the country and its citizens. Since 2004, the project's output has been put to work to benefit the Tanzanian economy, its domestic energy supply, energy costs, employment numbers, and the environment.

With wells and a processing plant on Songo Songo Island, the public/private effort puts domestic needs first, using output to fuel the Ubungo gas-to-power operation as well as a major cement company and a village electrification program. Excess gas is sold to industrial customers across a range of industries.

Songo Songo production now generates about 45% of Tanzania's electricity, reducing the need for higher-priced imported fuel. Another important benefit? When the country's supply of hydroelectric energy wanes because of droughts, gas-to-electric generation can be counted on to fill the gap.

The development has directly created 190 jobs and made 113,809 more jobs possible.

It is also significantly decreasing carbon emissions (at the Tanzania Portland Cement Company alone, CO₂ emissions have been reduced by about 80,000 tons per year) and is providing a cleaner energy source at Dar es Salaam power plants by replacing diesel and heavy fuel oil (HFO).

This project is just one example of what natural gas can do to boost African economies, workforces, energy supplies, and the health of both the environment and residents.

Because of its great potential for replicating success stories like this across the continent, I remain



convinced that natural gas is the key to a prosperous future and a just energy transition for Africa.

As leaders from around the globe gather for COP28—and discussions turn to zero-emissions goals and renewable energy, I would like to respectfully point out that natural gas is clean energy. We must not, in our zeal to achieve our climate goals, dismiss the tremendous good that gas can deliver.

Natural Gas and Gas Products are Clean, Assist Emissions Targets

We've already seen natural gas' positive impact on other regions of the globe. In America, for instance, natural gas is used more than any other fuel for generating both residential and industrial power, as feedstock to produce petrochemicals and fertilizers, and as a fuel of choice for generating electrical power. The U.S. uses roughly one-third of the natural gas produced globally, and demand for it there is growing.

There are good reasons for this, beginning with the fact that natural gas is the cleanest fossil fuel. It emits 50% to 60% less carbon dioxide than coal when burned and emits up to 30% less CO₂ than crude oil.

If natural gas is a good option for

wealthy countries like America, why shouldn't developing nations reap the same benefits?

Gas can provide readily available, clean energy for sub-Saharan African countries while their renewable energy infrastructure and technology are "catching up" to that of wealthy, highly industrialized nations. And when supplies from renewable sources like solar and wind are intermittent (as on cloudy days and when the air is still), gas can fill the gap.

Natural Gas is Needed Domestically to Address Energy Poverty

Wealthy countries should not be attempting to set deadlines for Africa's transition to renewables, but that is happening. Organizations from the World Bank to the European Investment Bank are pressuring Africa to quickly phase out fossil fuels. Even African lobbyists from Kenya are calling for a 30-year phase-out.

African governments and energy industry stakeholders must push back.

Investors who know Africa understand the hardships that accompany the electricity deprivation that more than two-thirds, or over

620 million, sub-Saharan Africans live with. These investors should stay the course rather than distancing themselves from African fossil fuels.

As I stated in my 2019 book, "Billions at Play: The Future of African Energy and Doing Deals," lack of electricity is much more than inconvenient. It deprives people of modern healthcare and exposes them to toxins in their homes from primitive fuels. It prevents progress across economic segments from business to industry to education.

The picture is a dire one and is expected to get worse due to projected population growth. Residents need electricity now, and fossil fuels can give it to them much more quickly, while green energy continues to evolve and become more prevalent.

Natural gas has a critical part to play in the energy mix needed for the continent to meet its current and growing energy needs. Let's make eliminating energy poverty a higher priority than adherence to an arbitrary, one-size-fits-all transition calendar.

Natural Gas Monetization Can Finance Energy Transitions

A just energy transition for Africa requires using our oil and gas resources as part of the process.

The transition to renewables has begun, and there is more to come. In the meantime, however, Africa needs gas-to-electricity production and the monetization of its oil and gas resources. Capital from these resources can progressively fund the infrastructure and development needed to transition to renewables.

Reaching energy transition goals will require a major influx of investment capital into African economies. As one example, for Nigeria to reach the goals of its Energy Transition Plan (ETP) it will require about USD410 billion by 2060.

Overall, Africa has no shortage of natural gas reserves. A recent investment platform statistic totals them at 800 trillion cubic feet, distributed among nearly half of all African nations.

What is urgently needed are strategies to attract investment, enabling this gas to be removed from its underground and undersea reservoirs, transported, and stored. Local content will always play an important part in this process.



Wealthy countries should not be attempting to set deadlines for Africa's transition to renewables, says NJ Ayuk.

Creativity is also needed to provide solutions for inadequate production, transport, and storage infrastructure such as building downsized, modular LNG plants and using compressed natural gas (CNG) that shrinks methane to less than 1% of its normal volume for transport and storage.

In closing, I'll repeat a vital point: Natural gas is increasingly in demand globally. This presents an opportunity that Africa should take advantage of now. We must monetize our natural gas resources for the good of our economies, the health of our residents, and to grow green energy

initiatives at a pace that is good for Africa. This is the message I'll be sharing during COP28 and well into the future.

*NJ Ayuk is Executive Chairman of the African Energy Chamber

All Hands On Deck As The Lobito Corridor Project Takes Shape

By Prince Kurupati

Major infrastructural investment drives and initiatives on the African continent have come from the East. This is largely necessitated by China's Road and Belt Initiative (RBI) which at its height in 2015 poured \$125 billion into Africa's infrastructural and energy investment initiatives. Economic slowdown post-pandemic in the East coupled with the risk of debt distress in various African countries has however led China to stop funding. This has in turn led the West to capitalise by ushering its own soft power strategy in Africa through investing in major infrastructural projects – a case in point being the Lobito Corridor Project.

At the start of the year, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and two southern African nations Zambia and Angola came together to



The Lobito Corridor Project is slowly but steadily taking share with more partners coming on board. Photo courtesy.

give a new lease of life to the historical Benguela Railway. The railway connects the resource-rich DRC to the port of Lobito in Angola. At its peak, the Benguela Railway was largely favoured as it was a direct route to

the port and made transportation of goods easier as it bypassed road congestion.

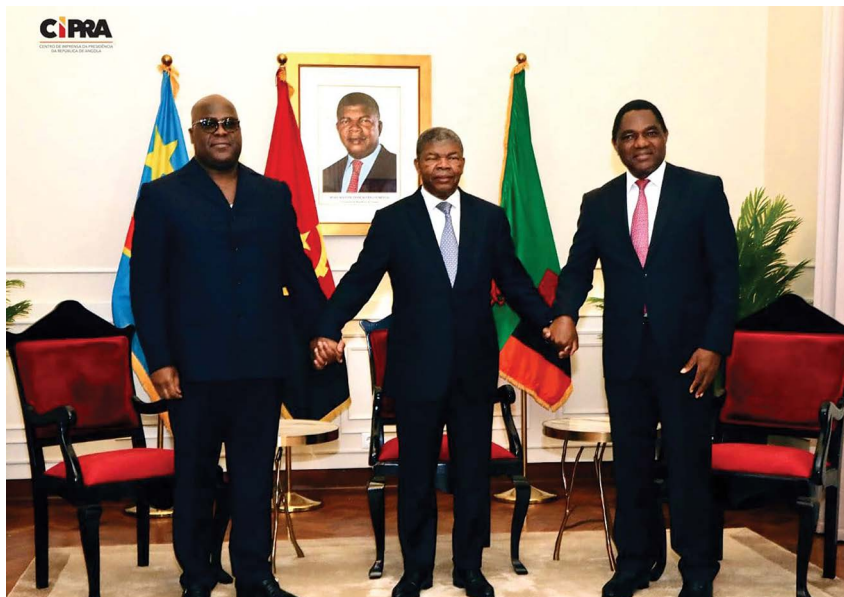
On 27 January 2023, they put pen to paper and signed the "Lobito Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation

Agency (LCTTFA) Agreement". The LCTTFA Agreement among other things allowed the countries to come up with harmonised corridor laws, regulations, and policies.

The three countries during the

G20 Summit held in India later in the year pitched their idea on the margins of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) event. The pitch won the hearts of the European Union and the United States which proceeded to sign a memorandum of understanding with the three countries to explore the idea further. Of course, this was done as part of the EU and the US' offensive on the African continent to capitalise on China's dwindling influence.

In a joint statement released soon after the EU, the US and the three African countries entered into an agreement, the EU and the US said, "We are excited to join forces to generate economic benefits with our partners in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia". The statement went further stating that the partnership will unlock the "enormous potential of this region (southern Africa)," owing to the critical infrastructure upgrades which will be implemented as part of the Lobito Corridor Project. Also joining forces with the three African countries, the EU and the US to ensure that the project comes to fruition is the African Development Bank which has committed to raise \$1.6 billion in financing in addition to contributing \$500 million itself as well as the Africa Finance Corp (AFC) which was assigned as the overall project developer. AFC president and CEO Mr Samaila Zubairu said "AFC is committed to collaborating with all parties as lead project developer on the expansion of the Lobito Corridor, a signature initiative of the Biden administration's PGI and the EU's Global Gateway Initiative... AFC will leverage its expertise in derisking projects and mobilising financing at scale to ensure the successful implementation of this vital initiative. We will do so while meeting the expectations of our private shareholders and our government



Leaders of D.R Congo, Angola, and Zambia are buoyed by the promise of the Lobito Corridor Project.

partners".

Other partners also involved in the Lobito Corridor Project are Trafigura Pte Ltd, a market leader in the global commodities industry, Mota-Engil Engenharia e Construção Africa SA, an international construction and infrastructure management company and Vecturis SA, an independent rail operator. These three are constituent members of the Lobito Atlantic Railway consortium which received a 30-year concession of railway services and support logistics of the Lobito Corridor.

All the partners involved in the Lobito Corridor Project agreed that the first six months starting at the end of this year will be reserved for feasibility studies. The real work will commence afterwards. The real work is indeed there as Trafigura reports that "Realising the full potential of the railway will require significant investment by the consortium. This will include securing 1,555 wagons and 35 locomotives for the Angolan side of the corridor alone... Overall, the consortium plans to invest USD455 million in Angola and up to USD100 million in the DRC".

Despite this, Helaina Matza who is U.S. President Joe Biden's

acting special coordinator for the administration's Partnership on Global Infrastructure Investment assured all stakeholders that they will stick to all the stipulated guidelines and timelines hence all the work will be complete in 5 years.

"The goal is really to stay as close to that timeline as possible, not only for our partners but for us also... It's quite important for us to move as fast as we can," Matza said. She concluded by saying the success of the Lobito Corridor Project will mean a lot for the U.S. as it "represents the most significant transport infrastructure that the U.S. has helped develop on the African continent in a generation".

Once complete, the Lobito Railway will run across Angola for almost 1,300km and continues for another 400km into DRC linking to Kolwezi, the heart of the Copperbelt. The Lobito Railway in DRC will also be connected to the extensive rail network operated by the National Railway Society of the Congo (SNCC).

All partners are set to benefit from the completion of the project. The Lobito Corridor will enhance the trade and export opportunities for Angola, DRC and Zambia. In addition, it will ensure that the movement of goods

and people among the three countries will be smoother, easier and faster.

Angolan President Joao Manuel Goncalves Lourenco while commenting on the Lobito Corridor Project and its potential benefits to his country and the entire region said, "The Lobito Corridor which links Angola to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and whose concession we have given today provides for its extension to Zambia, will certainly boost intra African exports which currently account for only 14% of the total exports for the rest of the world. Figures like this show us the

importance and necessity of putting our infrastructure at the service of the economic and social development of our countries and our continent. And we are doing so with vision, purpose and clearly defined objectives".

The EU and US will also benefit from faster trading routes with the southern African region, the region which has abundant resources of rare earth minerals needed in the present day. Data from the International Energy Agency (IEA) say that the total demand for copper and rare earth metals will increase by 40 per cent, nickel and cobalt by 60-70 per cent and lithium by almost 90 per cent. Having an easy trading route with southern Africa which produces all these products will thus prove to be a masterstroke decision for the West.

Matza said that even though the project is just about to take shape, proposals for expansion are already in place. She said efforts are already underway in Zambia to find opportunities to connect feeder roads to the railway that would benefit both agricultural and mining businesses. Also, further proposals to expand the Lobito Corridor across the continent to Tanzania and ultimately, the Indian Ocean are being discussed. —

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Biden Administration Honours Angelle Kwemo With Lifetime Achievement

By Joseph Bessong

Founder Believe in Africa Foundation, Business Woman, Philanthropist, Author, Speaker, President & CEO of the Astrategik Group Angelle Kwemo was recently honored by the Biden Administration with a Lifetime Achievement Award. The Award was bestowed to Angelle Kwemo in Washington, DC at an elegant gala to mark the 10th anniversary of the Caribbean African Faith-based Leadership.

"With grateful recognition AmeriCorps and the Office of the President of the United States Honors Angelle Kwemo with the President's Lifetime Achievement Award for their lifelong commitment to building a stronger nation through volunteer service," read the Award personally signed by President by President Joe Biden.

"By sharing your time and passion, you are helping discover and deliver solutions to the challenges we face, -solutions that we need now more than ever. We are living in a moment that calls for hope and light and love. Hope for our futures, light to see our way forward, and love for one another. Through your service, you are providing all three," President Biden says in the citation commending Kwemo.

Presenting the award, Rev Dr Agorom C. Dike, President And CEO of the Caribbean and Africa Faith based Leadership Conference, stated that Angelle Kwemo was the first African born female to receive such recognition, in her capacity as global influencer, humanitarian and advocate for social justice. "She is honored in recognition of her outstanding outreach service to community and other initiatives that foster hope and healing within the US and beyond".



A big award in recognition of decades of services for Angelle Kwemo

"I'm immensely grateful and humbled by this recognition. This award serves as a reminder of the responsibility placed open us in today's global realignment. It is my hope that many African leaders will place the well being of our beloved continent at the center of their day-to-day activities. May this honor inspire and encourage all of us as we strive to make an even greater impact in our

generation," stated Angelle Kwemo

Angelle Kwemo is an Africa Diaspora Champion. As a Capitol Hill veteran, she has been a strong advocate of a stronger role for the African diaspora in US - Africa relations drafting the H.R 656 African Investment and Diaspora Act introduced by Former Rep Bobby Rush (<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/hr656>) and now enacted by

President Biden executive order establishing the Advisory Council on Africa Diaspora Engagement (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/12/13/executive-order-on-establishing-the-presidents-advisory-council-on-african-diaspora-engagement-in-the-united-states/>)

Angelle Kwemo was one of the prominent faces during the maiden US-African Leaders Summit in Washington, DC in 2014 and has been active in forging closer business ties between the USA and Africa. Through Believe in Africa Foundation, she has been supportive of the creative industry, empowering youth, and women throughout Africa.

As a staunch advocate of trade and firm believer in the African Continental Free Trade Area, Angelle has been super active in most of the key trade related trade events in 2023. In June, she was in Morocco for the Bloomberg New Economy Gateway Africa Forum. She was present at the US-Africa Business Summit organized by the Corporate Council on Africa in Botswana. She was in Ghana for the 30th anniversary of Afreximbank and recently participated at Panel discussions at the Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF2023 in Cairo Egypt. Alongside other prominent African diaspora leaders, Angelle shared reflections on the

importance of cultural diplomacy at the IATF.

According to the leaders in the diaspora like Kadiatou Traore, "this prestigious recognition is a true testament to her unwavering dedication and remarkable contributions to the African diaspora community in Washington, DC. Her passion for volunteer work and your commitment to making a positive

impact have not gone unnoticed. Her tireless efforts have not only inspired those around her, but they have also made a profound difference in the lives of many. Her leadership and involvement have been exemplary, and this award is a well-deserved acknowledgment of her outstanding work”.

Over the past ten years, CAFBLC has engaged in numerous domestic and international initiatives to build bridges with faith-based organizations, governments, and bilateral organizations to foster access and support for missions and services to our constituency. It is committed to advocacy for institutions and individuals victimized by religious persecution, health disparities, hunger, civilian onslaught, and other human rights violations. CAFBLC facilitates connections with the White House Faith-Based Cabinet Offices, the Office of Public Engagement, US Congressional Representatives, African and Caribbean Embassies, the World Bank, and the IMF Faith-Engagement Division to create opportunities for economic development, peace, religious freedom, youth advancement, and unbiased access to good healthcare and development priorities to address



Angelle shared reflections on the importance of cultural diplomacy at the recent IATF in Cairo, Egypt

existing needs and emerging threats to safety and security, physical and mental health challenges.

Believe In Africa (BIA) that Angelle founded, and leads is an African diaspora-led not for profit

organization founded by former U.S. congressional staffers and African diaspora leaders in the U.S., educate policy makers and the public about African economic growth and highlight the continent's gradual

rise in the global community. The Organization will mark ten years of operations in 2024 , and plans are underway for some high profile events to celebrate the milestone.



Angelle Kwemo has been a leading advocate for trade in Africa , and stronger cooperative ties between the USA and Africa



By sharing your time and passion, you are helping discover and deliver solutions to the challenges we face, President Biden said in the award.

Africa's New Friend on the Block

By Akol Dok*



Boosting trade and promoting stability were part of discussions at the first Saudi-African Summit. Photo courtesy.

Africa is becoming a key player in geopolitics. The United States, Russia, and China held events courting African leaders in the past couple of years. Saudi Arabia became the latest country when it hosted the Saudi-Africa Summit in Riyadh. Prime Minister of India Modi recently successfully pushed for the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20.

Who is this new friend on the block, and what can Africa benefit from Saudi Arabia? What can Saudi Arabia benefit from Africa?

The leadership of crowned Prince Mohammed bin Salman has sought to expand the Saudi sphere of influence beyond the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has shifted across the Red Sea to cement its influence in the African continent.

Saudia Arabia has a competitive advantage. According to the International Household Survey Network, 44% of Africans are Muslim.

African Muslims travel to Mecca for the annual pilgrimage. This religious aspect makes Saudia a reliable and trustworthy partner in the eyes of many African Muslims.

Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Somalia, and Mauritania are members of the African Union and the Arab League. Saudi Arabia has the biggest economy in the Arab League, and it strongly influences the bloc. Africa isn't new to Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabia isn't unique to Africa.

The Arab League and Islam are an entryway for Saudia into the African continent. Saudia Arabia has a strong geopolitical position and strong financial and economic potential. Saudia Arabia has a \$600 billion sovereign wealth fund and a hunger for economic diversification. Africa is the perfect investment hotspot for the Kingdom.

According to the Africa Development Bank, just 53 percent

of roads on the continent are paved, isolating people from access to essential services, including healthcare, education, trade hubs and economic opportunities".

This infrastructure investment gap allows Saudia Arabia to invest in African development and reap the benefits. During the Saudia-Africa Summit, the Kingdom signed investment agreements with Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, Senegal, Chad, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. The Kingdom prioritizes investment in industry and agriculture and seeks to promote value addition.

African countries are nonaligned and must work with countries that serve their political and economic interest. Economically, if Saudia Arabia provides finances and investment for Africa's development, that will have a positive impact.

Politically, many African countries have been shunned by the West and seek to rekindle their relationship

with the United States and the West. Saudi Arabia has a strong relationship with the United States and can mediate positive relations between the US and African countries. This could be crucial for geopolitics.

Africa's new friend on the block has the potential to change geo-politics. Saudi Arabia can benefit Africa politically and economically.

*Akol Dok is the Managing Partner of Orus Consulting Limited, a business advisory and public relations firm based in East Africa. He is a political and economic analyst featured on CNBC Africa, CGTN Africa, Radio Miraya, RT International, Yahoo News, and The Nation. He hosts the Akol Dok Show, a weekly show discussing African political and economic affairs. He is very vocal about the potential of Africa playing a role on the global stage.



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Tough Austerity Measures for Malawi

By Prince Kurupati

When Lazarus Chakwera ascended to the presidency in Malawi in 2020, renewed hope for a brighter future engulfed the whole nation. For the first time since independence, Malawi had elected a man who above all things put God first (how he described himself). President Chakwera as he assumed office, said that his presidency was an assignment from God to make all things right in the country. The citizens therefore were filled with joy and hope that they had elected a president who would rightfully save and serve the nation without putting his interests first. There was also a belief that since the nation was now being led by a 'morally upright' leader, all the country's problems would quickly be addressed in the best possible way hence all political and socio-economic challenges would soon be a thing of the past.

The renewed hope that the citizens had at the start however began to dissipate with each passing day during Chakwera's reign. It became evident that the more things changed, the more they remained the same. While the general citizens wailed in pain at the deteriorating standards of living, the first real indicator that everything was not alright came in May 2022 when the Malawi central bank devalued the local kwacha. The devaluation eroded the incomes of most Malawians and resulted in an upward spiral of prices for basic commodities and rates of both water and electricity tariffs.

Compounding matters for Malawi was the slow pace at which the country recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic, the effects of Cyclone Freddy which claimed more than 1,000 lives, displaced thousands more and destroyed infrastructure and property worth millions as well as the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War. The effects of the latter have been largely felt as the war destroyed the global supply chain of key commodities such as wheat.



Chakwera's austerity measures are just a PR stunt, says parliamentary opposition leader Kondwani Nunkhumwa.

The news that Malawi had been granted credit facilities by the Bretton Woods institutions did little to avert the deteriorating economy. Rather, things have been accelerating towards an economic implosion as the central government for the second time in less than two years devalued the local kwacha currency exchange rate to the dollar by 30%.

As relayed by the former Malawian President Arthur Peter Mutharika who in a heated press conference castigated Chakwera, the devaluation has thus necessitated a sharp rise in prices while in turn, eroding the incomes of Malawians. The price of a «50kg bag of maize has increased from Mk7,500.00 in 2020 to Mk50,000. 00. As a 50kg bag of fertilizer is now Mk110,000.00 from Mk17,000.00 from 2020... petrol is now selling at MK2,530.00 from as little as Mk690.00 in 2020.» The skyrocketing prices have also transcended to rates. Electricity rates have skyrocketed by 44% while water boards are joining the bandwagon as they have expressed interest to follow suit. Transport fares for kabaza, and

minibuses have all gone up.

For long, despite the obvious signs that Malawi's economy was on a downward spiral, President Chakwera chose to prioritize seeking foreign assistance both aid and investment as the only feasible solution to the country's problems. It was only after intense pressure had been applied by both general citizens via nationwide protests and industry as well as political leaders via the media that President Chakwera sought solutions within the country.

President Chakwera's internal solutions entail implementing tough austerity measures. The measures are largely aimed at top government administrators. Addressing the nation live via the state broadcaster, President Chakwera said «In making those painful adjustments, I myself have to lead by example... This is why effective immediately, all my international trips between now and the end of the fiscal year, beginning with my trip to COP28 at the end of this month, are cancelled. By extension, I am putting a freeze on all public-funded international trips

for all public officers at all levels, including those in parastatals, until the end of the financial year in March.» He added by saying that «Any travel deemed absolutely necessary by anyone during that period must be submitted to my office for my personal authorization.»

Furthermore, President Chakwera ordered that «all fuel entitlements for cabinet ministers, principal secretaries, directors and all members of senior management of Public Institutions should be cut in half with immediate effect.»

For the working population, President Chakwera ordered a lowering of income tax on individuals, so that workers whose incomes have lost value are helped with a "lower tax burden". Moreover, he also directed the minister of finance to include provisions for a reasonable wage increase for all civil servants in the midyear budget review.

The President also said that the cordial working relations between the country and Bretton Woods institutions will continue to pay dividends in the next four years as the

country is set to receive an injection of \$174 million. Africanews reports that «With the \$174m injection came a US\$60m Trade Finance Facility, US\$217m and US\$250m towards Agricultural Commercialization Project from the World Bank. As well as US\$70m & US\$30m budget support from the European Union and the AfDB Group respectively.»

As noble as the austerity measures seem, it's to be seen if they will be strictly implemented. At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, Malawi implemented more of the same

austerity measures, but their success was limited as they were loosely enforced.

Perhaps cognizant of the failures of the past, many economic analysts in the country expressed scepticism at the likelihood of success of the austerity measures. Analyst Victor Chipofya speaking during a local show on radio said, «The country needs to build industries that would be able to export commodities to be able to have foreign currency. Nothing like that came out from the president.»

Political analyst George Phiri said

the success of the austerity measures is not guaranteed because they are largely urban-centred when 80% of the Malawian population lives in rural areas. «The impact of devaluation has affected everyone across the board, whether he is the president or he is an ordinary Malawian in the rural and is not considered for the beneficiary of the [farm input] subsidy... What happened with those?»

The leader of the opposition in the Malawi Parliament Kondwani Nunkhumwa said Chakwera's austerity measures announcement is

just a PR stunt. He said besides the upcoming COP28 Summit in Dubai later this month, there isn't any other major international event up to the end of the year. As such, by saying that he won't travel due to the austerity measures, he is just taking the nation for a ride. «He knows that there is almost no international meeting between December and February. Why can't he say he has cancelled all international trips between now and 2025?» Nankhumwa queried.

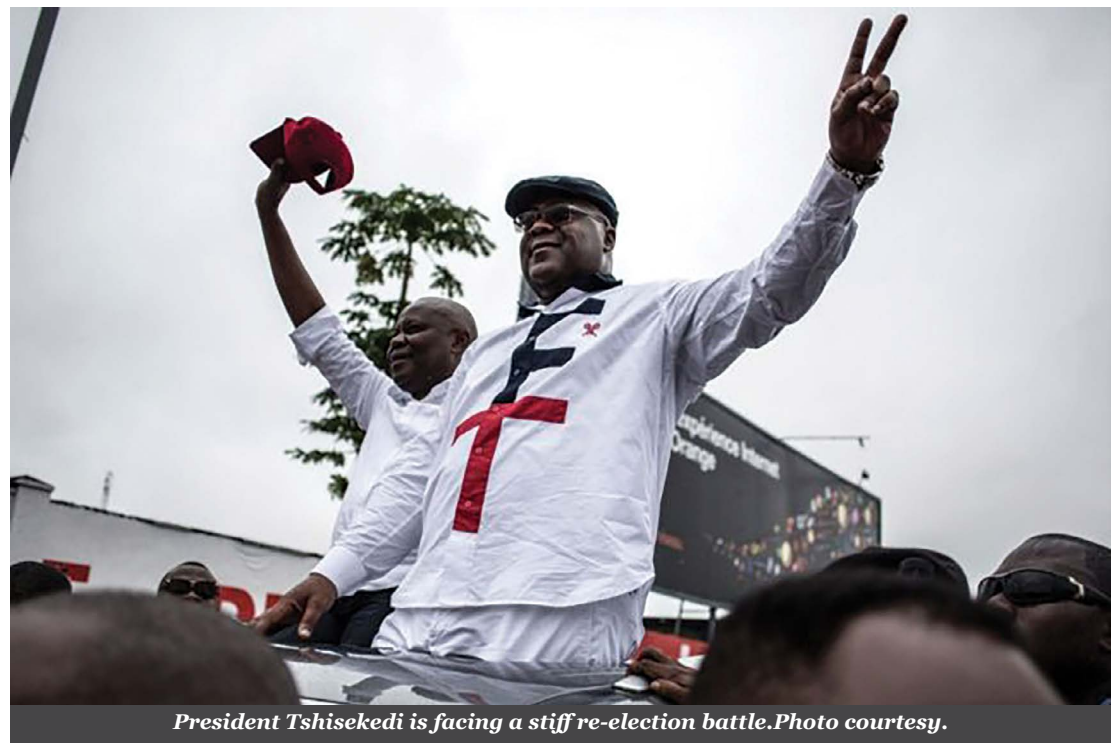
DR Congo: Tshisekedi, Katumbi Battle Shaping Up Presidential Race.

By Jean d'Amour Mugabo

With one-month long campaigns now in full swing for the December 20 presidential and parliamentary elections, major contenders are flexing their weight and analysts and pundits hard at work with predictions on who will emerge as the next leader of the vast central African mineral-rich country.

Two heavyweights top the list: Félix-Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, the outgoing president and son of the most famous long-time opposition leader to Mobutu Sese Seko's rule, late Etienne Tshisekedi, and Moïse Katumbi Chapwe, the wealthy businessman and former Governor of Katanga province from 2007 to 2015. Former Member of Parliament Martin Fayulu remains another strong contender. Another notable candidate is the Nobel Peace Prize-winning gynaecologist Denis Mukwege who founded the Panzi hospital and foundation in the war-torn eastern DRC to particularly help rape victims. However, the latter two are nowhere close to the former two in terms of influence, according to analysts.

«There are many factors making Tshisekedi the favourite winner. As a principle looking at the history especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, it's rare for the incumbent president to lose elections. The DRC one-



President Tshisekedi is facing a stiff re-election battle. Photo courtesy.

round vote system also favours the incumbent at the time opposition is divided and represented by many candidates. The candidate who wins most votes, even if it's 18% or 15%, will be declared president," says a Kigali-based journalist and political analyst Jean Louis Kagahe who holds Congolese and Rwanda citizenship.

«On the other hand, Moïse Katumbi is a fierce challenger to Tshisekedi who may defeat him if the elections are held in transparency, thanks to his

popularity in DRC. I lived in Katanga for 10 years and I have witnessed the notable transformation that Katumbi introduced as a governor especially in Lubumbashi, the capital city of the province. He has earned fame as chief of TP Mazembe, the most successful football club in the country and has extensive influence as a businessman who is among the richest in the DRC," says Mr Kagahe, 61, who grew up and did all his studies to the Bachelor's degree in DRC. Kagahe also served as

a high school teacher and participated in DRC politics as the deputy leader of then ruling MPR political party at Lubumbashi University in Katanga province.

«Katumbi gained more strength when three opposition candidates including former Prime Minister Matata Ponyo decided to rally behind him at the beginning of campaigns," he adds. The two others are Seth Kikuni and Franck Diongo.

About Martin Fayulu who was

the most popular in 2018 elections when Joseph Kabila relinquished power following the international pressure, Kagahe says Fayulu has lost popularity in favour of Tshisekedi who was then new in the DRC politics and Katumbi who was barred from contesting. Fayulu is widely viewed as the legitimate winner of the DRC's 2018 presidential polls and challenged the results in the Constitutional Court which confirmed Tshisekedi's victory. He often insists in his campaigns that Tshisekedi connived with his predecessor Joseph Kabila in rigging the elections, claiming that he was the rightful winner.

M23 War Casts Doubt on Peaceful Elections

"I first of all laud Tshisekedi for honouring the elections calendar despite the country's insecurities in Bandundu but especially in the eastern DRC whose two territories of Masisi and Rutshuru have declared that they won't vote; however, it's not new because some parts of Ituri province did not vote in 2018 because of the Ebola epidemic," he says.

Home to hundreds of armed groups, eastern DRC has been wrecked by wars for the last 30 years and intense fighting resumed at the beginning of October between the M23 rebel group and pro-government militias widely known as Wazalendo.

Kagahe, who grew up in Masisi and Rutshuru where M23 has occupied vast swathes of territory for two years, says he fears M23 may accelerate the war on Goma, the capital city of North Kivu, in order to sabotage the elections as revenge against Kinshasa government which has rejected talks with the group.

"I fear that M23 may capture more territories including Goma city when the East



Moise Katumbi is emerging as the most formidable opposition challenger in the elections.

African Community Regional Forces (EACRF) withdraw when their contract expires on December 8 as Kinshasa government ordered them recently, resorting to welcoming SADC forces which I doubt will have established themselves in buffer zones hitherto controlled by EACRF. You know the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) present in the DRC since 1999 has also recently announced it signed the plan with Kinshasa to withdraw its 14,000 peacekeepers in the near future; all of this may lead to the increase of

insecurity," Kagahe said.

Observation Mission Fears to Deploy

The European Union has cancelled its election observation mission in the DRC, announcing that its team of 42 electoral experts who had arrived in the DRC had been unable to "deploy across the country for security" reasons that rendered their mission «impossible».

«Due to technical constraints beyond the EU's control, we are forced to cancel the election

observation mission,» said European Union diplomatic service spokeswoman Nabila Massrali in a statement released on November 29.

«The EU encourages the DRC authorities and all stakeholders to continue their efforts to ensure that Congolese people can fully exercise their legitimate political and civil rights in the forthcoming elections,» said the spokeswoman as quoted in the statement, adding the EU was examining other options with the Congolese authorities, including the possibility of maintaining a mission of electoral experts to observe the electoral process from the capital, Kinshasa.

On the same day, the DRC government released a statement noting the EU's decision to cancel its electoral observation mission, regretting the decision which occurred at a time when discussions were being held with European Union experts on the practical arrangements for its deployment.

"The government is committed to ensuring that the forthcoming elections are held in a transparent, inclusive and free manner. To this end, it remains open to any proposal likely to help achieve this objective. It remains available to welcome Observer Missions wishing to monitor these elections in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Democratic Republic of Congo," reads part of the statement.

Missions from the African Union, the Carter Centre and the South African Development Community (SADC) are expected to observe the elections.

Nearly 44 million voters out of a population of around 100 million are expected to take part in the polls in which 23 presidential candidates remain in the race.



Tshisekedi deserves credit for respecting the electoral calendar despite security challenges around the country, says Jean Louis Kagahe.

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Ghana-A Daunting Task For VP Bawumia in 2024

By Maxwell Nkansah

Based on political risk and political economics research at IMANI, current VP Mahamudu Bawumia would be denied a coronation, contrary to the interests of the party elites and gatekeepers since he has lost some of his luster among the grassroots. The preliminary primary results were in, there comes an updated impression of how the 2024 elections are likely to play out if nothing changes radically.

Except for 2000, which was a very exceptional election (the nation had never previously witnessed a transfer of power via the ballot box), no candidate in Ghanaian history has gone on to win the general elections if they received less than 85% of the vote in internal primaries.

If a candidate received less than 64% of the vote in the internal primary, they have never gone on to win the general elections. Compared to his 68% triumph in the Super-Delegate pre-primaries, the Veep's predicted 61.5% win in the primaries was less. This supports the hypothesis that he excites the elites more than the grassroots.

The Veep's outcomes come despite the withdrawal of one of his primary competitors. If this opponent had remained, there's a good chance that his vote total would have fallen into the low fifty. This is because the



A complex equation for Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia as he seeks to succeed President Akufo Addo .Photo courtesy.

rival's supporters don't have a lot of crossover with the supporters of the MP and eccentric businessman who finished second in the most recent primary.

The primary runner-up hoping to sabotage Veep's campaign in the general elections in any manner is the largest danger for the ruling NPP to handle following the polls. The competitor who withdrew is preparing to run as an independent in 2024.

The opposition will automatically win if he receives just 2% of the vote. It's a high bar, though. In contrast, the runner-up, with his «Ross Perot» level of disruptive power, would easily win more than 10% of the national vote in the improbable event that he decides to run as an independent. To stop this, the governing party will move heaven and earth.

Even though the opposition party benefits greatly from the Veep's performance in the primaries and the government's decline in popularity as a result of the economic crisis, the ruling NPP still has a chance to win the presidency by a narrow margin (despite losing their slim parliamentary technical majority) if none of the scenarios in point 5 come to pass. This is because the Veep is injecting a «Northern» and «Muslim» dynamic to upset Ghana's electoral balance. The opposition faces a slim loss in the presidential polls if they do not respond with their own «Akan heartland» dynamic.

The Party officials, who have gone to great lengths to make

the Vice President's elevation to the «flagbearer» post appear to have the support of Ghana's oldest political party on all fronts, are extremely distressed over his non-coronation. No presidential candidate since the restoration of democracy in 1992 has been victorious in the general elections without first winning their party's primary by a wide margin.

For example, six months ago, the opposition leader who served as both president and vice president won almost 99% of the vote in the NDC primary.

Following the same pattern, the current president received over 95% of the vote in the 2014 primaries, which paved the path for his election.

A presidential candidate's chances of winning the ensuing national elections have been practically nonexistent on the few occasions when they have won by less than 85% in their own party's primaries (the 2000 elections being a notable exception), such as in the NDC's 2002 and 2006 primaries or the NPP's 2007 and 2010 primaries. Based on the available data, it appears that leading a party to victory in the general elections in Ghana necessitates a candidate to



As Vice President Bawumia championed some of the key reforms in the two terms of President Akufo Addo.

organize a broad and unambiguous endorsement, akin to a coronation.

THE MAGIC RISE

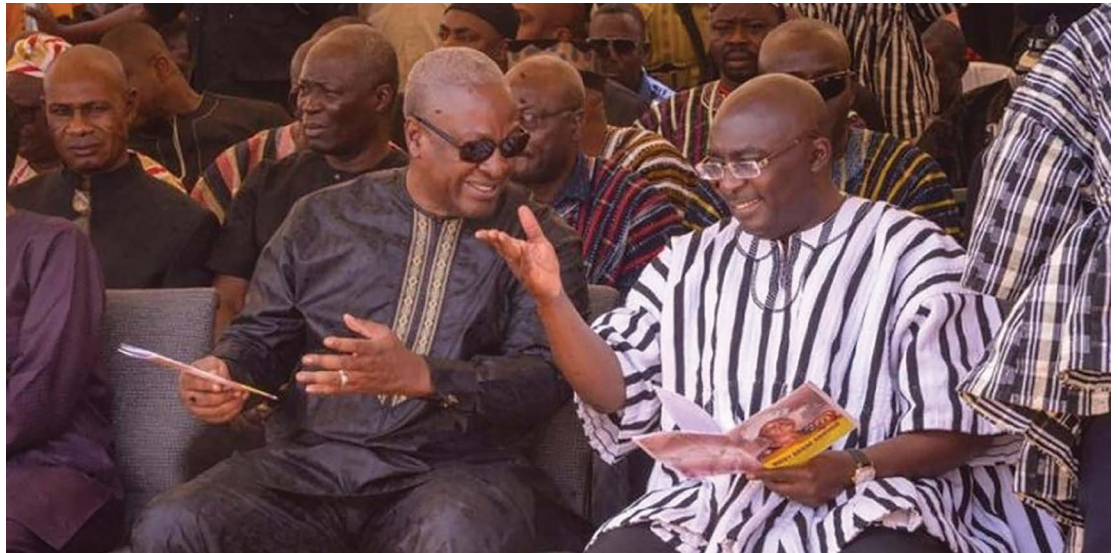
The life of the current Veep in politics has been idyllic. A few months before the 2008 general election, he was plucked from relative obscurity, much like other Veeps before him, from the technocratic halls of the Bank of Ghana to join the NPP presidential ticket. He had a lot to prove. Since then, the 60-year-old lawmaker has shown himself by being the most devoted supporter of the ruling NPP's distinctive, slogan-heavy public relations strategy.

In a party dominated by Southern, mostly Akan, Christians, his flawless academic record and Northern ethnic and Islamic religious roots gave his ascension a certain kind of exotic fairy-tale flourish. His rise to prominence inside the party was so fast that, at one point, major names lined up to support the story of his certain coronation. Subsequently, Ghana's economy started to decline, culminating in a disastrous situation that necessitated an immediate IMF rescue and the country's insolvency.

The Veep's economic qualifications, which helped him gain favor with the party's upper echelons during the party's opposition period and enabled him to effectively criticize the economic policies of the ruling administration, have now also proved to be his downfall. Suddenly, his lack of a solid foundation in the ruling party is a problem once more. His opponents are suddenly questioning the party's grassroots members if they understand the hype around his Oxford economics degree and the magnificent lectures that shaped his ascent. It appears that many people have suddenly lost faith in the big story explaining Veep's uniqueness.

A MAVERICK PARTY-POOPER

This is undoubtedly the reason that the most formidable opponent facing the Veep in the primaries is a seasoned MP from the ruling party and a maverick businessman who claims to employ 7,000 people, despite never having bothered to finish his bachelor's degree from a



Former President John Mahama and current VP Bawumia at a public event. Both men will be front runners in the 2024 elections. Photo courtesy.

suburban New York institution.

Party bosses have been rattled by the rival's shoot-from-the-hip politics and eccentric style of criticizing the government's record despite this being an internal election. They have been careful to refute his accusations of their favoritism towards the Veep, but they still need to send out as strong a hint as possible that the Party will be accused of being biased towards the predominantly Akan Christian South if they fail to elect the first Muslim and Northerner as their presidential candidate.

THE PRIMACY OF IDENTITY POLITICS

The Veep is predicted to win the national polls with a sizable advantage, but far less than the amount that successful contenders have garnered in their primaries. How does this affect his prospects of winning the general election in 2024?

If the 2024 elections were to be contested mainly based on policy performance, the opposition NDC would have easily prevailed due to the partial mobilization of the ruling party's base, as evidenced by the candidate's predicted outcome in the primary. However, as is the case with elections worldwide, policy is rarely the only determining element, and identity politics is a significant concern.

The NPP's historical strength in the southern and middle-belt Akan

areas means that should the Veep emerge victorious in the primaries as expected, he will have far more leeway in addressing identity-related issues than the opposition candidate, a Christian from the north, in the areas with a majority of Muslims and the geographical north. The NDC advises extreme caution in how they approach campaigning in the North and the Muslim-dominated «Zongos» for fear of upsetting the densely populated Akan areas. This is because the party has a somewhat tense relationship with supporters in the Akan heartland.

No matter how hard his campaign team tries to court the Islamic and Northern constituencies, the Veep is not likely to lose many Akan and Christian voters because ethnic alliances and allegiances in Ghana typically radiate through the political parties to envelop the candidates rather than the other way around (very different from the case in Kenya and Nigeria in that sense). This allows them to be more daring and imaginative.

The only way the opposition can combat this new dynamic is to devise a plan of their own to shake the ruling party's Akan core.

After more thought, it is evident that more would be needed in terms of overall campaign machinery and message that would be effective in addressing the weak points in the Akan meta-identity. Remember that

the opposition must narrow this substantial deficit before they can cross the line. Three years ago, the governing party won the presidential contest by a margin of 500,000 votes.

A contentious claim is that the «Akan Heartland» relates more to the areas of the Akan-dominated geography with consistent voting patterns than it does to all of the Akan regions. Coastal towns that are heavily urbanized, such as Cape Coast or Mankessim, are less receptive to the above-discussed strategies since they tend to fluctuate with the national mood.

There is indeed a great deal of confidence among the opposition to win the next elections. Their conviction stems from their perception that there are very significant electoral hazards associated with the Veep. Some claim that a sizable portion of evangelical Christians who fall into the swing voter group may object to supporting a Muslim candidate (Ghana has never had a president who is openly a Muslim). Some claim that the Veep will be ready material for caustic satirists come election season since he is so intricately linked to the current policy disarray.

The opposition has a great deal of confidence in winning the upcoming elections. Their conviction stems from their perception of the Veep as carrying many significant electoral dangers. According to some, a sizable portion of evangelical Christians who

fall into the swing voter group may be reluctant to support a Muslim candidate because there has never been a publicly acknowledged Muslim president of Ghana. Some claim that the Prime Minister is so intricately linked to the recent policy disarray that when campaign season begins, he will be ready material for caustic satirists.

Veep has indeed made a strong case for himself as a digital advocate in recent years, and some claim that this «tilt» has now turned into a hard pivot as the economy has collapsed.

The effects of digitization are generally good but not spectacular. Hardcore policy aficionados, such as some of the readers of these pages, however, find fault with Veep's handling of the so-called digitalization agenda on many counts. Let's examine some of the most well-known flagships of digitalization.

DIGITAL ADDRESSING

Ghana has paid millions of dollars to a private app developer to reskin an existing digital application into a national geotagging platform.

This is true even if the aforementioned method only makes use of free and open-source mapping tools from the main geolocation platforms. The Veep and his group didn't discover this for years. Rather than implementing a comprehensive solution, he precipitously informed the nation three years prior that Google had consented to «upload» Ghana's mapping system onto its platform. However, at the time, this was utterly unnecessary, since Google already provided the Plus Codes system, which replicated all the features that Ghana's quaint customization ineffectively carried out. Nothing of the kind occurred.

If Ghana had engaged in more sincere engagement with the IT community, money might have been saved and resources could have been directed toward greater value-adding geolocation integration into service delivery rather than the replication

of outdated geotagging systems. Instead of using the national system, all internet platforms now servicing Ghana just use Google or other foreign digital geolocation technologies.

NATIONAL ID

It is not a novel idea that national identity may serve as a vital basis for the provision of public services. The World Bank's 2014 ID4D program expands upon decades of policy awareness; some European countries introduced national IDs in 1938 and later, but their momentum stalled due to civil rights concerns. For example, the Ivorian national ID card program has been operational since 2001.

Unquestionably, since the country's attempts to implement a national ID system started in 2003, Ghanaian enrolment has never been faster or deeper thanks to Veep's patronage of the Ghana Card initiative. More people in Ghana than ever before own a safe form of identification that works with other online services.

However, the excessive profiteering approach taken by this institution has meant that much of the good it could have done has been lost. The system as it is now essentially serving as a cash cow for its innovative private sector «partners,» who are effective controllers and owners of the underlying technical infrastructure rather than just contractors.

When the nation was essentially the target of extortion during the most recent huge voter registration drive, things reached a breaking point. Millions of dollars were required by the private contractors before the nation agreed to supply enough voter cards for first-time voters. Ultimately, it was necessary to give up on the idea of using the Ghana Card exclusively. After the exercise, it was discovered that more than 60% of young voters who were signing up for the first time lacked a Ghana Card. Exorbitant costs have hindered adequate coverage, even though the program is more than 40 times more expensive per person than India's well-acclaimed

model.

Similarly, plans to integrate government services tightly have not materialized since doing so necessitates paying private contractors millions of dollars for basic database connectivity, which is a need for every state agency involved.

The private companies behind the Ghana Card are more interested in selling hardware terminals for card validation to financial institutions than they are in delivering a low-cost KYC mechanism over the internet to support the digital economy, undermining the government's promises of open banking. The Ghana Card was the only document needed for SIM card registration, however, telecom operators were unable to authenticate the cards instantly because of the Ministry of Communications' strong opposition to a similar attempt to force these terminals on telecom agents. The National Identification Authority's letters, which criticized the Ministry's strategy and insisted on selling these products and services, confused the nation.

Confusion may have peaked when an attempt to circumvent the Ghanaian passport and incorporate the nation's primary e-passport system into the Ghana Card led to absurd confrontations with the international organization in charge of matters, ICAO. Promises to force all of ECOWAS to adopt Ghana's e-Passport functionality model ultimately failed since, very plainly, the majority of nations would rather follow the pace and approach set by the ICAO. This is the result of a project that is purported to be for the benefit of the public but is driven mostly by profit.

AND A RAFT OF OTHERS

During the peak of his career as a digital champion, the Veep would constantly introduce new «transformative» digital projects every day. Upon closely examining the results of the majority of these

initiatives, some extremely depressing findings emerge.

Ghana's Auditor General has released harsh reports detailing a decline in performance, including rising default rates, across activities like its PINCO, poultry, and tricycle-acquisition projects since MASLOC, one of the government's small business lending programs, was digitalized in 2020 to great fanfare as part of the Veep-led digitalization agenda, ostensibly to eliminate inefficiencies and graft.

The country was thrown into scandal after a controversy involving procurement, starting with the cathedral issue and continuing with the Bank of Ghana debacle, when the Veep introduced a nationwide e-procurement system in 2019 to address bid-rigging and other procurement abuses. Even the procurement control agency's chief was indicted at one time after being embroiled in an odd «tenders for sale» affair. Needless to say, the e-procurement system that the Veep introduced with great fanfare has not affected the majority of procurement bodies, including the central government.

CONCLUSION

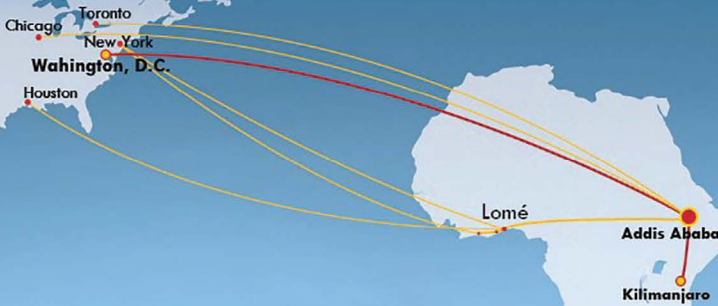
To put it briefly, Veep's harsh turn from economic transformation to digitalization for transformation hasn't spared him or the governing party from the impending clash with the government's track record on policy in the 2024 elections.

His unprecedented rise has added a degree of uncertainty to Ghana's established political calculation, which should cause those in the opposition's electoral strategy team who are cheering for the government to fall in the 2024 elections to pause. It might be too soon for them to celebrate.

Right now, the 2024 checkerboard is only beginning to take shape, and half of it is obscured by the image of a guy getting ready for a rendezvous with fate.

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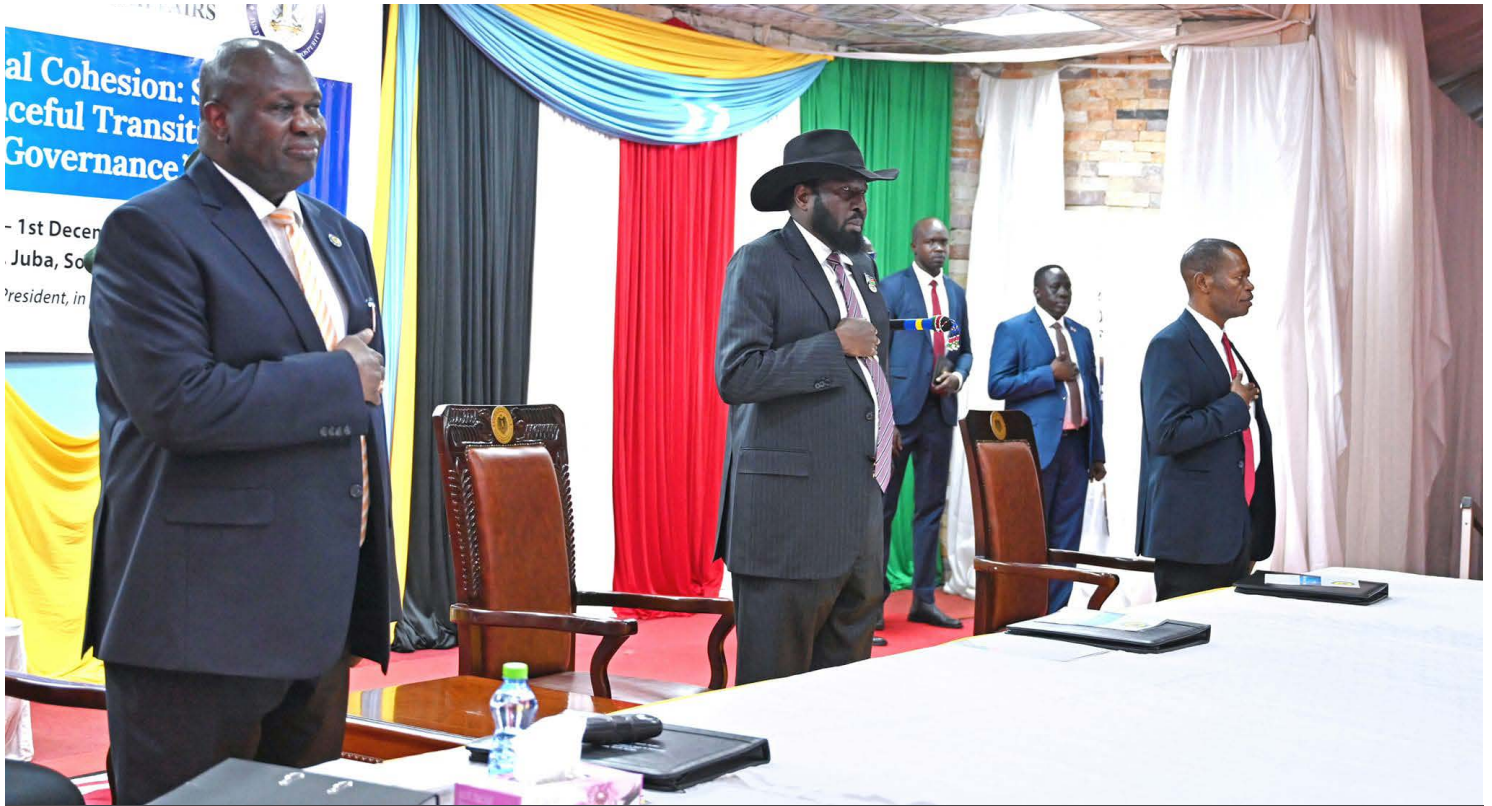
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South Sudan: President Kiir Tasks Stakeholders 2024 Elections

By Deng Machol



President Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar attended the recent Governors' Forum in Juba.

JUBA, South Sudan - "We are establishing South Sudan as a democratic country, and anybody who wishes to become president has the right to organize their party and contest peacefully, without violence," says President Salva Kiir. This reaffirmation from President Kiir came as he took over the leadership of the Eastern African Community last month. "We cannot deliver on this noble mandate if we are not at peace," he said.

Speaking during the 7th Governors' Forum in Juba's capital of South Sudan in late November, under the theme "Fostering National Cohesion: South Sudan's path to peaceful transition for democratic governance, Kiir said, "There is no need to engage in activities that will destroy our country and harm our people".

On the same note, the world's youngest country is scheduled to conduct its first-ever general elections in December 2024 since it became an independent country in 2011. This also after the 2013 civil war

wrecked the country for five years, killing nearly 400,000 people, and uprooting four million people from their homes, before the 2018 peace agreement signed by President Kiir and Riek Machar, leader of SPLM-IO, turned Vice President in 2020.

The elections aim to transform a fragile country into a democratic society through fair, free, and credible elections. This promise comes with a lot of expectations and anxiety.

Despite palpable signs of progress on several fronts, international partners and some South Sudanese think the pace has been a little slow for comfort. The formation of a government of national unity has faced delays over the integration of previous warring factions, and disagreements over the election process expected to transition the country to a democratic nation.

Some of the peace partners such as the SPLM-IO and international bodies such as the UN mission in South Sudan and Troika countries' expressed concerns over delays of

important tasks provided for in the revitalized peace agreement and necessary for the conduct of the elections.

Vice President Machar who doubles as the head of SPLM-IO has said several times that the country is not yet ready for elections, citing deployment of forces, among many concerns. The UN envoy, Nicolas Haysom, thinks that South Sudan is not ready for elections as well, citing uncompleted mechanisms necessary in the conduct of the elections. President Kiir has however continued to harp on a message of inclusivity and unity, urging the peace parties to collaborate effectively in the implementation of pending issues.

Kiir, who has headed the ruling party (SPLM) since 2005, has already been endorsed by his party members for the presidential elections has reiterated that anyone aspiring to become president has the right to organize their party and contest peacefully without resorting to violence. President Kiir sees this as

the only viable path toward building a robust foundation for a politically stable, inclusive, and democratic South Sudan.

"I strongly encourage all parties to the agreement to maintain their cooperation in implementing this agreement; as it is the only sure way to establish a solid foundation for a politically stable, inclusive, and democratic South Sudan," Kiir said.

With a year left, the transitional government has started the deployment of the first phase of the necessary unified forces after a long overdue effort to take up security across the country.

The National Elections Commission, political parties' council, and National Constitutional Review Commission were recently reconstituted, but without predictable and adequate funding to operate.

The permanent constitution, the return of Internally Displaced Persons and refugees, and reforms in the security sector are yet to be completed, which are creating



We are establishing South Sudan as a democratic country, and anybody who wishes to become president has the right to organize their party and participate in elections peacefully , says President Kiir

uncertainty. At the same event, Nicholas Haysom, Head of UNMISS said completing the final leg of South Sudan's transitional period requires strong partnerships.

"There is now a great sense

of urgency to accelerate these conversations so that South Sudan is well positioned for its forthcoming electoral process, including ensuring there is sufficient political and civic space for a process that will ground

South Sudanese in a process which is nation-building as opposed to deepening division," Haysom said.

The people of South Sudan haven't exercised the right to choose their leaders since the referendum that

secured independence from Sudan in 2011. They have suffered through cycles of violent conflict that have prevented the democratic transfer of power. President Kiir remains optimistic and has been charging forward with a strong domestic and international agenda. In addition to the Governors Forum, President Kiir's recent international agenda has included participation at the EAC where he was given the leadership baton.

President Kiir was also present at COP28 summit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates where he urged the developed countries to consider financing projects that will tackle climate change affecting developing nations.

"I urge global partners to build livelihood of people in the global South through capacity building to embark on green growth, the time for ambitious climate action is now," President Kiir said. Far from a country on life support, supporters of President Kiir see his robust activities at home and abroad as a sign of vitality, and a reason to remain hopeful on the future of South Sudan.

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Tanzania: Criticisms For New Electoral Commission Law

By Adonis Byemelwa

Political activists and other members of the public have shown disapproval of the amended National Electoral Commission Bill, arguing that some key issues that would warrant true democracy have been deliberately snubbed.

The Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) recently issued at least 10 issues of concern over the proposed amendment Bill suggesting ways to achieve the country's long-desired democratic reforms.

The government had recently presented three crucial amendments to the Bill making the first comprehensive update in 30 years of multiparty democracy.

The Bill introduces new procedures for people to apply for advertised vacancies in NEC and undergo rigorous interviews by a «special recruitment committee» instead of the commissioners being appointed directly by the president.

However, it also requires the committee to forward at least nine chosen names for the president to decide on the maximum of five commissioners, while filling the positions of NEC chairperson and vice-chairperson remains the sole discretion of the head of state as expressly stipulated in Tanzania's constitution. The committee will also be mandated to interview applicants for the key post of director of elections, who has also hitherto been appointed directly by the president but unlike the commissioners is a salaried position.

But again, the Bill requires the director's qualifications to include being a senior civil service officer and the committee's nominee for the job to be subjected to presidential approval.

While LHRC showers accolades for this significant step, they were quick to point out what may derail the noble process.

The executive director of LHRC Dr. Anna Henga, while addressing journalists identified one significant



There is potential for confusion arising from the amended bill, says LHRC Director Dr. Anna Henga

issue, saying: "The potential confusion arising from the amended Bill is to let the electoral director serve as the secretary of the interviewing committee for the commission's members."

She questioned the logic behind the arrangement, emphasizing the need for clarity in the relationships between the commission and the electoral director.

With President Samia Suluhu Hassan at the helm, Tanzanians had in the first place, seen a raft of measures that aimed at creating more political space, that saw the opposition allowed to conduct political rallies with little interference from the coercive apparatus.

This is in contrast with former President John Magufuli, who vehemently vowed to bury the opposition in what he mostly said; allowing the other parties to conduct rallies across the country would be akin to debating against his move to propel the development agenda.

But in a new twist, things may not be that rosy this time ahead of the 2024 civic elections because the

opposition has found the amended contents in the electoral commission are yet to sink well in many of their minds.

The main issue is why the government insists on having civic elections run by its local government and regional administration instead of being run by the national electoral commission as the lessons on the following year will be.

With the civic polls scheduled to be held in October next year, this will provide just eight months for the new legislation to be passed and become operational. The Bills that were presented in the House for the first reading are the National Electoral Commission (NEC) Bill, the Political Parties Affairs Laws (Amendment) Bill, and the Presidential, Parliamentary, and Local Government Elections Bill, all dated 2023.

Nevertheless, several critics have asserted that the NEC Bill has contradictions by stating that the commission will be an «independent, autonomous organ whose decisions will not be interfered with» while at

the same time including clauses that indicate the president will have the final say in who to admit as members.

The renowned journalist, Jenerali Ulimwengu, was recently quoted as saying, that allowing elections to be conducted without changing flaws in the electoral commission was like trying to fit round pegs in square holes.

He noted that former Chief Justice, Francis Nyalali taught Tanzanians against rushing to multipartyism and instead take time to make sure the architecture for the new dispensation was in place.

According to the LHRC boss, the inclusion of civil servants as part of the electoral commission was in contravention of the ethos of impartiality, explaining that government employees would be acting in favor of the ruling system for fear of losing their jobs.

The LHRC also questioned the mode in which the commission's funds are sourced from the government budget, which they think compromises the commission's autonomy.

The Human Rights Center called

on the government to allow the commission to obtain monies from the consolidated fund, instead of sourcing the same from the Prime Minister's office as a charity.

The Tanzania Episcopal Conference in collaboration with the Tanzania Constitutional Forum has recently surveyed countries that they think have made headways in instituting independent electoral commissions.

Presenting the study findings in a meeting attended by various religious organisations and human rights activists, The TEC Secretary Fr. Dr Charles Kitima, noted that they gathered the details from Kenya and South Africa about independent electoral commissions worth emulating to the Tanzania government.

"The electoral commissions in Kenya and South Africa have people's blessings. They are independent. Members of the electoral commission apply for the jobs and pass through rigorous vetting. They have to prove buoying reasonable doubts to have not been affiliated with any political party. It was time Tanzania emulated the dealings to push for peace," said Dr. Kitima.

According to Dr. Kitima, South



TEC Secretary Dr Charles Kitima is cautioning authorities against repeating the mistakes of the 2020 civic and general elections

Africa and Kenya do change returning officers after every election, contrary to Tanzania where executive directors who lead the civic elections, with their images tainted with rigging scandals and frauds remain in the same areas of justifications for years.

The religious leader warned the

relevant authorities against repeating the mistakes made during the 2020 civic and general elections that saw the opposition intimidated without having anywhere to lodge their complaints.

He said it was time religious leaders condemned the rigging like any kind

of inequities, explaining that some clerics were only remaining coy when it comes to disparaging the ruling machinery, a situation which he says makes them (clerics) look hypocrites before God and their congregants.

The Tanzania Constitutional Forum executive director, Deus Kibamba, who was one of the presenters in the meeting, clarified that the commission leaders in Kenya and South Africa were not biased remarking that in case one of the candidates made mistakes in filling the forms, they were ready to call them for more clarifications and correctives.

He noted with dismay that during the 2020 civic elections, opposition contenders accused of making mistakes in filling the forms were arbitrarily removed from the electoral processes, a situation which, he said, was against the rule of law and a precursor to breaching the country's peace and tranquility.

ACT Wazalendo leader, Zitto Kabwa said the party will push for another Bill to make election laws favorable to all candidates, but the LHRC executive director Anna Henga said they would have challenged the Bill in court had it been passed into law.



President Samia has been slowly but steadily opening up political space in Tanzania and easing political tensions.



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Cameroon: Data Girls' Frida Eposi Leads Charge in Empowering More Women in Tech

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

Despite the potential technology has to empower societies, women in Africa still lack access to software, hardware and education necessary to pursue tech careers. One lady is, however, fighting against this narrative in building a community where women get to embrace technologies and showcase what they can build using technologies.

Frida Eposi is a multi-talented young lady who thrives in building emerging businesses using innovative tools and techniques. She has worked with close to 350 emerging entrepreneurs, SMEs, and start-ups across Africa and currently mentoring businesses. A co-founder of Data Girl Technologies, they look to train the next generation of female tech talents across Africa. Their goal has been to train up to ten thousand women and so far, they have been able to train about three thousand women.

"The men are more excited about tech and women feel it is challenging and that it is a man's thing. It is that fear that sometimes makes them to be discouraged. We have been able to use the design thinking approach and the learning by doing where we have them identify problems in the society and throughout the session, what they learn in class they can incorporate in



Frida Eposi, co-founder Data Girl Technologies.

their project," Frida Eposi said.

"Technology is not just coding only; it cuts across a lot of fields and it is important to have young women, young tech entrepreneurs in the ecosystem of Silicon Mountain. I

am encouraging more women to be part of the ecosystem; let us build something for women and close the gender divide gap."

Talk to us about the reason for

starting Data Girl Technologies.

Frida Eposi: I studied banking and finance in school and I have always been interested in business and entrepreneurship generally. I started my first business two years after school. While doing that and struggling to make sure that I was building something sustainable, I kept failing in those endeavours.

Seeing women in technology is very scarce and so, trying to get into that space, I understood that there is a gender divide. My goal is not just to encourage, empower and train women tech talents, but also to create tech entrepreneurs. We need more women at the helm of technology companies.

Data Girl Technologies identified that tech is a global language that has been spoken and understood by everyone. The future is tech, everything is moving towards



Data Girl Tech hopes to empower ten thousand women in the technological field.

technology, and it will be a beautiful thing if women can accompany this movement by taking advantage of it.

A report from the World Economic Forum says that in 2030, 85 per cent of jobs and opportunities will be developed from tech and we want to see women being part of these opportunities, which is why we decided to continue empowering women.

How does your training curriculum differentiate you from platforms offering the same initiative?

Frida Eposi: At Data Girl Technologies, we understand that everyone is different, but what makes us stand out is that we are gender-focused. Our attention is on the global problem, which is reducing the gender disparity in the tech space.

Our courses are on-site and we realize that besides the challenge of expensive internet in Cameroon, there's that laxity that comes with online learning. What makes us stand out is that we can follow up with our students intentionally, help them identify their challenges, and support them in meeting up with where they are lagging in the courses.

What also makes us stand out is the way our courses are structured in addition to having a learning-by-doing approach. We work on a project basis and this has helped us train students in coding, and UI/UX irrespective of their mental capacity.

At the end of our 12-week BootCamp, we realize that our students do not only come up with projects of their own, but they have products that they can present even to investors or to the interviewer on what they have done. In the end, our students would have gained knowledge, and experience and getting job-ready.



Data Girl Technologies notes that everything in the world now is moving towards technology.

After the program are there any follow-ups or do you offer mentorship and networking opportunities?

Frida Eposi: Data Girl Technologies has a community of over 3000 women and girls that we empower and impact and we have a one-week session mentoring session on our programs.

We do not just train and let you go, we help you to become ready for the job market, supporting you by designing a career path based on your passion because learning a skill in the tech space is one thing while using the skill to target a career path is another.

Data Girl Technologies' idea isn't just to train, but to equally help you through job linking. We look for partners who are ready to employ tech talent, however, we don't decide for the partners on how and whom to select, but we are confident that

they select the very best from our programs.

What does Data Girl Technologies aim to achieve in Cameroon with this program in the years to come?

Frida Eposi: For the next 5 to 10 years, Data Girl Technologies is envisaging not only empowering more than 3000 to even 10,000 women, but now we want to place them into different jobs and help them start their businesses.

We won't just be training women, we will be placing women in jobs, and placing them in those areas where women need to be present to change the narrative because we believe that changing the status quo will help reduce gender disparity, women need to be in these roles.

We need more women leaders and

role models, so our goal is to boost the number of women leaders in the tech ecosystem, and also help women and girls present in only male-dominated teams.

Any final remark

Frida Eposi: Data Girl Technologies is located in Molyko. We are encouraging more women to come and say what their minds are telling them and we can also place you into the right technological field. We have been able to place over 35 per cent of the women we have trained into getting job opportunities, internships and opportunities to learn and practice more of what they have been able to learn. I am encouraging more women to be part of us, be part of the ecosystem; let us build something formidable for women, let us close the gender-divide gap.

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The African Union at 20

African perspectives on progress,
challenges and prospects



Edited by Wafula Okumu and Andrews Atta-Asamoah

Achenjang, Baker, And Nolan - Local Research, Global Connection.

By Rachel Dorroh*

Hands-on field research, presenting at an academic conference, writing a project proposal, securing funding for scientific work – all of these real-world experiences will be part of Hannah Baker and Laurel Nolan's resumes when they graduate from Union College. What's more, they have contributed to the body of scientific knowledge on a topic their mentor Dr. Fidelis Achenjang has been passionate about for nearly three decades.

It started when Hannah decided she wanted to follow in her good friend Laurel's footsteps and apply for a stipend to do undergraduate research through the Ledford Scholars Program. A project of the Appalachian College Association (ACA), Ledford is open to local students like Hannah and Laurel, who are from Corbin and Pineville, respectively.

Laurel had completed a project the year prior with Dr. Sunil Karna, and Hannah saw that it had been a great learning opportunity for her. She wanted to be a part of Ledford, too, and she hoped the experience might also help her achieve her dream of getting into medical school and becoming a doctor one day.

She approached Fidelis, who had been her chemistry professor, about the idea. He is also Dean of the School of Health and Natural Sciences and the sponsor of the science club, which Hannah is the vice president of and Laurel is the president of. He showed her some projects she could work on with him, and when he started talking about rat-tailed maggots (RTMs), she knew that was the one.

What, one might ask, is the appeal of studying a creature that makes its home in sewage, manure, putrid water, and other decaying matter?

"It means so much to Fidelis," Hannah says. "He was genuinely interested in seeing if these maggots



The Research Team onsite at the transfer station ,left to right Hannah Baker,Laurel Nolan,Dr Fidelis Achenjang.

are here in the Appalachian region, and I thought it if we could find them, it would be a cool thing to witness."

It's true. When Fidelis talks about these fly larvae that look like a cross between a tadpole and puffed rice, his animated gestures and impassioned voice command attention. He explains that although these maggots with long breathing tubes that look like tails are common around the world, scientific knowledge of them is limited. Most medical doctors and veterinarians are not familiar with RTMs, even though they can cause illness in humans and animals, alike.

Fidelis first encountered these elusive creatures in 1996. At the time, he was a professor at the University of Dschang in his home country of Cameroon. Local people knew all too well about RTMs and the stomach pain and other ailments they could cause, but his colleagues in the entomology department said they had

never seen them before.

He asked a surgeon friend what he thought about these larvae, which have bodies roughly one to two centimeters long with "tails" of the same length or longer, impacting human health.

"He thought they were too big to be a parasite for humans," Fidelis says.

This gap between scientific knowledge and local folk wisdom compelled him to keep searching for answers, and he eventually met a traditional healer who regularly treated patients for intestinal infestation, or myiasis. The healer invited Fidelis and the surgeon to witness a treatment. Young children sick with digestive upset came to the healer for help, and he gave them a remedy to induce vomiting. In this, Fidelis and the surgeon saw the rat-tailed maggots expelled from the bodies of the children, who recovered from their illness soon after.

Fidelis and the surgeon partnered with the healer to learn from

him and collect data about his sightings of RTMs. They developed a questionnaire for his patients, and Fidelis also had his students at Dschang take it around to different parts of the country when they were on holiday from school.

"We wanted to know how extensive this was," Fidelis says.

In the French zone, where raffia palms are common, RTMs are well-known because the rotting bark of this species makes an excellent habitat for these larvae. When Fidelis learned this, he worked with local people to collect RTMs from the palms. He was able to preserve many samples and also grew some adult flies from the larvae, which he also preserved.

"I had the fly and the maggots, but no eggs," he says.

As time went on, Fidelis collected anecdotal evidence of RTMs from all around the world but found that scientific research was still lacking. It became clear that the best way to bridge the gap between local

wisdom and scientific knowledge was to collect many samples of all phases of the RTM life cycle so that entomologists could thoroughly study the characteristics of the species and help others to finally recognize the tiny decomposers and pseudo-parasites that have been here all along.

Due to years of civil war, Fidelis has not been able to return to Cameroon for some time, and his colleagues have become “blessed memories,” as he says. These difficult conditions, along with the balancing act of pursuing a career while raising his five children, have made it challenging to continue collecting samples and pursuing this passion project. Still, his desire to raise awareness of RTMs has never left him.

When Hannah showed interest in his research, he knew this was a chance to see if they could find RTMs right here in Appalachia and continue the work he had begun decades ago. He told her that the project would be enough for two students, and Hannah recruited her original inspiration, Laurel, to join in.

Starting in May of 2023, the research team reviewed relevant technical literature and sent out surveys to local veterinarians, doctors, educators, septic companies, and others in the region, looking for leads, and keeping track of what they learned. They also traveled to various locations in Tennessee and Kentucky multiple times a week, searching for RTMs. By mid-June, they had been to high-traffic hiking trails, landfills, animal shelters, and other suspected breeding areas with no sightings yet.

They were beginning to think they would never actually find RTMs, when on June 21, they decided to return to the garbage transfer station where they had previously found regular tail-less maggots writhing in the shallow puddles of leakage from compacted trash. It was a sunny day after a spell of rain, and they thought maybe, just maybe, with more of that foul water sitting around, they’d have a better chance of finding their prized



Dr Fidelis Achenjang in Lab. Photo credit Union College ,KY

maggots.

The three of them were crouching over a muddy puddle beside a dumpster, wearing the fluorescent yellow vests they’d been advised to wear for safety, when, after stirring up the water a bit with a stick, the long sought-after RTMs wriggled up to the surface.

“We were shouting, ‘We found the maggots! We found the maggots!’,” Hannah says. “The people dropping off their trash that day must have thought we were crazy,” she laughs.

“After a long time, lo and behold, we were blessed with this,” Fidelis says. “We were excited, super excited.”

They brought the samples back to



A sample of Fidelis's RTMs from Cameroon.

the lab to preserve and continued searching other sites throughout the summer. Soon, they discovered RTMs at distilleries and local farms, as well.

Now that the team has identified local sites where RTMs can be harvested, Fidelis is hopeful that collecting the rest of the samples needed for the entomologists will be that much easier, and the next phase of the project can finally ensue.

“Once we have good samples of all the life phases, we will send them to an entomology lab to do the systematics,” he says. “This means we will see which flies are really responsible for this in terms of genomes, in terms of, family, and so on.”

At the conclusion of their summer research, Hannah and Laurel created a presentation of their findings. They shared this at Union as well as at Lee University’s McNair-Ledford Undergraduate Research Symposium this semester. This was the first time the Lee Symposium had been open to Ledford Scholars, so this part of the project was a new experience for both Hannah and Laurel.

“It was a really good experience to learn how to make a poster like that and present it to different judges and answer questions about our work,” Hannah says.

“Even learning how to prepare a proposal and how to build relationships with colleagues has really helped me,” Laurel says of her combined experiences with Ledford.

“They are happy with their work,” Fidelis says. “We have found something very useful.”

While RTM infestation is mostly a health concern for those who do not have access to clean drinking water, children and animals are always at risk because they may play in and drink out of mud puddles or other contaminated areas. Raising awareness of RTMs’ existence and their ability to hide at the bottom of deeper water due to their long respiratory “tails” could prevent unnecessary illness here in Appalachia as well as around the

world.

"From a medical standpoint, this was really interesting," Hannah says, explaining that she will bring her new awareness of RTMs and her deepened understanding of parasitology into her future work with patients.

Fidelis says that once more is known about the maggots, there could be many applications of the knowledge, including creating antibiotics from their DNA or intentionally farming them to grow an inexpensive fish food. Mostly though, he is driven by scientific inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, a message he drives home to his students. "We are always learning," he says.

"This is about Fidelis's life's work," Hannah says of the project, "and I'm really happy we got to help contribute to that."

Fidelis, Hannah, and Laurel advise anyone who has information about rat-tailed maggots in their area to contact Fidelis at fachenjang@unionky.edu, as he is excited to add the information to the data he and the students have already collected. He hopes to make the database public at some point but will ensure that personal identifying information



The team's first sighting of RTMs in Appalachia.

unionky.edu, as he is excited to add the information to the data he and the students have already collected. He hopes to make the database public at some point but will ensure that personal identifying information

stays private. To learn more about Dr. Achenjang's work, see Dr. Fidelis Achenjang | Union College (unionky.edu)

To learn more about the Ledford Scholars Program, see Ledford

Scholars • Appalachian College Association (acaweb.org).

*Courtesy of Union College, KY

The Harsh Reality of Living in Ethiopian Big Cities: Struggles and Economic Challenges

By Lidya Belete

«I am glad that the fasting season started.» These were the words uttered by my neighbor last Friday. As an Ethiopian, she was referring to the commencement of the nearly two-month-long fasting period which started on November 25th. However, her reasons for expressing joy weren't rooted in spirituality but in a heartbreaking reality.

In a society where one's social status is often tied to their ability to provide for themselves, my neighbor felt compelled to appear equal to her peers by carrying a lunchbox to work. She dreaded the thought of others discovering her dire circumstances and being reminded of her desperate situation. In Ethiopia, it is not common for individuals to openly share their personal problems, further exacerbating the pressure to maintain a façade of normalcy.

Ironically, my neighbor found



Inflation has taken a harsh toll on the country's economy and its people. Photo credit Addis Fortune.

solace in the start of the fasting season as it provided her with an opportunity to evade judgment. By simply claiming to be fasting, she could avoid scrutiny for not having a lunchbox at work. She said “I could simply say that I am fasting and can eat bread with tea when I return home.” It is disheartening to witness how people find themselves resorting to such measures due to extreme poverty and lack of basic necessities.

Her story serves as a powerful reflection of the countless individuals who find themselves ensnared in the unyielding cycle of poverty. It is a poignant reminder of the struggles that unfold amidst the shadows of Addis Ababa's streets, where lives are overshadowed by the constant pangs of hunger and an enduring battle for survival.

For the past few years, inflation rates in Ethiopia have lingered in the double digits, reaching a staggering high of 37% in May of last year. This demonstrates the severe impact inflation has had on the country's economy and its people.

A report published in 2023 by various international organizations paints a bleak picture of the situation. It reveals that around 70 million people in Ethiopia suffer from inconsistent access to meals, with over 25 million individuals going days without food. This stark reality is further exacerbated in conflict-ridden regional states such as Tigray and Amhara, where poverty rates have risen by 45% and 30%, respectively, as stated in a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

However, the harrowing trend of poverty is not confined solely to these regional areas; it extends to urban centers that are often considered hubs of economic opportunity. In cities like Addis Ababa, net food buyers have witnessed an alarming increase in poverty rates, reaching 24% over a five-year period. This demonstrates that even within urban landscapes, where economic prospects may seemingly be brighter, food security remains a complex issue with no easy



Addis Abba

solutions.

The struggle for survival has intensified in Ethiopian big cities like Addis Ababa, where the cost of living far surpasses the average income. According to recent reports, approximately 98% of civil servants in the country earn a gross salary of less than 12,000 Ethiopian birr per month, leaving them with a net salary of around 9,000 birr. This amount is insufficient even to cover basic expenses such as rent, which continues to rise exponentially.

The steep increase in the prices of essential commodities, such as onions, exemplifies the dire economic situation. In just a few years, the cost of 1 kg of onions has skyrocketed from 25 birr to 150 Ethiopian birr. This disturbing trend is not limited to onions alone; almost every item in the market has seen exorbitant price hikes. As a result, many Ethiopians are unable to feed themselves adequately, compromising their health and overall well-being.

If this alarming situation persists, my predictions for the future include:

1. Homelessness: The number of homeless individuals will likely

increase significantly.

2. Higher Crime Rates: Poverty can drive people to resort to unimaginable measures in order to survive.

3. Deteriorating Health: Inadequate nutrition and limited access to healthcare will negatively impact the overall health of the population.

4. Erosion of Societal Values: When forced to compromise their principles due to dire circumstances, individuals risk losing their identity and sense of self.

5. A Society Ill-Suited to Be Governed: If the citizens are unable to meet their basic needs, it becomes increasingly challenging for leaders to govern effectively.

In light of the impending crisis, it is essential for our politicians to prioritize finding solutions rather than attempting to deflect blame or provide theoretical explanations. While it might be tempting to address the difference between the high cost of living and inflation, the urgency lies in implementing tangible measures to tackle poverty and bridge the income gap.

Economists argue that addressing food security in urban areas beset

by significant poverty requires the simultaneous implementation of multiple factors. It necessitates a comprehensive approach that takes into account various interconnected elements. These include targeted poverty alleviation programs, measures to address inflation and market fluctuations, investment in education and skills training, and the promotion of sustainable economic growth that benefits all segments of society.

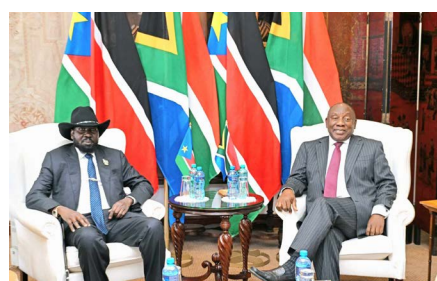
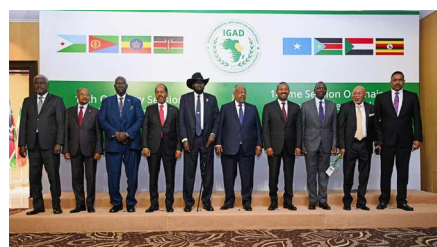
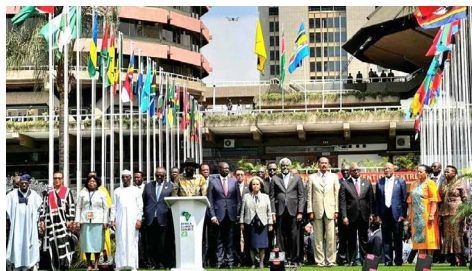
Tackling urban poverty and food insecurity demands a coordinated effort from government entities, civil society organizations, and international partners. By recognizing the multidimensional nature of the issue and adopting comprehensive strategies, Ethiopia can strive towards creating a more equitable society where the shadows of hunger and poverty fade away, leaving room for prosperity and well-being to flourish.

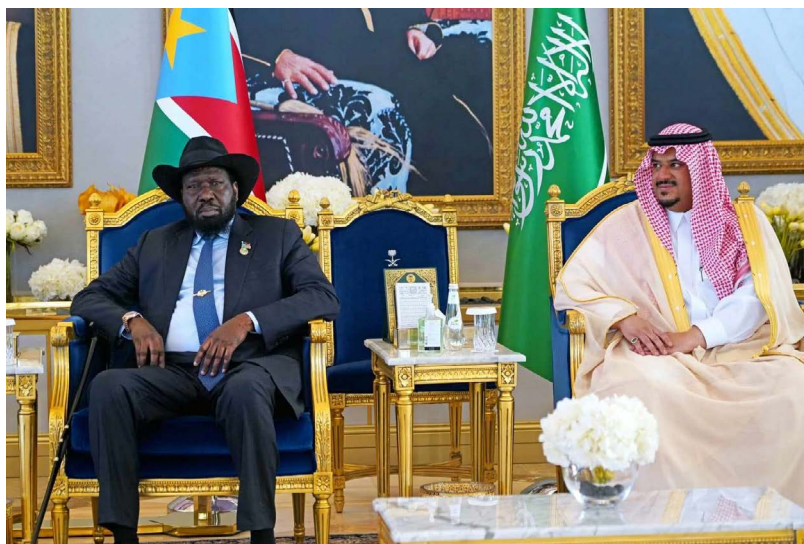
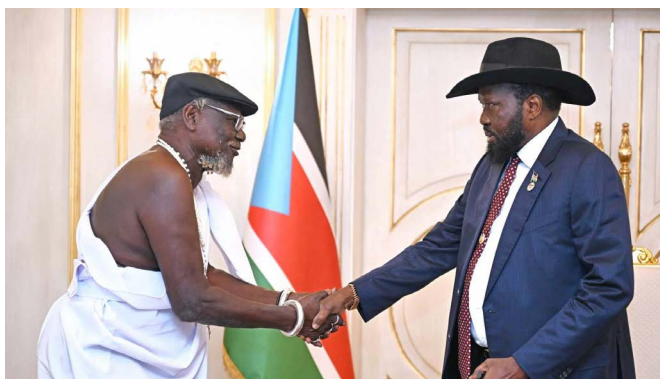
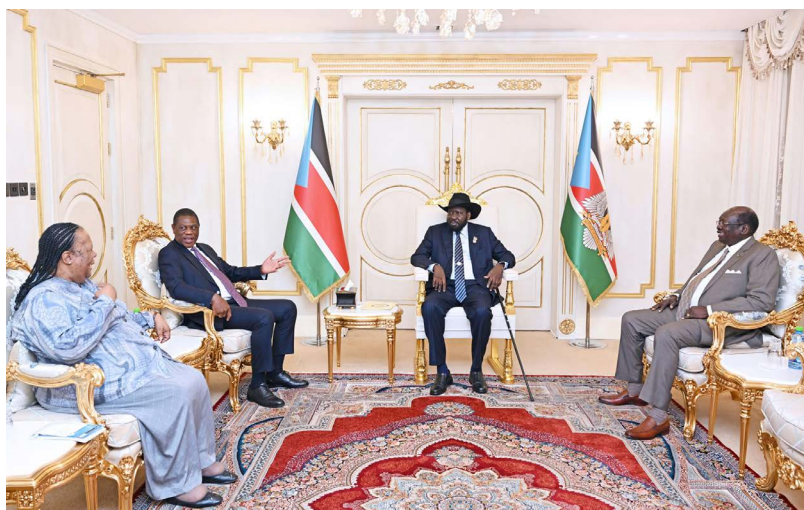
Everyone deserves the opportunity to live a life free from the constant struggle for survival. Only by working together can we hope to achieve a future where quality of life is not a luxury but a fundamental right for all.

South Sudan: Keeping Hope Alive

From engagements and consistent engagement with his cabinet members, to consultations with regional governors, traditional authorities, the clergy, and other members of the civil society, it has been a hectic year for Salva Kiir as President of South Sudan. His robust

domestic agenda mirrored his active presence and broad engagements on the international scene with participation in diverse forums and interactions with key regional and world leaders. PAV shares snippets of President Kiir's Year.





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Africa CDC and Mastercard Foundation Launch Phase Two Initiative To Strengthen Africa's Public Health Systems

By Wallace Mawire

The Africa CDC and the Mastercard Foundation have entered a new phase of their partnership on the Saving Lives and Livelihoods initiative in the aftermath of WHO's declaration of the end of COVID-19 pandemic as a public health emergency of international concern. The Saving Lives and Livelihoods initiative, a bold and unprecedented \$1.5 billion partnership, was launched in June 2021. This innovative and ground-breaking partnership aimed to purchase COVID-19 vaccines, roll out vaccinations, build the vaccine manufacturing workforce for the continent, and strengthen the Africa CDC to ensure long-term health security for Africa.

Unprecedented in scale, speed and inclusion of African organisations, the partnership has contributed to the continent's current vaccination rate of 53 per cent of the target population, up from just 3 per cent at the start of the initiative. The partnership has also trained, equipped, and deployed 38,000 health workers, creating a robust frontline in safeguarding public health locally. It has provided



job opportunities for 23,000 individuals and integrated over 600 COVID-19 vaccination centres into healthcare systems. Additionally, this initiative led to the expansion of genomic testing capabilities from 7 to 40 laboratories across the continent.

The review of Phase 1 of

this initiative, among fifteen implementing partners across 29 countries, conducted by Deloitte, indicates that the vast majority of funds disbursed were used effectively and as intended. Likewise, ongoing monitoring by KPMG has confirmed that partners not only showed

strength in programmatic results but also improved the institutional capacity for greater sustainability and institutional resilience.

"Our Saving Lives and Livelihoods initiative with the Mastercard Foundation has shown the power of respectful and action-oriented partnerships rooted in collaboration, coordination and systems strengthening. The experience and learnings from Phase I will enable us to move with greater speed and scale to deliver with accelerated impact to our member states" said Dr. Jean Kaseya, Director General of the Africa CDC.

In its second phase, the partnership will expand its scope and scale, focusing on completing the vaccination of healthcare workers and vulnerable groups, building a robust workforce of community health workers, ensuring pandemic preparedness by bolstering national public health institutions, laboratory capacities, data access and quality, local manufacturing of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics, and continuing strengthening of Africa CDC.



"While the global pandemic may be declared over, the need to continue investing in our health systems, build our workforce and prepare for future pandemics remains urgent. This partnership will ensure that we have strong health institutions and systems. We aim to enable thousands of young people to build their careers in healthcare and contribute to improving lives in Africa," said Reeta Roy, President, and CEO of the Mastercard Foundation.

The Saving Lives and Livelihoods initiative stands out as a testament to the power of African-led health solutions. As it progresses to its next phase, partnerships will continue to play a crucial role in shaping a New Public Health Order for Africa. Africa CDC and the Mastercard Foundation remain committed to improving the health and well-being of all Africans.

Africa CDC is a continental autonomous health agency of the African Union established to support public health initiatives of Member States and strengthen the capacity of their public health institutions to detect, prevent, control, and respond



quickly and effectively to disease threats.

The Mastercard Foundation is a registered Canadian charity and one of the largest foundations in the world. It works with visionary organisations to advance education and financial inclusion, enabling young people

in Africa and Indigenous youth in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work. Established in 2006 through the generosity of Mastercard when it became a public company, the Foundation is an independent organisation separate from the company, with offices in Toronto,

Kigali, Accra, Nairobi, Kampala, Lagos, Dakar, and Addis Ababa. Its policies, operations, and program decisions are determined by the Foundation's Board of Directors and leadership.

Medieval Disease Ravages Zimbabwe

By Prince Kurupati

Diseases as bad as they are and as unwanted as they are, are part of human life. However, while this is the case, major scientific discoveries of the past years have done a lot in combating the spread of some diseases as well as ushering in effective preventative measures. In most countries, especially those in the developed world, waterborne diseases like cholera and typhoid thanks to scientific discoveries are nearly at the point of extinction. This is however a stark contrast with Zimbabwe, a country that has perennially struggled with cholera/typhoid outbreaks. Currently, the country has declared a 'state of emergency' in the capital Harare owing to a cholera outbreak which has claimed over 100 lives and affected thousands more.

The current cholera outbreak according to the humanitarian organization, Relief Web, started on



The country has declared a state of emergency in Harare owing to a cholera outbreak which has claimed over 100 lives and affected thousands more. Photo courtesy.

12 February 2023 in Chegutu Town of Mashonaland West province. In an atypical fashion, the outbreak has

persisted from one rainy season to the next rainy season hence increasing the risk of the disease spreading further.

As of 7 November, the government estimated over 100 people to have succumbed to the disease while Relief



President Mnangagwa says his government is embarking on a massive drive to drill boreholes for each of the country's 35,000 villages.

Web puts the number of fatalities at 136 with 6,685 suspected cases. Relief Web puts the crude mortality rate at a worrying 2%.

A slow protracted response from the government, a lack of knowledge regarding preventive alternatives for the disease and how to support affected individuals, mushrooming of housing cooperatives and new locations putting strain on already dilapidating sanitation systems as well as general stigmatization have been highlighted by Relief Web as the main reasons behind the persistence of the disease. Combined, these reasons have necessitated the disease to spread to multiple geographical areas which include «45 out of 62 districts and in all 10 provinces of the country. The outbreak has now spread to more than the 17 traditional cholera hotspot districts, putting at risk over 10 million people, including more than five million children.»

The high rate of transmission means that cholera cases are now in both urban and rural communities. In both communities, the lack of readily available safe water sources increases the risk of further carnage. Most urban centres including the capital are experiencing water rationing which sees most households getting tap water for just a few hours in a week. Residents are having to rely on unsafe open wells.

Recently deposed Harare Mayor Ian Makone whose last major task before vacating office was to declare a state of emergency in the capital painted a grim picture saying, «People have dug wells close to pit latrines, especially in mushrooming settlements and other suburbs which do not have running water. This means their drinking water is contaminated.»

Prosper Chonzi who is the Harare City Council health director painted an even grimmer picture saying the water in the capital city «leaves a lot to be desired... It is contaminated with a number of things, faecal matter at times. Until we address those matters, we will continue to have cholera outbreaks in Harare.»

Things are even scarier for rural folks as most rural households - 90%+ - do not have access to tap water. A rural dweller Answer Nyamukondiwa of Buhera, one of the hardest hit areas who spoke to Al Jazeera aptly put how dire the situation is saying:

«The cholera problem is not new. We've had it for a while but ... There used to be health workers who would move around communities distributing water purification tablets that we could use to treat open wells. That isn't happening anymore,» Nyamukondiwa said.

Another resident who spoke to Al Jazeera TV who resides in

Murambinda, a growth point in Manicaland province said, «We do not have enough boreholes... There is so much pressure on the few boreholes serving big villages. When these boreholes break down, people have no option [other] than to fetch water in the contaminated rivers. We need more boreholes. We are getting cholera when we drink contaminated water from the rivers.»

Urgency in combating the disease by the government only started in the past week. However, the measures announced by the government have been criticized by many for being too reactionary and too little too late. To curb the spread of the disease, the Zimbabwean government imposed restrictions in vulnerable areas, limiting funerals to 50 people and forbidding attendees from shaking hands or serving food at the gatherings. The authorities also discouraged people from frequenting open-air markets, unlicensed vendors, or outdoor church camps where sanitation is scarce.

The government also said it is increasing surveillance at all borders to guard against cross-border transmission. One of the two cholera epicenters Manicaland shares its borders with Mozambique. With more than 1,000 cases recorded in the province, there are worries that the outbreak may cross borders and

pose a risk in another country.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa said his government is embarking on a massive drive to drill boreholes for each of the country's 35,000 villages. While noble and a good initiative, many say this will not help curb the spread of the disease at this juncture where help is needed most.

Proposing immediate solutions to curb the spread and combat the disease, Relief Web said it's critical for the government to seek partners who will help the Ministry of Health and Child Care offer primary health care which entails conscientizing communities to adhere to water, sanitation, and hygiene practices. Relief Web says, «The capacity of the Ministry of Health and Child Care has been stretched due to the high number of admissions, lack of human resources to manage the caseload, and lack of cholera supplies, including disinfection liquids, to stop the transmission.» Relief Web also proposed mobilization and training of volunteers to support task shifting from medical personnel to volunteers.

The last huge cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe was in 2008 when over 90,000 cases were reported in 60 out of 62 districts, resulting in about 4,300 deaths. The Zimbabwean government will be hoping to prevent a repeat of that unfortunate situation.

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Cameroon Youth Assembly Drives the Fight to End AIDS as a Public Health Threat

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

The fight to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 runs through the local communities and the Cameroon Youth Assembly, CYA, a youth-led organization is driving that fight in Cameroon. World AIDS Day comes at a defining moment in Cameroon where AIDS-related deaths are said to have fallen in the past years.

"We are calling on our policy and government officials to put laws that favour the fight against AIDS. When they give money to monitor and evaluation programs at all levels, this money should be used wisely," Nkongho Oben, National Coordinator, Cameroon Youth Assembly

"If we marry politics and finances, in the fight against AIDS, we are going to achieve great results. Following the UNAIDS report, it is possible to end AIDS if we put politics and finances together."

This year the theme of AIDS Day is «Let Communities Lead and the World Health Organization points out that in communities living with, and affected by HIV, networks of people from key populations and youth leaders have been, and continue to be, essential for progress in the HIV progress.

In an interview with Pan African Visions, Nkongho Delvis Oben, Epidemiologist and National Coordinator of the Cameroon Youth Assembly explains the measures needed to see an end to AIDS in the county as a public health threat by 2030 and also outlines the challenges in that fight.

Why is the celebration of World AIDS Day important looking at the present context of Cameroon?

Nkongho Oben: HIV continues to be highly stigmatized and misunderstood, particularly in Cameroon. Since the Cameroon Youth Assembly joined the fight



Nkongho Delvis Oben, Epidemiologist and National Coordinator Cameroon Youth Assembly, CYA.

against stigmatization, we have been called almost every month and we have listened to people's experiences on how they have been discriminated against because they have HIV. This has happened in their workplaces, families and even in the healthcare sector.

World AIDS Day exists to shine a light on the real experiences of people living with HIV today while celebrating the strength, resilience and diversity of the communities most affected. It is a moment to inspire the leadership needed to create a future where HIV doesn't stand in the way of anyone's life.

The theme this year is, Let Communities Lead. What is the significance of the theme to local society organizations that are leading the charge to end HIV/AIDS in the communities?

Nkongho Oben: Cameroon Youth Association being a youth-led movement see youths to be at the forefront of the fight against

HIV. The importance of civil society organizations, first of all, those living with HIV/AIDS, is enshrined in the greater involvement of people living with the disease. CSOs are generally recognized as playing an exceptional role in the global AIDS response. First of all, they mobilize communities to demand services. They act as service providers and they gather strategic information that informs policy.

We understand the fight has not been an easy one with so many challenges. So, what are the barriers to the fight against HIV/AIDS in the local community?

Nkongho Oben: Education is one of the factors that hinder this fight in the local communities. It is going to shock you to know that globally, only 1 in 3 young people demonstrate accurate knowledge of HIV prevention, which is a big problem. Access to high-quality, gender responsive age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education programs, both

in schools and out of schools must be strengthened to ensure that young people have the knowledge that they need to prevent HIV/AIDS infections.

The barriers to the participation of young people need to be removed and the support for their meaningful engagement and leadership, even at the community level, in all HIV-related processes and decision-making spaces need to be scaled up and ensure that there are sustainable responses led by young people. Going from a more national point of view, our national prevention strategies and programs must holistically address the needs of young people, in all their diversity, especially young people and the young population in high-incidence locations.

The world is envisaging ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. How possible is this target and is it possible?

Nkongho Oben: On July 13, 2023, UNAIDS released a report titled The Path that Ends AIDS and this report

contains data and evidence from studies which prove that the fight against AIDS is first of all a political one and a financial choice. A lot of countries are already using the data from the report to drive their HIV control programs, like Botswana, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, all of which are already achieving their 95 per cent targets. This means 95 per cent of people living with HIV know their HIV status; 95 per cent know they are HIV being on life-saving antiretroviral treatment and 95 per cent of people who are on treatment being virally suppressed. This is a call that a positive tailored leadership could greatly affect the fight against AIDS.

We are calling on our policy and government officials to put laws that favour the fight against AIDS. When they give money to monitor and evaluate programs at all levels, this



The theme this year is Let communities Lead and it is a call to action to enable and support communities in their leadership roles.

money should be used wisely. If we marry politics and finances, in the fight against AIDS, we are going to achieve great results. Following the UNAIDS report, it is possible to end AIDS if we put politics and finances together.

Any final last word on the AIDS Day celebration

Nkongho Oben: My final word this day goes to our Gen Zs. People can get or transmit HIV only through specific activities such as sex, and drug abuse, for example. In our local

communities at the moment, a lot of youths engage in sexual activities and drug use and abuse. To reduce their risk, they should use condoms correctly, not inject drugs and never share their equipment with others. If you do not have HIV but are at risk, talk to your healthcare provider. Speak to someone as there are a lot of focus groups that could help you work through the process of you getting tested and having to deal with the mental trauma that comes with exposure.

Gen Zs, please be informed, a lot of them are not informed and diseases that affect us get to us because we are not informed. AIDS is real and kills; it destroys your mental output leading to physical incapacitation and you become unproductive. CYA is here for you; it is a youth-led organization and accepts every youth. Join us to fight HIV/AIDS in Cameroon.

A Focus On Energy Cooperation For Eduardo Miranda

By Ajong Mbapndah L

His youthful age stands in contrast to his interest, dynamism, and growing expertise in the energy sector. Originally from Angola, Eduardo Miranda the serving President of the Association of International Energy Negotiators Chapter at Houston Baptist University, sees cooperation as critical for Africa's fight against energy poverty.

"Africa needs regional cooperation south-south and south-north, transferring innovations on existing renewable energy technologies through collaboration, prioritizing policy implementation, decentralizing energy systems. Electricity generation should be enabled, and energy resources should be diversified for improved security and sustainable development," says Eduardo Miranda.

With a cursus that involves studies in Zimbabwe, Portugal, Harvard in the USA, and his current program at the Houston Baptist University, Eduardo says the exciting challenges



AIEN is a global organization supporting the full value chain for oil and natural gas operations, says Eduardo Miranda.

in the African energy sector equally require a mix of talent and leadership. Living in Houston considered by many as the energy capital of the world and serving with a chapter of the Association of International Energy Negotiators are attributes that Eduardo Miranda thinks could help him eventually play a more resourceful role in Africa's fight against energy poverty.

Could we get an introduction of the International Energy Negotiators and the Houston Baptist University Chapter that you lead?

The Association of International Energy Negotiators (AIEN) is a professional membership association that supports international energy negotiators around the world. AIEN enhance the professionalism of cross-border energy negotiators throughout the world. It is now composed of roughly 3,000 members in more than 110 countries, representing numerous international oil and gas

companies, host governments, law firms and academic institutions. AIEN members come from a variety of disciplines: commercial, technical, academic, and legal. Hence International Energy Negotiators in this area are therefore more a prototype of true international regulations; they help its member states to regulate better by providing model guidelines, collective and better regulatory intelligence and a forum of dialogue and collegiality.

As Houston Baptist University and the Archie Dunham College of Business moves forward in strengthening degree programs, one aspect of that process is providing students with opportunities to expand their professional business contacts and networks. This obviously goes beyond the classroom and the technical training students receive in their degree program. Regardless of the students program, it is always good to stress the importance of having mentors to help students continue their professional growth. One great way to develop student's network of mentors and professional contacts is through professional societies. This is why it came into mind to form and found an AIEN chapter at Houston Baptist University.

How relevant is the Association of International Energy Negotiators in the modern-day global energy trends?

AIEN is a global organization supporting the full value chain for oil and natural gas operations. The Association hosts several quality events each year that provide networking opportunities and provide valuable educational programs and tools. In sum, the AIEN aims to help the international energy negotiator be better prepared to meet the challenges of today's competitive global energy market.

AIEN has over 20 model contracts that are in extensive use throughout the industry. Since energy



As part of our strategic plan, we are working with other Houston Universities to host one huge AIEN event in 2024, says Eduardo.

investments often require multiple partners, who are frequently based in different countries, having a set of model contracts designed for the international oil and gas industry improves the formation of business ventures.

Being a part of AIEN allows me to learn these model contracts and the learn from the people who developed these contracts.

What are some of the achievements recorded in your

mandate so far?

During my mandate as the AIEN president at Houston Baptist University, My team & I have managed to recruit a great number of students/members at Houston Baptist University, and recently as AIEN president I managed to organize one event which is considered to be the one of the best young negotiating event of 2023 at Houston Baptist University. With great experts of the oil and gas industry who spoke about What it's really like to be an

international Lawyer or Negotiator in the Energy Industry, where I was the moderator of the event. This experience has taught me the importance networking and building a strong team because «no man is an island».

In the long run our objective is to expand & recruit more people from all over the world.

As part of our strategic plan, we are planning to work together with other Houston Universities and host one huge AIEN event. With combined effort and collaboration, I believe this will be the best and well-organized event of 2024.

You are of Angolan background, what is your reading of the energy landscape there and across Africa?

Africa is a continent known for its incredible diversity and vast untapped potential. Africa, with its immense landscapes and rich natural resources presents a crucial energy scenario. It has some of the globe's most abundant sources of renewable energy, including copious sunlight, wind, and geothermal potential alongside substantial oil and gas reserves.

The story of Africa's energy sector is a captivating narrative woven together with challenges, resilience, and progress. The African continent faces a different exploration and production landscape. Armed with vast, untapped oil and gas resources, the 'continent of tomorrow' remains in need of technical and financial capacity to fully leverage its hydrocarbon wealth. As a result, of Africa's 1.4 billion people an estimated 600 million, nearly half of Africa's population, lack access to electricity and 900 million lack access to clear cooking solutions. Without new investment, the energy poverty will only increase which pushes down economic development opportunity in countries that are poised to develop quickly. I believe that young, talented business leaders will be able to rise up to become problem solvers in the African continent by unlocking and

nurturing their creative potential.

How can the lessons and experiences garnered with your membership and leadership role with the International Energy negotiators be put to use in helping Angola and Africa improve on its energy fortunes?

Africa needs regional cooperation south-south and south-north, transferring innovations on existing renewable energy technologies through collaboration, prioritizing policy implementation,

decentralizing energy systems. Electricity generation should be enabled, and energy resources should be diversified for improved security and sustainable development. Developing proper planning of renewable energy, good governance, strategic investments in energy infrastructure is also recommended. Proper design of mini on- or off-grid solar plants, wind plants, accurate and economical energy management system for different sources of energy, Proper cooling of the solar plant, and fabrication of solar modules with better efficiency can be recommended



Story 23 1 Pic 4 The story of Africa's energy sector is a captivating narrative woven together with challenges, resilience, and progress, says Eduardo Miranda



Learning from the masters. Eduardo Miranda with NJ Ayuk of the African Chamber at a recent AIEN event in Houston, TX

to enhance the reliability and sustainability of energy generation.

What can African learn from the city of Houston is considered as the energy capital of the world ?

Home to more than 500 oil and gas exploration and production firms, Houston has long been recognized as the energy capital of the world, with Texas producing over 40% of the U.S.' crude oil and 25% of its marketed natural gas. The largest energy companies in the world call Houston home. "Houston is the headquarters and the intellectual capital for nearly every energy industry segment. We take pride in our abundance of human and technical resources in exploration, production, transmission, marketing, supply, and new technology to lead the energy transition. And the Houston region remains at the forefront of foreign investment in the energy sector.

Houston based companies have vast international experience and the technology and project management expertise to implement the challenging energy projects.

You have studied in Zimbabwe, Portugal, and other institutions in the USA, Harvard before your current institution, what plans for the future?

Education does not only transform people; it transforms the world. Hence, I am a strong believer in evolving and transformation. I have always believed that if you put in the work, the results will come. Despite all my accomplishments so far, I still believe that there are vast opportunities in the oil and gas field, and I am very keen to explore them since I am still a work in progress. Surely more greater achievements are expected in the future.



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Disaster As Floods Wreak Havoc in Kenya

By Samuel Ouma

Kenya has been devastated by a torrential flood just a few months after conquering a terrible drought that rocked the country, the worst scenario in 40 years.

The flooding is linked to incessant rains attributed to the El Nino phenomenon pounding different parts of the country.

According to the local authorities, 31 out of the 47 Kenya's counties have been affected by the raging flood in the last one month. The most impacted are the Northeastern, coastal and southeastern regions.

As a result of the floods, homes and people have been swept away, leading to fatalities and injuries. During the publication of this script, more than 140 people had been reported dead, and the number is expected to increase as the rains continue.

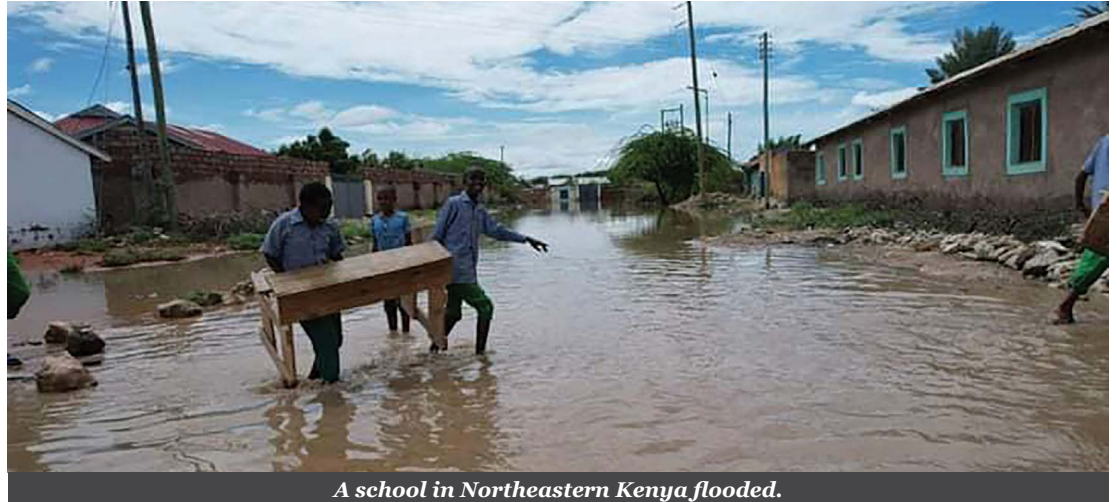
More than 90,000 homes have been swept away, forcing over 400,000 people to seek shelter elsewhere.

Agriculture has also been affected, with several crops destroyed and a number of livestock reported dead.

«Livestock and agriculture have also been impacted by the floods; acreage of farmlands has been submerged, and there has been an outbreak of pneumonic cattle disease, resulting in the deaths of 72 chickens, 12 cattle, 1680 goats, 728 sheep, and one camel,» said the Interior and National Administration Principal Secretary Raymond Omollo.

Flooding also has wreaked havoc on infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and buildings. Destroyed transport networks have hampered the mobility of people and goods, leading to business interruptions and increased transportation costs.

«In Wajir County, the floods have disproportionately affected vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, orphans and single-headed households. The closure of the roads from Mandera and Garissa has increased costs of food stuffs. 1 kg of tomatoes is now Ksh450 (\$3). There is a need for more humanitarian



A school in Northeastern Kenya flooded.

organizations to respond to this disaster. Both the county and national government must be held accountable for the way they have managed this disaster,» said Amnesty International Kenya Wajir Circle of Conscience member Fatuma Yussuf.

For instance, raging floods cut off a section of the Mbogolo bridge along the Mombasa-Malindi Highway on November 25. Kenya National Highways Authority (KeNHA) was forced to redirect motorists to other routes, leading to heavy traffic to and from the coastal city of Mombasa.

Three days earlier, the Thika-Garissa road was temporarily closed after a section of it was destroyed by floods.

On November 17, a portion of the Mtwapa-Kilifi road was submerged following a heavy downpour experienced in the area.

«Last week, the Regional Police Headquarters, Garissa and Habaswein Police Station (Wajir) motor vehicles were heavily submerged by the ongoing floods,» said the police.

Moreover, flooding has damaged some areas' power and water supply infrastructure, causing extended blackouts and water shortages that further disrupt daily life and economic activities.

Health consequences are another significant adverse effect of the current flooding in East Africa. Waterborne diseases like malaria,

diarrhoea, dengue fever, and cholera are reported in some counties like Wajir, Kwale, and Mandera.

In collaboration with international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Kenyan government is working extra hard to alleviate the consequences of floods.

Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua states that the country is mobilizing technical and financial resources to improve flood response.

«We are joining forces with development partners to donate food and non-food items to tens of thousands of affected families in order to prevent the humanitarian situation from worsening,» said Gachagua.

Airplanes have also been dispatched to evacuate affected families to safer locations. They are also used by government agencies to facilitate all types of security-related aerial work, such as observation, patrol, photography, aerial survey, dropping of supplies and security equipment, and search and rescue.

The Kenyan government has also unveiled a free toll number for emergency cases.

«The National Disaster Operations Centre can be reached on 0202151053 or the Toll free number 800721571 to report any emergency incident,» added PS Omollo.

Amnesty International Kenya has called on the Government of Kenya to intensify multi-sectoral humanitarian efforts to cushion the victims. The

organization urged the national and county governments, as well as international, civic, and business efforts, to increase food and shelter, evacuation, and emergency health efforts for the affected.

«Amnesty International Kenya urges the Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on Disaster Response and Flood Command Centre established this week to accelerate military and commercial airlifts of food rations to all affected areas. The food and fuel price hikes will only reduce with subsidized and reliable transport.

Both county and national governments must give daily updates on those affected, funding disbursement and humanitarian services. Transparency rather than blaming either arm of government does not save lives. Nor does it blame victims for their deaths. We express our concern and solidarity with all our members and persons who are affected and currently at risk,» said Amnesty International Kenya Executive Director Irungu Houghton.

Kenyans have been urged to be on the lookout with those living in flood-prone areas asked to move to safe areas.

«We continue to urge everyone to adhere to weather and flood alerts and take precaution so as not to risk injury or death through driving in flooded roads and crossing bulging rivers,» said Raymond Omollo.



CORPORATE PROFILE

The term "Órama" originates from the Greek language and signifies "vision." At Órama, this definition serves as our guiding principle, aligning perfectly with our corporate management company's ethos.

As a comprehensive management firm, Órama proudly stands as a modern, one-stop destination for business management services in Mauritius. What sets Órama apart is our robust Pan-African presence, granting us the unique capability to cater to the diverse business needs of both Africa and Europe. Headquartered in the heart of Mauritius, Órama is duly licensed by the Financial Services Commission (FSC), a testament to our commitment to compliance and excellence in our industry.



OUR VISION

Our vision is to be part of a transformative movement, catalyzing a future where individuals, visionary entrepreneurs, and corporations collaborate to drive global sustainability, eradicate food insecurity, alleviate energy poverty, and champion low emission technologies. We aim to equip entrepreneurs, companies, and investors with the essential tools and opportunities they require to not only prosper but also actively shape a prosperous and sustainable future for Africa and the world.



OUR MISSION

To empower businesses with bespoke, high level solutions that facilitate growth and expansion into new territories

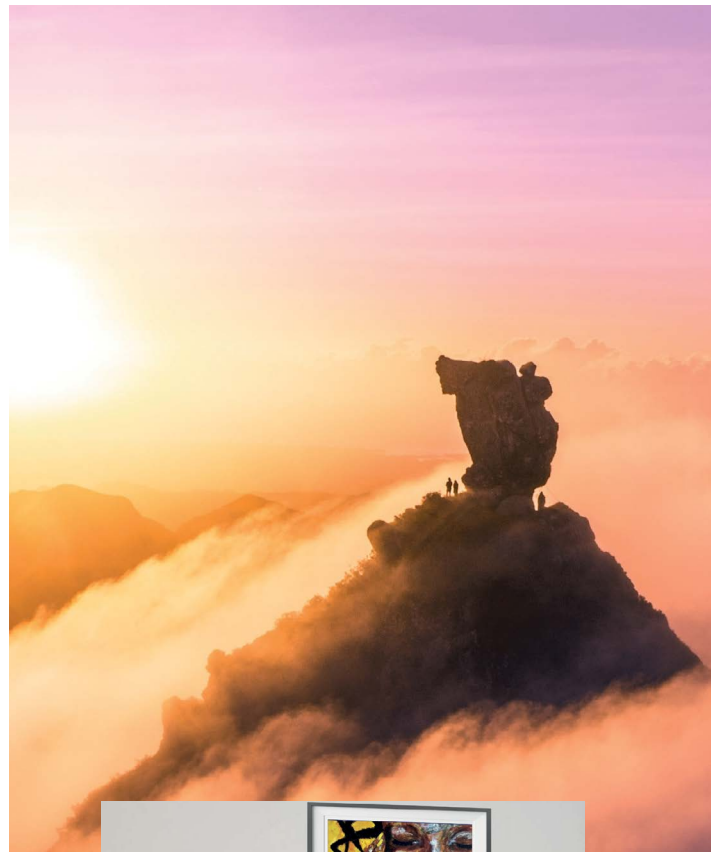
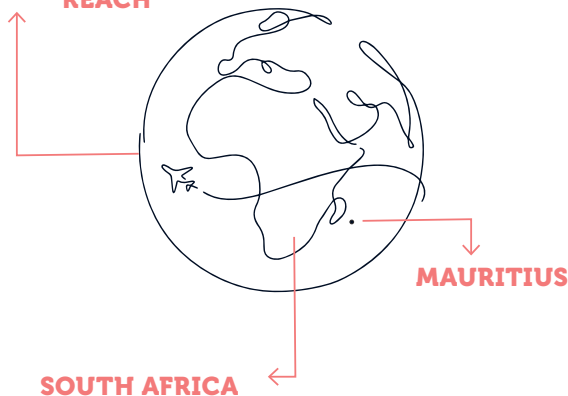


OBJECTIVE

To help build and grow businesses efficiently and sustainably by providing opportunities conducive for growth, shape businesses for a prosperous future so they become new African success stories.

OUR PRESENCE

WORLDWIDE REACH



Ms. Keseena Chengadu
CEO

At Órama we firmly believe that individuals, visionary entrepreneurs, and corporations are the driving forces that can propel the world toward genuine sustainability, eradicate food insecurity, alleviate energy poverty, adopting low emission technologies among others. Through our endeavours, we aim to provide entrepreneurs, companies, and investors with the vital tools and opportunities they need to not only thrive but also actively shape a prosperous and sustainable future for Africa and the world.

Our journey in the corporate services arena has been a tapestry of growth, learning, and adaptability. With a seasoned team of professionals and a strong presence spanning Africa, Órama boasts a wealth of 50+ years of collective experience. We have navigated intricate business landscapes, harnessed the benefits of Mauritius, and delivered tailor-made solutions to a diverse clientele representing various industries.

AFCON 2023 Draw Sets Stage for Epic TotalEnergies Ivory Coast Tournament

By Boris Esono Nwenfor & Sonita Ngunyi Nwohtazie

With just a month to go to Africa's biggest football jamboree, the Africa Cup of Nations, AFCON, there is excitement in the air as countries finetune preparations for the 34th edition of the competition in Ivory Coast. This will be the second time that the West African country is hosting the competition after it did so back in 1984.

The tournament will feature 24 teams battling out for the coveted prize, with teams drawn into 6 groups of 4. The winners of each of the groups, runners-up and the four highest-ranked third-placed teams will qualify for the knockout stage.

Matches are expected to be played across 6 stadiums in 5 cities. The Alassane Ouattara Stadium and Felix Houphouët-Boigny Stadium in Abidjan; the Stade de la Paix in Bouake, Stade Ahmadou Gon Coulibaly in Korhogo, Laurent Pokou Stadium in San Pedro and Charles Konan Banny Stadium in Yamoussoukro are the venues for the matches.



Senegal are the current AFCON holders having won the last edition in Cameroon.

Africa's biggest event, the TotalEnergies Africa Cup of Nations, Ivory Coast 2023 will kick-off in Abidjan on January 13, 2024, with Ivory Coast facing Guinea-Bissau with the final scheduled for February 11, 2024.

Tricky pairing for host Ivory

Coast as Cameroon gets defending champions

The draws for the tournament set up mouthwatering clashes and encounters that promise to leave you spellbound. Host Ivory Coast, winners of the 1992 and 2015 competitions were joined by the Super Eagles of Nigeria in Group A.

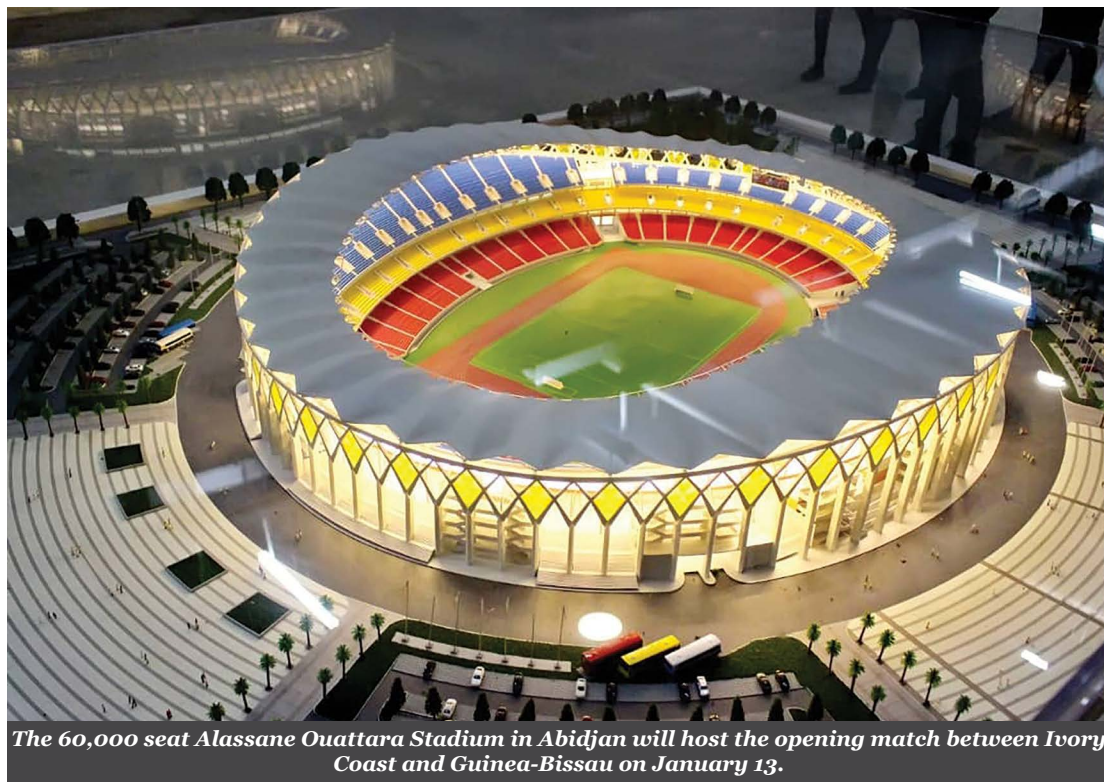
Fast-rising and improving Equatorial Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, who have qualified for a fourth straight AFCON, will be looking to create an upset in the group.

The black stars of Ghana have a huge undertaking against Egypt in Group B. Cape Verde and Mozambique round up the group. Ghana has won the AFCON four times, with their last win coming back in 1982, a long time for a country that has and continues to produce quality players on the continent and beyond.

Ghana will hope to banish the second-fiddle record, having finished second five times. Indeed, since winning the competition in 1982, Ghana has finished runner-up in 1992, 2010 and 2015.

Five-time champions Cameroon will meet defending champions Senegal in Group C, in what is to be a jaw-dropping fixture, with Guinea and the Gambia also in the same group. Senegal won, only their first AFCON title in Cameroon last edition picking up a 4-2 win on post-match penalty shootouts. Before that victory, Sadio Mane's country had finished runner-up twice, in 2002 and 2019.

For Cameroon, Coach Rigobert Song's side will be looking forward to their sixth title, having last tasted



The 60,000 seat Alassane Ouattara Stadium in Abidjan will host the opening match between Ivory Coast and Guinea-Bissau on January 13.

victory in 2017. Facing the Gambia, Cameroon will be meeting an old foe whom it defeated in the quarter-finals 2-0 in Douala last edition.

Group D consist of Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Angola, while Bafana Bafana of South Africa will face Tunisia, Mali and Namibia in a relatively easy Group E.

Morocco, the first African country to reach the semifinal of the FIFA World Cup was drawn in Group F alongside Tanzania, Zambia and DR Congo. The Atlas Lions have won the AFCON just once, in 1976 in Ethiopia. Their best performance since then has been a runner-up position in 2004, beaten by Tunisia.

The Egyptian King that is yet to be crowned

Like every great player in the world, what distinguishes the normal players and those of the realm of special players, is the number of titles, not just individual ones but collective ones. Ranking the greatest players on the African continent, those that come to mind are Samuel Eto'o, Didier Drogba, George Weah, but increasingly, there is an Egyptian «king» who many see as a contender for the best player in the history of African football, Mohamed Salah.

You may be forgiven for not



Mohamed Salah failed to win the AFCON in 2017 and 2021. Ivory Coast may be third time lucky for the Egyptian.

ranking the Liverpool winger as one of the best players on the continent, looking at how the player to many, has yet to reach his full potential, despite scoring goals for fun for his Merseyside club. With the 31-year-old reaching the heydays of his career, the AFCON in Ivory Coast represents an opportunity for Mohamed Salah to finally get his hands on the coveted AFCON trophy that has eluded him in two previous editions.

Certainly, Mohamed Salah finished

as runner-up with the Egyptian squad at the 2017 AFCON in Gabon and last year's edition in Cameroon. All missing out to the Indomitable Lions in 2017 and to Senegal in 2021. In total, Salah scored 4 goals in both editions of the competitions.

Salah is revered in Egypt as a symbol of national pride for his achievements and is known as the «fourth pyramid» and in the Arab world is regarded as the «pride of the Arabs». But all this will be for nothing if he cannot once again lead Egypt to their eighth continental trophy. A feat that will finally land Salah, the object that his heart utmost desires.

Osimhen, the face of the Super Eagles Squad

Nigeria and Napoli striker Victor Osimhen finished the 2023 AFCON Qualifier as the top striker, leading many to predict that the Super Eagles of Nigeria may once again, have a squad that can compete and claim the trophy that has eluded them for the past ten years.

Osimhen during the qualifiers scored more goals than the likes of Senegal's Sadio Mane, and Egypt's Mohamed Salah. His hatrick in Nigeria's 6-0 demolition of Sao Tome and Principe at Godswill Akpabio Stadium in Uyo, took his tally to 10 in 6 AFCON qualifying games.

Osimhen is currently in good

form... and one thing that Nigeria will pray for is for him to remain fit, and injury-free before and during the tournament,» Alpha Markus Sidi, Wakanda FC midfielder told Daily Post on Osimhen's prospects of leading Nigeria in Ivory Coast.

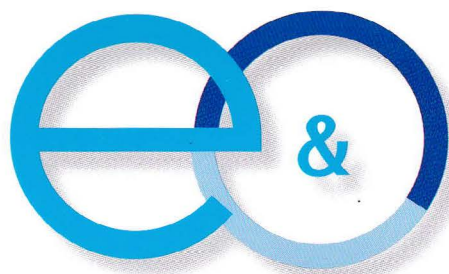
Technically, the Super Eagles team has improved a lot from what they used to be. Now we have more teamwork, and they understand. With the likes of Kelechi, Taiwo, Chukueze, Moses, Aribi, Iwobi, Ademola, Ndidi and Frank to support him, I believe Osimhen would not only lead Nigeria to win the AFCON in Ivory Coast, but he would also finish as the top scorer of the competition.

The former Lille striker will be racing to go to Ivory Coast after he missed out on the Cameroon edition due to an injury, with the edition won by Senegal. In his absence, the Super Eagles crashed out of the competition in the round of 16 after losing 1-0 to Tunisia.

The big question now will be, can this year's Ballon d'Or nominee and last season's Serie A top scorer power Nigeria to go past the third-place hurdle by winning the 2023 edition of the AFCON in Ivory Coast? The last time that Nigeria won the AFCON came back in 2013 when they defeated Burkina Faso 1-0 in the final.

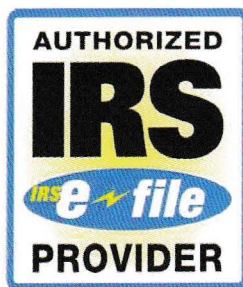
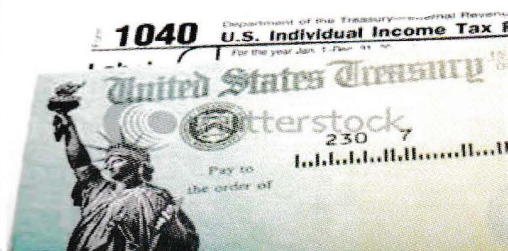
AFCON 2023 QUALIFYING - TOP SCORERS		
Victor Osimhen		10
Youssef Msakni		5
Sadio Mané		5
Patson Daka		5
Louis Mafouta		5

Victor Osimhen finished as the top scorer of the 2023 AFCON qualifiers.



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