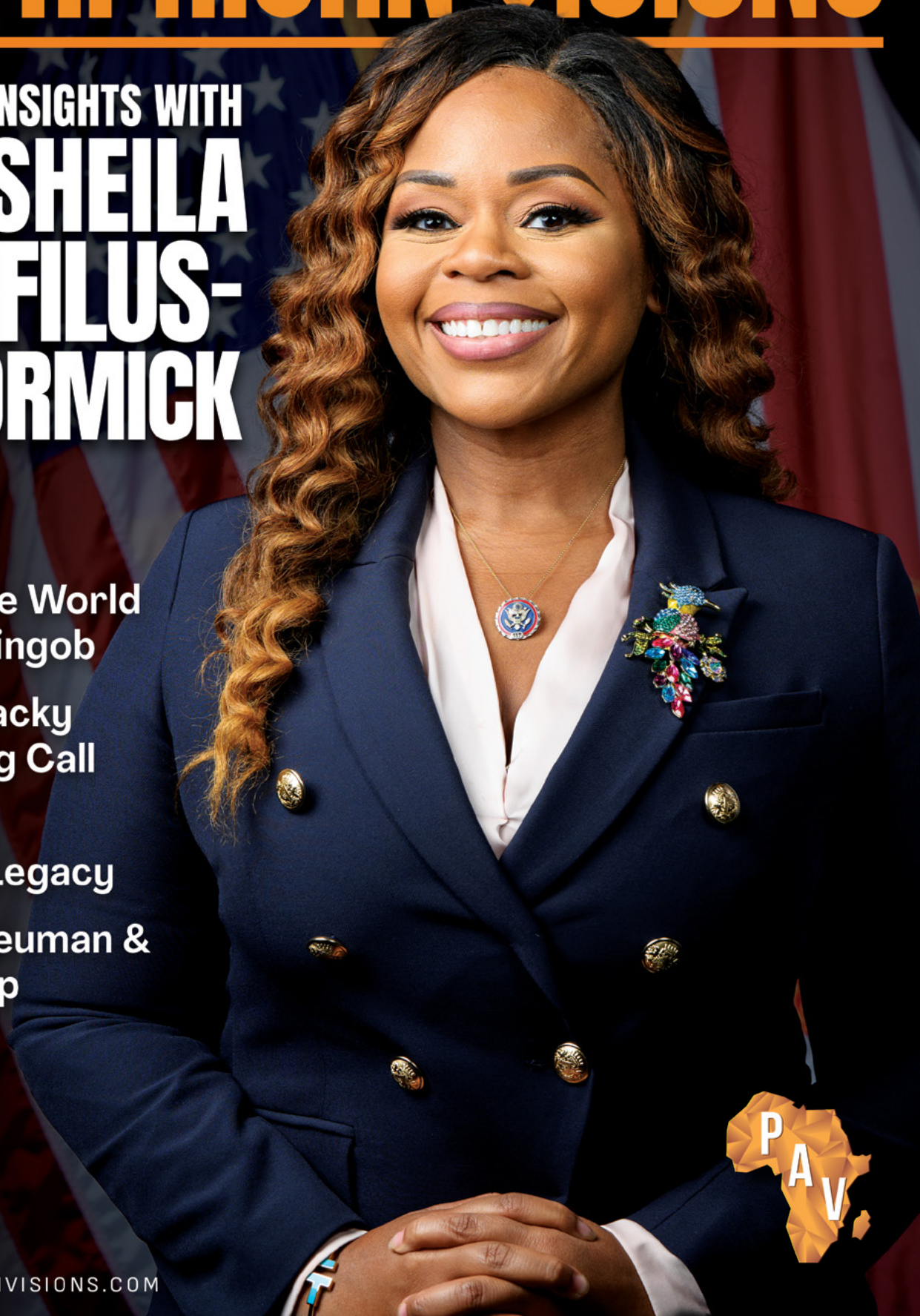


PAN AFRICAN VISIONS

US-AFRICA INSIGHTS WITH REP. SHEILA CHERFILUS- MCCORMICK



Namibia-The World
Mourns Geingob

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Sall's Wrong Call

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Musings On Cote d'Ivoire's Dividends From Change.

By Ajong Mbatndah L

Suspense, upsets, tensions, tears, celebration the just ended AfCON in Cote d'Ivoire had it all. For a country that was literally out of the tournament after its last group game ended with a 4-0 shellacking from little fancied Equatorial Guinea, the free flowing tears of President Ouattara after the finals with Nigeria summed it all. The Ivorian victory had threads of a miracle, a blend of the will providing the means, but even more importantly, a triumph for change.

In the face of unbridled frustration and a host nation in anguish following the heavy defeat from Equatorial Guinea on 22 January, Jean-Louis Gasset the French coach of the Elephants as the Ivorian National team is called, threw in the towel. In three matches, he had won just one and lost two. For a host country in the pedigree of Cote d'Ivoire, it was insulting. Some sources say the Ivoirian FA initially sort for the expertise of another French coach to continue after Gasset's ouster, but plans did not work out well. It is literally with a sense of desperation that Gasset's assistant 40-year-old Ivorian Emerse Faé was asked to manage the team. It was obvious that the Ivorian FA had no faith in him.

In an extraordinary twist of faith, it is Fae who became the hero leading Cote d'Ivoire to its third AfCON title. Indigenous African coaches are rarely given a chance to lead. Yet, it is an Ivoirian coach in the person of Yao Martial who gave the country its first AfCON trophy in 1992. The expatriate v national coach debate is further exacerbated by the double standards in terms of expectations, salary considerations, resources made available, results expected, and more.

Tournament after tournament, most of the coaches are always European. Some with less qualifications than Africans but still preferred. Others with no track record to show for the hefty pay packages that no coach of African origin will dream of. Viewed from this prism, the victory of Cote d'Ivoire led by Emerse Faé over Nigeria led by the Portuguese Jose Peseiro is a triumph of sorts for African talent. Curiously, the last time



Ajong Mbatndah L, Managing Editor

Nigeria won the cup was in 2013 with late Stephen Keshi a former captain of the Nigerian national football team serving as coach.

To their credit as well, African coaches have excelled in the last couple of tournaments. At the 2019 AfCON, despite overwhelming presence of European coaches, Algeria and Senegal that qualified for the finals had African coaches. In the 2021 edition in Cameroon, it was two African coaches that qualified their countries again for the finals. The stroke of fate that brought Emerse Faé to the helm clearly changed the fortunes of Cote d'Ivoire at the tournament. The Elephants became conquering, knocking out star studded defending champions Senegal along the way, and ending up champions.

The change that propelled Cote d'Ivoire to victory is something that should get Africans thinking. Indeed, if there is a continent or a part of the world where change is needed most, it is Africa. As Africans were consumed with the excitement and thrills of the AfCON in Cote d'Ivoire, President Macky Sall of Senegal brought his country to the brink of implosion by postponing elections and indirectly extending his leadership beyond the constitutional two terms that he was due.

This would not have been news if it was not Senegal, literally the bastion of democracy in francophone Africa. The move was further shocking considering that Macky Sall is the one who led the charge in stopping his predecessor President Abdoulaye Wade whose attempts to go beyond

the constitutional two terms were soundly rejected by Senegalese.

A leading country in the West African bloc ECOWAS, which has been grappling for a response to the surge in coups, the development in Senegal only heightened tensions within the sub region. How do you condemn military coups in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea and give what some have described as a civilian coup in Senegal a pass? How does the African Union say it abhors unconstitutional takeovers and give Macky Sall who served as Chairman a few years back the latitude to toy with constitutional provisions?

When highly respected leaders like Macky Sall fall into this trap, it speaks volumes on the depth of the leadership crisis facing Africa. Even as President Ouattara shedded tears and basked in the glory of the AfCON victory, no one was in doubt on the fact that he is in power today only because constitutional term limits were changed to give him a third term. No one is in doubt that in Cameroon, the advanced age of President Paul Biya and the cascade of crisis plaguing the country makes him more of a problem than a solution.

At a time when energy should be dedicated on tackling unemployment, focusing on addressing the energy and infrastructure crisis, moving the continent towards fulfilling the potential of the AfCFTA, energy is been dispensed trying to figure out a way forward for Senegal. At a time when the continent is trying to harp on trade and stronger regional integration, it is Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger quitting ECOWAS. It is tensions between the DR Congo and Rwanda, it is no end in sight for the crisis in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon.

As challenging as the times maybe, the reasons to hope are there. At the AfCON in Cote d'Ivoire, we saw Africans, young and old boisterous in supporting their countries. The tournament itself had no respect for big names. Who would have thought that a country like Mauritania will beat Algeria, or Equatorial Guinea thrashing eventual winners Cote d'Ivoire, South Africa beating world cup semifinalists Morocco...When

even US Secretary of State Tony Blinken added a stop in Cote d'Ivoire during AfCON on his recent African tour, it is testimonial to the stakes. The AfCON has gone beyond mere sports and entertainment.

For Africa to move forward, the passion that was seen at AfCON needs to be transposed to other sectors. From stopping leaders from changing constitutions to suit their whims and caprices, to demanding for accountable leadership, good governance, voting for leaders who meet their aspirations, the people will gain more in challenging governments for reforms in the energy sector with the same vigour, the same vigour in pushing for dual nationalities so more talent could come to the continent. After all Emerse Faé the Ivorian hero of the moment played in junior categories with the French selections and only opted for his native country Cote d'Ivoire at the senior level. William Troost-Ekong, the towering Nigerian defender and Captain who emerged as MVP of the recent AfCON played for Dutch selections at the lower levels well before settling for the Super Eagles. In foreign shores, Africa has some of the most brilliant minds in medicine, engineering, IT, and more and it will only be a plus for the continent if governments are not averse to attracting these talent to the national development mission.

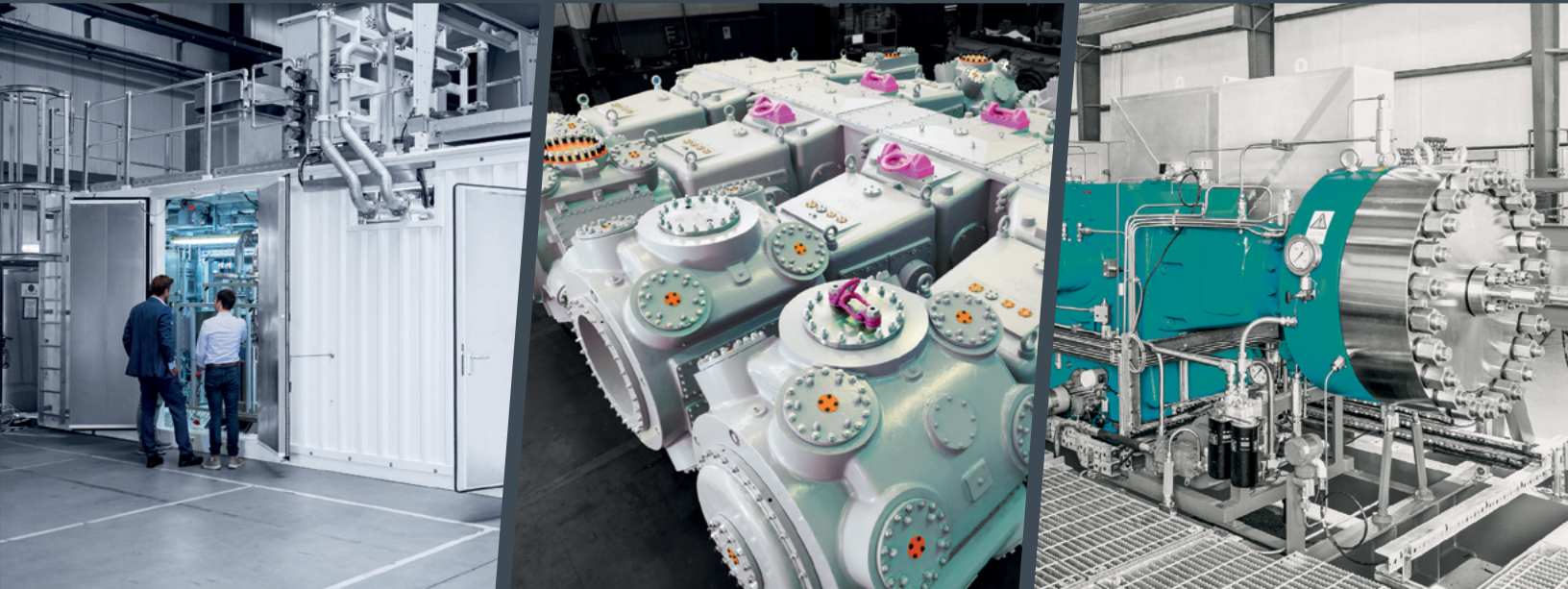
With the Black History month on the way in the USA, Congresswoman Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (FL-20), took time off her hectic schedule to field questions on some facets of the USA-African relations. A hard working and rising star of the democratic party in the US legislature, Congresswoman McCormick sees greater potential to deepen ties between the USA and Africa.

In addition to the cacophony in West Africa, this issue of PAV looks at how the world is mourning the transition of Namibia's third President Hage Geingob, the vision of Biggie Butale in Botswana, the legacy of NJ Ayuk as he passes on the torch at Centurion Law Group, the growing partnership between the Neuman & Esser Group and Africa, and more. Happy reading!!!



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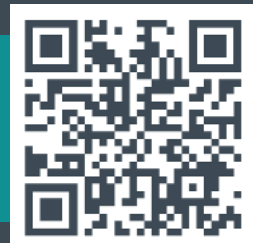
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Geingob - Architect of Namibia's Freedom and Unity

Andreas Hailenge



Late President Hage Geingob is fondly remembered across Namibia and Africa as a visionary leader.. Photo courtesy

Windhoek - February 4, 2024, will forever be remembered by the Namibian people as the day President Hage Geingob passed away, marking him as the first head of state in the country's history to die while in office. The 82-year-old passed away in a Windhoek hospital, where he was undergoing cancer treatment. He died three days after returning from the United States where he travelled to undergo a specialised cancer treatment.

However, he will be remembered as a man who spent all his life in public service and made permanent mark in the Namibian political landscape. Geingob's journey, which took him from the heights of the anti-colonial struggle to the highest office in the land, is evidence of his steadfast dedication to progress, freedom, and democracy.

The people of Namibia celebrated the 34th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution on February 9, 1990. This day marks a pivotal moment

in Namibia's history when the Constituent Assembly, comprised of visionaries and patriots, unanimously adopted the Constitution. Geingob was able to guide the 72 individuals, once adversaries in the struggle for liberation, to forge a document that would lay the foundation for a nation built on the principles of unity, liberty, and justice.

On the occasion of the Constitution Day in Windhoek, President Nangolo Mbumba noted that Namibians are reminded "of the remarkable and inspiring journey we have walked under his able guidance and stewardship as chairperson of the Constituent Assembly, founding prime minister, and third president of the Republic of Namibia," he said. Mbumba, who was sworn in as Namibia's fourth president, just hours after the death of President Geingob, said Namibia has lost a "revolutionary and visionary leader who, as the third president, worked diligently to champion the fundamental rights and freedoms that are entrenched in the

Namibian Constitution."

In remembrance of Geingob, lawmakers from both the National Assembly and National Council held a candlelight ceremony at the Parliament Garden to pay tribute to the late president's role in the adoption of the Namibian Constitution.

Speaker of the National Assembly Professor Peter Katjavivi said President Geingob "strongly believed in the importance of building a Namibia where all its inhabitants, regardless of their social status or any other characteristic, feel a sense of belonging.

"He dreamt of a country where our nationhood as Namibians is celebrated, and it counts above anything else. Hence his idea of a Namibian house, where no one feels left out. We remember how he extolled the virtues of inclusiveness. His mantra was exclusion spells conflict, while inclusion spells harmony.»

Born on August 3, 1941, President Geingob became the first head of

state to die in office in the country's 33 years independence. He was at the forefront of the struggle for Namibian independence through the former liberation movement, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO).

And his role as a freedom fighter and diplomat laid the foundation for his future endeavors as a transformative leader.

At independence in 1990, Geingob transitioned seamlessly from a freedom fighter to a politician. He went on to play a leading role in shaping the nation's political landscape, serving in various capacities within the Namibian government and the ruling SWAPO Party. He was Namibia's first prime minister from 1990 to 2002. He also served as trade and industry minister from 2008 and 2012 before returning as prime minister from 2012 to 2015.

In a cabinet reshuffle in August 2002, Geingob declined a lesser ministerial position of the regional and local government and housing.

The following year, he took up the executive secretary position at the Global Coalition for Africa in Washington.

Geingob's political journey reached its zenith when he was elected as Namibia's third president by an overwhelming majority in November 2014. He was expected to step down as head of state at the end of his mandatory second term in March 2025.

During his eight-year presidency, Geingob coined the concept of a Namibian House, a clarion call to the citizens to unite and work together. He tirelessly worked to bridge gaps and foster a sense of unity among Namibians. Geingob's inclusive approach to governance aimed at ensuring that the diverse voices of Namibia found representation and that the nation moved forward as a collective force. He would say countless times, "Let us continue holding hands and pulling in the same direction, guided by a spirit of trust and collaboration. I am confident that if we pull together, as we have always done, we will ensure that we maintain our liberty, unity, and justice."

World Mourns Geingob



Geingob religiously served Namibia under his predecessors Sam Nujoma and Hifikepunye Pohamba before becoming President in 2015.

Several world leaders, including South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Joe Biden of the United States, have expressed their sympathies with Namibians after the death of Geingob.

The President of Botswana, Mokgweetsi Masisi, was the first

head of state to pay homage to former first lady Monica Geingob at their residence in Windhoek. Masisi, who was a close friend of Geingob, expressed that "we had a very close relationship. When you have a friend this close, you just keep wishing, Why didn't he get a little extension? I had

many more things I wished to do with him and would have liked to spend some time with the president after his retirement."

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who also travelled to Windhoek, said that Namibia "has lost an outstanding leader in a year in which Namibia, like South Africa, is due to hold elections. President Geingob was a towering veteran of Namibia's liberation from colonialism and apartheid."

Zimbabwean President Emerson Mnangagwa expressed that the Southern African region has lost a liberation stalwart and icon. While the President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, said Namibia has lost a great statesman who "shaped the democratic constitution of his country,"

Angolan President and Chairperson of SADC, João Lourenço, said that Africa has lost a worthy son and freedom fighter who knew how to dedicate himself to the cause of rescuing the dignity of the African people.

Kenyan President William Ruto described President Geingob as a distinguished leader who served his people with "focus and dedication."



The African Energy Chamber honoured President Geingob with a lifetime achievement award at the 2023 African Energy Week in Cape Town

And he was a believer in a unified Africa and strongly promoted the continent's voice and visibility in the global arena.

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly, during its 55th plenary meeting of the 78th session on February 7, also observed a moment of silence in honour of President Geingob. Its President, Dennis Francis, expressed that the late Geingob was a towering figure in Namibian history and politics and a beacon of leadership on the African continent. Francis indicated that Geingob's avocation for sustainable development and renewable energy earned admiration and respect on the world stage, a vision that extends well beyond his country's borders.

On his part, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on the global community "to commit to honouring the values that Geingob stood for by fighting racism, misogyny, and injustice and by standing up for human rights. At the same time, by working to build a more equal world in which no one is left behind,

The Dream

In the second year of his presidency in 2016, President Geingob unveiled the Harambee Prosperity Plan (HPP), a comprehensive roadmap designed to address socio-economic concerns and drive the nation towards prosperity. The plan outlines various interventions across key sectors, including education, health, land reform, infrastructure development,



The new leadership of President Nangolo Mbumba and VP Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah has pledged to cement the legacy of Presidents Geingob, Pohamba, and Nujoma.

and economic growth.

In the revised HPP, President Geingob has championed the development of green hydrogen as a key pillar of Namibia's renewable energy strategy. This was part of his vision to promote sustainable energy solutions by harnessing Namibia's world-class solar and wind resources.

The Green Hydrogen Project near the coastal town of Lüderitz in southern Namibia not only promises to provide a sustainable energy solution for Namibia but also opens doors for international collaboration

and investment.

In May 2023, the Namibian government agreed to a US\$10 billion deal with Hyphen Hydrogen Energy, a German company, to develop a green hydrogen project that will export to the European Union once the project enters production.

In his tribute, the Minister of Mines and Energy, Tom Alweendo, noted that President Geingob departed when his dream of a Namibian House was incomplete.

He said that President Geingob firmly believed in our ability as a

nation to be prosperous.

"In this, not only was he persistent, but he was also a real dealer in hope. During the time when our economic potential looked bleak, he believed that with creativity, the economy had the ability to do better.

"He charged us to reimagine ourselves and chart a brighter future for this and the next generation. Today, we are on the verge of prosperity. We have witnessed exciting economic developments in the country, of which he was the main champion," Alweendo said.

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DRC's Felix Tshisekedi Inaugurated For Second Term

By Prince Kurupati

Thousands of cheerful faces filled the 80,000-capacity Martyrs Stadium in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of Congo on 20 January 2024 to celebrate the electoral victory of Felix Tshisekedi. Tshisekedi who has been the DRC president for the past 5 years received another mandate to lead the Central African nation for 5 more years. Garnering 73% of the votes cast in the December presidential election, Tshisekedi was re-elected on the back of massive support and confidence from the electorate. Tshisekedi's first inauguration in 2019 was DRC's first democratic transfer of power since the country's independence from Belgium in 1960.

As he took the oath of office at an event graced by several heads of state and foreign envoys including those from the United States, China, and France, Tshisekedi said he is taking "back the baton of command that you (the electorate) entrusted to me". He called for a "united, stronger and prosperous Congo" and said he knows and is aware of the electorate's "expectations".

Going into the December election, DRC was reeling under immense economic pressures. The country's poor economic performance has in turn caused lots of socio-political problems as demonstrated by the ever-rising unemployment figures as well as sporadic anti-government protests.

Though boasting of immense mineral riches, DRC has failed to turn its natural resources into riches for its population. The country which has roughly 100 million people is ranked as one of the poorest countries in Africa and globally. Over 70% of the country's population live in extreme poverty with Reuters putting the number of people living on less than a dollar a day at 62% of the entire population. The country's resources have been exploited by foreign actors working with corrupt officials from the country leaving the intended beneficiaries living like paupers.



President Tshisekedi inspects a guard of honor during inaugural festivities to start his second and last term of office. Photo credit Guylain Kipoke, AP.

To his credit, in his first term of office, President Tshisekedi introduced free primary medication for all citizens something which endeared him with multitudes of people. Going into his second term, Tshisekedi in his inauguration speech said he wants to "consolidate" the progress made so far and improve many other socio-political and economic aspects of all the DRC citizens. Other achievements of Tshisekedi from his first term as relayed by the spokesperson of President Tshisekedi's administration Tina Salama include "increasing the national budget from 4 billion to 16 billion dollars, providing free basic education, strengthening the armed forces, revitalising diplomacy, launching the program for free childbirth, constructing and rehabilitating healthcare, education and energy infrastructure, and implementing reforms in public administration and the judiciary".

Tina Salama also said Tshisekedi's landslide win was a testament to the confidence the people have in him. As President Tshisekedi starts his second term, the Congolese people should expect a continuation of the reforms

that the Tshisekedi administration was implementing. "President Tshisekedi sees the victory as a reflection of the Congolese people's support for his political vision. The people have chosen to strengthen the achievements of Tshisekedi's governance. As a result, the people can expect the continuation of reforms that will significantly improve their daily lives," Salama said.

In his aspirations and desire to tackle the challenges facing his country and improve the lives and livelihoods of the DRC people, Felix Tshisekedi faces a serious threat from dozens of armed groups that largely operate in the volatile and uneasy eastern region. Chief among these is the notorious M23 rebel group which constantly battles to control eastern DRC. The eastern region is where most of DRC's minerals are found and these include gold, diamonds, and cobalt.

During his first term, President Tshisekedi chose to deal with the armed groups by declaring a state of siege in Ituri and North Kivu provinces. However, these efforts were described as short-term by Richard Moncrieff, the Great Lakes

Project director at the International Crisis Group (ICG). According to Moncrieff, President Tshisekedi "needs to build for the long term in terms of reforming his security sector... and not place so much trust in very, very unreliable short-term solutions".

President Tshisekedi during his campaign trail also fingered Rwanda as one of the key instigators of the instability in the eastern region. The president said Rwanda was playing a key role in accommodating the militias chief among them the M23. In his final campaign rally, President Tshisekedi said, "If you re-elect me and Rwanda persists... I will request Parliament and Congress to authorize a declaration of war. We will march on Kigali."

Just a few months before he said this, President Tshisekedi had severed ties with the East Africa Community (EAC) Regional Forces' mandate and went on to replace it with the SADC forces. Addressing the media soon after signing the agreement with SADC, the Congolese foreign minister said the SADC troops had been given the mandate to "support the Congolese army in fighting and

eradicating the M23 and other armed groups that continue to disrupt peace and security". President Tshisekedi also requested the withdrawal from DRC of the UN mission known as MONUSCO which has been in the country since 1999. President Tshisekedi described MONUSCO as ineffective.

President Tshisekedi's newly established relationship with SADC therefore gives him reassurance of enough support in case he plans to proceed with his plan to march on Kigali. However, questions remain on the effectiveness of the SADC troops. Will they be able to

contain the armed militias that other forces before them including the UN peacekeepers have failed?

Tshisekedi's assertion that Rwanda is helping the M23 isn't just a wild thought, however. In 2023, a group of UN experts made a similar observation, and its findings were backed by the United States. Rwanda however vehemently keeps denying the claims and instead, points its finger at DRC for backing Hutu rebels who stage attacks in Rwanda. Commenting on President Tshisekedi's most recent remarks that DRC is ready to march on Kigali,

Rwandan President Paul Kagame said anyone who wished for his country's destruction "will experience it instead".

While many security experts believe that President Tshisekedi only made the "march on Kigali" comments to garner the nationalist vote, Moncrieff believes that owing to the threat he made, Tshisekedi "will find it difficult to row back from the bellicose rhetoric that he used in the election campaign". In case a full-blown war erupts, Moncrieff fears more for Tshisekedi rather than Kagame as "Rwanda's army is one of

the most respected in Africa while DR Congo's is notorious for corruption and ill-discipline".

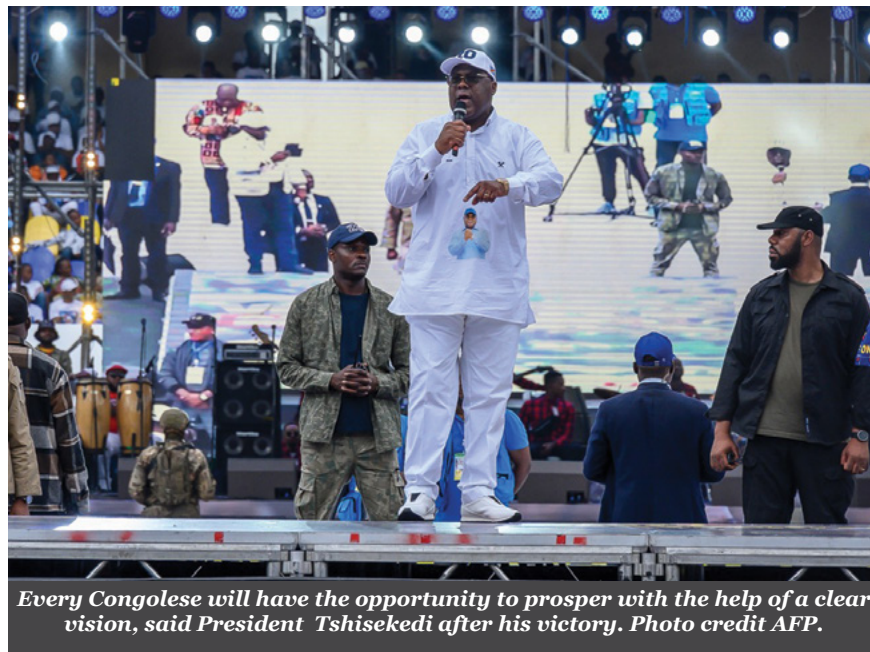
The message from the international community is that President Tshisekedi should prioritize uniting the nation and promoting good governance and building democracy. The Belgium Minister of Foreign Affairs Hadja Lahbib said, "President Felix Tshisekedi faces many challenges in his second term. Belgium wishes to encourage the President to initiate and pursue efforts in the field of good governance and human rights, whether in terms

of gender equality, the fight against corruption, reform of the security and justice sectors, meeting social and environmental challenges, or improving the business climates".

The United States in a statement released by the U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said, "The United States congratulates Felix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo on his re-election to a second term as President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). We also congratulate the Congolese people for their commitment to making their voices heard throughout the electoral process. Now the important task of building national cohesion cells for leadership, accountability, and inclusivity at all levels."

Away from the pomp and fanfare that characterized his inauguration, Tshisekedi's competitors in the December election were taking steps to challenge his victory. All of the four main presidential hopefuls including Moise Katumbi who garnered 18 percent of the vote, Martin Fayulu, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege challenged the official election results and on the day of the inauguration called on their supporters to "show their discontent". Since 32 December 2023 when the official results were announced, the opposition figures contested the results but vowed not to approach the Constitutional Court. Rather, they said they would organize a series of actions until the results were annulled.

DRC's electoral commission CENI acknowledged that there were electoral issues but denied the allegations that the vote was stolen. Some of the 'issues' identified by CENI are cases of fraud, vandalism, and intimidation as well as the use of illegal voting machines. The largest election monitoring group in Congo, CENCO however sided with the opposition leaders describing the presidential and parliamentary polls as an "electoral catastrophic".



Every Congolese will have the opportunity to prosper with the help of a clear vision, said President Tshisekedi after his victory. Photo credit AFP.



Security, employment, interconnecting and modernizing the country are some of the top second term priorities for President Tshisekedi. Photo credit UDPS.

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Burkina Faso : Military Regime Survives Another Coup Attempt

By Prince Kurupati

The spokesperson of the Burkina Faso military government said on January 18 2023 that the country's president and government institutions have for the «umpteenth» time survived a coup. The attempted coup according to spokesperson Rimalba Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo had been scheduled to take place on January 14 citing findings from preliminary investigations. The coups' intended to «destabilise» the Sahelian nation.

Implicated as the chief culprits in organising the coup is a network of “military personnel, some retired, some active and civilians”. Most of these have however been detained according to spokesperson Ouédraogo and they are currently helping the country's law enforcement agents with investigations.

Spokesperson Ouédraogo said the country's intelligence services and defence forces who were vigilant in apprehending the suspects have also unearthed a complex plot in which foreign funding was unblocked for the coup plotters to efficiently organise their plan. Information was being sent and events coordinated by a team that contacted various military barracks throughout the country to “organise a mutiny”. The intelligence services and defence forces also went on to state that another key component of the coup plotters' plan was to sway the people's support for the ruling MPSR (Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration).

This is the fourth attempt in which some elements in the military barracks have sought to wrestle power away from Captain Ibrahim Traore. Captain Traore ascended to the presidency via a coup in September 2022 after he deposed Col. Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba who he had also risen to the presidency via a coup after deposing the country's last civilian president Roch Marc Christian Kabore.

The last attempt occurred in September 2023. The Junta after the coup attempt simply released a statement saying some military officers had attempted to wrestle power with “the dark intention of attacking the institutions of the Republic and plunging our country in chaos”. The statement



The fiery rhetoric of Captain Ibrahim Traore has found a receptive audience across Burkina Faso. Photo courtesy.

went further saying the implicated had been arrested hence helping the law enforcement officers with investigations. However, no specific details about the actual plan and plot of the coup were released.

Soon after the news of the attempted coup, the French news magazine *Jeune Afrique* was suspended for publishing what the authorities said were “untruthful” articles that reported tension in the barracks and fuelled discontent in the country. Nationwide pro-junta demonstrators in turn filled the streets showing their support to the junta and allaying any fears of a brewing mutiny in the barracks.

After the September 2023 coup was thwarted, Captain Ibrahim Traore took to X (formerly Twitter) to express how he and the country are determined to move forward despite efforts by some to destabilise the country. Captain Traore said he is determined to “lead the transition safely despite the adversity and different manoeuvres to stop our inexorable march towards assumed sovereignty”.

Many analysts have concluded that the several coup attempts that Burkina Faso has witnessed are simply down to the fact that coups beget coups. However, Temitope Laniran who is a Research Associate at the University of Bradford said that the constant coups and coup attempts in Burkina Faso are down

to superficial democracy. Laniran states that while Burkina Faso like most African nations had in the past embraced liberal democracy, the “mere introduction of electoral democracy is not sufficient. A strong democracy needs strong institutions to build resilience against fragility. Poverty and insecurity are an indication of fragility. They show that institutions are not efficiently distributing wealth. Civil rule is under threat as long as institutions remain fragile”.

Laniran's sentiments were also supported by Kamissa Camara and Susan Stigant from the United States Institute of Peace who say that the systems of governance in Burkina Faso are not effectively democratic. Owing to this, power remains concentrated in particular communities and narrow elites. One of these communities is the military.

To prevent future coups and to stabilise the country, Camara and Stigant say there is a need for concerted and consolidated efforts between Burkina Faso and regional groupings chief among them the African Union. While the African Union is quick to condemn military takeovers, it's not a hands-on grouping as it often fails to effectively act to deal with the instigators of a military takeover. It is on this front that Camara and Stigant call upon regional groupings to come up with effective measures, policies, and

possibly personnel to deal with such issues.

Moreover, Camara and Stigant said there is also a need for civilian leaders during their tenure in power to embrace the inclusion and accountability that Africans demand. While the military takes power after a coup, often, they are ‘pushed’ to act in this way owing to the cries from the public lamenting the absence of basic needs, services, and amenities. For as long as the leaders provide what they promise in their election manifestos, one of the main reasons behind any coup will be wholesomely erased from the equation.

“Africa's partners must ‘flip the script’ from their old patterns of development assistance to leverage the power of investment. This will not only fuel expanded economic opportunities vital to stabilising violence-stricken African states, but also develop local private business sectors as natural, civil society engines for demanding better rule of law, including anti-corruption measures,” Camara and Stigant said.

Commenting on the pathway to take after a coup has already taken place, Camara and Stigant said there is a need for “carefully designed transitions toward effective democracies instead of often rushing to simply schedule quick post-coup elections that will bake into the next government the same flaws that undermined the previous one”.

Senegal: Sall's Last Act in Charge - Destroying His Legacy

By Prince Kurupati

In an unprecedented move that has thrown Senegal into an uncharted constitutional crisis, the country's President Macky Sall unilaterally shifted the presidential election dates from February 25 to later this year. The new election date has since been proclaimed as December 15 following a chaotic parliamentary vote.

Senegalese President Macky Sall appeared on state TV on Saturday, February 3. For those who have come to know President Sall, his immediate demeanour characterised by a serious expression on his face immediately suggested that all was not well. Indeed, as he uttered his first words and afterwards the accusations of corruption levelled at the Constitutional Court, it became evident that something more ominous was on the way. The ominous part came towards the end of the address as President Sall said he was rescinding the decree convening the presidential election set for February 25.

Why rescind the election date? Well, according to President Sall, the prevailing environment in the country is not conducive to conducting the election. This is largely necessitated by the fact that there are lingering questions on the integrity of the Constitutional Court. Currently, Senegalese lawmakers are investigating two constitutional council judges whose integrity in the election process has been questioned. Moreover, the President said the extended window will give the state time to look into the eligibility of prospective presidential aspirants including those who are currently barred from running due to various reasons. Rounding up, President Sall said conducting elections with these "troubled conditions" in place "could seriously undermine the credibility of the ballot by sowing the seeds of pre- and post-electoral disputes".

Throughout President Sall's reign especially his second term in office, Senegal has experienced several



A tainted legacy for Macky Sall and a sullid reputation for Senegal as the beacon of hope for democracy in Francophone Africa. Photo courtesy.

nationwide protests. Most of these were responses to the government's heavy-handedness in dealing with opposition leaders chief among them Ousmane Sonko. The biggest and most fearsome protests occurred in March 2021 and June 2023 following the conviction of Sonko. The conviction effectively eliminated Sonko from the ballot as Senegalese law restricts candidates with criminal convictions from running.

In the aftermath of the announcement up to the next rescheduled election date, President Sall said "For my part, my solemn commitment not to run in the presidential election remains unchanged, finally, I will engage in an open national dialogue to bring together the conditions for a free, transparent and inclusive election."

Lending some sort of 'legitimacy' to President Sall's unilateral decision was the Parliament which voted to shift the election date to 15 December. The Senegalese leader got the backing of the Parliament late on Monday 5 February when 105 MPs in the 165-seat assembly voted in favour of the

president's decree. The vote was however passed by MPs aligning with President Sall's coalition as all opposition lawmakers had been forcibly ejected from the August House.

While President Sall's reasoning may seem noble, many in the country as well as observers from beyond Senegal's borders are convinced that the rescission of the election date is motivated more by politics rather than propriety. After announcing that he would step down at the end of his second term as per the dictates of the Constitution, President Sall endorsed Prime Minister Amadou Ba as his preferred successor. In recent times, however, polls have shown that Ba's ratings are at an all-time low. As such, a defeat in the upcoming election won't be a shocker.

Compounding matters for President and Prime Minister Ba is the fact that Bassirou Diomaye Faye, the man being endorsed by Ousmane Sonko to stand in for him during the election as the candidate of the African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF) is

currently enjoying massive support all over the country.

Convinced that the decision to shift the election date is a political move by President Macky Sall is Francois Conradie, the lead political economist at Oxford Economics Africa who said, "Our reading is that Sall became convinced that Ba was going to lose to Bassirou Diomaye Faye, the radical running as Sonko's stand-in, and chose to postpone the election to play for time."

On the contrary, Moussa Diaw, a research lecturer at the Gaston Berger University in Saint Louis believes that President Sall's worries and the decision to shift the election date is justified. Speaking to French publication Le Monde, Moussa Diaw said the decision to shift the election date is backed by the fact that the country needs "to be pacified before an election could be organised. Otherwise, there was a risk of unrest."

By shifting the election date, President Sall has thrown Senegal into a constitutional crisis, something which has been likened to a constitutional 'coup' by governance

experts. At law, President Sall's second and final term in office expires on April 2. It means by this date an election should have been conducted and concluded with the incoming president already inaugurated. However, by shifting the election date to December 15, President Sall from April 2 to December 15 will be executing presidential duties outside of the constitutional mandate.

Describing the legal dilemma that has been necessitated by President Sall's decree, Mucahid Durmaz, a senior West Africa analyst at risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft said, "The decision has thrown Senegal into uncharted waters of a constitutional crisis... The constitution requires elections to be organized at least 30 days before the end of the incumbent president's mandate. Sall's rule expires on April 2. And the decree detailing the electoral calendar must be released 80 days before the vote takes places. Even if he appoints a transitional president after 2 April, the legality of it will be disputed."

Justifying his decision to shift the election date, the Senegalese president said the environment was not conducive and his supporters said



Opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye is proving to be more than a stand in candidate for embattled leader Ousmane Sonko

any election done in the prevailing environment would lead to unrest. However, at the present moment, it is the decision that has ignited the unrest. Soon after the decision was announced, 3 of the 20 presidential candidates lodged their legal

challenges to President's Sall while others stated they would follow suit. As reported by Al Jazeera, authorities had to temporarily restrict internet access citing hate messages on social media, schools closed early and more protesters took to the streets. A

private television channel Walf said it was taken off air and had its license provoked.

The events in the immediate aftermath show that President Sall's decision has ignited the very same thing that he said he wanted to prevent. With it being described as a constitutional coup and widely condemned by many, it would have been prudent for him to quickly take back his words and let events flow as originally planned. All that's happening now is just tainting the president's image at the wrong time. More worrisome is that it significantly dissipates the chances of Prime Minister Ba's chances of winning as and when the elections will be held.

Commenting on the whole debacle, Human Rights Watch concluded that "Senegal has long been considered a beacon of democracy in the region. This is now at risk."

Both the African Union and ECOWAS have expressed regret at the decision to move the election dates. ECOWAS said it's concerned "over the circumstances that have led to the postponement of the elections".



President Sall endorsed Prime Minister Amadou Ba as his preferred successor. Photo credit Ahmet Izgi, Anadolu Agency, Getty Images.



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Botswana: Biggie Butale On The BRP Card

By Ajong Mbapndah L



The BRP is a beacon of hope for the majority who have been left behind by the current regime for many decades, says Biggie Butale.

With crucial elections coming up later in the year, Biggie Butale, President of the Botswana Republican Party believes his party deserves a fresh look and could be more than a better alternative to the ruling Botswana Democratic Party that has dominated politics in the Southern African nation since independence.

From complacency to unfulfilled campaign promises, and a slow but steady rise in corruption, President Masisi and the ruling party have not delivered for the people of Botswana, says Biggie Butale.

“The BRP is a movement of the people. It is a beacon of hope for the majority who have been left behind by the current regime for many decades. The party is here to remind other like-minded movements that as leaders

it is our responsibility to initiate sustainable development through our economic transformation reforms and policies,” Biggie Butale says in an interview with PAV.

How would you sum up the socio-economic and political situation of Botswana as of January 2024?

Currently, Botswana’s socio-economic status is in dire straits. The education system has seen better days, and the Government health facility pharmacies are bare. There are high rates of youth unemployment and other societal ills that need tackling urgently that are bedeviling the country.

Over the years Botswana has enjoyed high economic growth rates coupled with a stable democratic

set-up. Of late, it has become clear that we ought to redefine the word democracy. Politically, Botswana has had one party at the helm of Government since independence in 1966. 50-plus years still depending mostly on diamond exports does not augur well for the future of the country. Our politics has also changed since there is less tolerance of political opponents. Being an effective opposition politician automatically qualifies one to harassment and “special” treatment, you become a target!

You have led the Botswana Republican Party (BRP) since November 2023. Can you shed light on the party and what it stands for?

The Botswana Republican Party

is a new dispensation that promises the citizens of Botswana better lives through progressive politics. The party strives to grow the country’s economy and bring about sustainable development as opposed to promises to just increase salaries and allowances to all and sundry, we believe that every vote for us is an investment towards ameliorating Botswana’s socio-economic woes. We stand for respect for human rights and social justice.

People are curious about the political journey that culminated in you creating and leading the BRP.

My leadership traits and influence in Botswana politics are what made me who I am, and I have no doubt that many people in Botswana want me to be their leader.

Of Course, the journey hasn’t been

an easy one, and only leaders with the interests of the people at heart will be persecuted as I have been.

My exit from the ruling party was a result of the concerted dwindling of the democratic space in that party.

Due to being one who aspires immensely to serve the people, the former head of state Ian Khama and I were driven to start the Botswana Patriotic Front. We were subsequently compelled to find a new political home after perceptions of autocracy and a sharp change of policy in the ruling party. The new party we formed grew in popularity and was well on the path to credibly challenging for state power when some supporters of the former President urged him to challenge me for the Presidency, this was a fatal move as many people had said the former President wanted to get back to State house despite his exhausting the Constitutional 10-year limit. From the moment he publicly announced his intentions instability and skulduggery tactics pervaded the party, we spent more time in court then on the campaign trail leading to a large portion of members deciding to leave and form the Botswana Republican Party

How can you situate the importance of the BRP in the current political dynamics or context in Botswana?

The BRP is a movement of the people. It is a beacon of hope for the majority who have been left behind by the current regime for many decades. The party is here to remind other like-minded movements that as leaders it is our responsibility to initiate sustainable development through our economic transformation reforms/policies. We are a very well organised people first orientated party and leadership. Many of our political outfits do not run consultation-based parties but rely on mostly autocratic set ups. Our solid structure and culture at Botswana Republic Party is what attracts members in large numbers.

May we know how prepared the party is for the General



I believe the opposition therefore has a great chance to cause an upset, says Biggie Butale.

elections coming up later in 2024?

As a political leader having done this before when I was the founding President of the Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF), I can confidently attest that the BRP is more than ready for the upcoming elections. We are not starting from scratch as some may think. Most of the members from my previous political home and other political parties have joined us and we are expecting more to do so in the lead up to the polls. Our candidates for both parliamentary and council seats are also being mentored by myself and the Vice President who have both been down the elections and Government road paths before. Our political ideas encapsulated in our manifesto have also captured the imagination of the populace.

What is your assessment of the leadership of President Masisi, how has he fared so far as President of Botswana?

President Mokgweetsi Eric Masisi could have been a better leader given the era in which he ascended to the presidency. Botswana are

generally not unreasonable people. All Batswana need is promised deliverables that can change their lives and the next generation. The current regime has delivered very little of the promises they made since 2019 when they assumed power. It is unfortunate that President Masisi's reign has been marred by so many controversies. That alone is not good for the country. In my opinion, the President lost track when he failed to address some of the pressing socio-economic challenges facing the nation and instead seemed to obsess on his predecessor. One of his biggest mistakes was spending most of his 5-year term fighting with his predecessor at the expense of national priorities. I believe he could have chosen a more diplomatic path to resolve whatever transpired between him and his predecessor. Secondly Botswana's Judiciary has suffered credibility perception. Corruption has also skyrocketed in the interim.

The ruling party has dominated politics in Botswana for decades, how do you make

the case for your compatriots to give your party and the opposition a chance?

That's an undeniable fact, but over the years the ruling party has lost popularity, and this has translated to a growing hostility towards the regime. I believe the opposition therefore has a great chance to cause an upset, especially now that the opposition has sound leaders who are yearning to liberate the nation of Botswana. It has been almost six decades since Botswana attained independence and the ruling party seems to not only have run out of steam but more importantly of ideas as well. The ruling party also suffered a debilitating haemorrhage when we left in 2019 to form the BPF. Our mission at BRP is very precise-to completely transform lives, change Botswana from being an entirely consumer-based single commodity economy and to move towards industrialization and modernization. Botswana is a natural resource wealthy Nation. We need to systemically harness these resources to benefit ordinary Batswana.

If the people of Botswana



The BRP will move the Anti-Corruption body from the Office of the President so that it reports directly to Parliament, says Biggie Butale.

entrusted you and the BRP with the trust to run the country, what would the Biggie Butale-led government look like and how would it govern differently from the current administration?

If given a five-year mandate, my administration will embark on a robust economic transformation to remove the social injustice suffered by Batswana over time. Botswana is the leading and largest diamond exporter by value but the gap between the rich and the poor is very distinct. The economy of Botswana is in the hands of about 5% of the population, of which unfortunately in that 5% majority are not indigenous Batswana. The unemployment issue needs to be tackled and move from a two-digit to a one-digit rate by focusing on some major factor endowments

i.e.: harnessing sunshine to produce solar energy, utilising the huge land reserves and water resources to spark an agricultural revolution. Botswana is also blessed with huge Mineral deposits that need to be fully exploited not just for raw export but to be benefited here in the country to reduce unemployment and to benefitate and increase national wealth.

We believe in good Governance and Meritocracy in the Civil service. We will genuinely and sincerely fight corruption not just on paper but with preset targets that will move Botswana up on International Governance indices. We will move the Anti-Corruption body from under the Office of the President so that it reports directly to Parliament. My administration will also strengthen the justice system that was hitherto

Botswana's pride and joy.

You were a Member of the Pan African Parliament from 2014 to 2016, how was the experience like for you and how relevant is that institution in the continent?

I interfaced widely with leaders from across Africa, there was a common thread in terms of democracy, and ideologies—it was quite an experience from 2014-2016. I met many members of different parliaments, and we exchanged notes from our various countries of origin. The common thread I picked up was the near similar, rabid hostility ruling parties had for the opposition.

Looking at the future of Botswana, what makes you optimistic and do you have any

fears?

Botswana is like a near blank canvas and has so many untapped opportunities for locals and investors to explore. The economic opportunities range from agriculture to mining and tourism. Botswana has been at peace continuously since Independence, I believe that we can export this peace dividend to the rest of the continent. We have a small well trained and well-equipped army that is well experienced in peacekeeping missions. My government will expand on this to help the rest of the continent more. My fear, like many African countries, is the electoral system that needs to be investigated and strengthened to curb corrupt leaders from manipulating it so as to remain illegitimately at the driving wheel of our countries.



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Blinken Kickstarts US' Diplomatic Offensive in Africa for 2024

By Ajong Mbapndah L & Prince Kurupati

From the onset of 2024, the United States has shown a clear intention to work and cooperate with Africa. At the forefront of demonstrating how keen and willing the U.S. is to cooperate with and invest in Africa was the American Secretary of State Anthony Blinken who started his calendar year with an official trip to four African countries.

Blinken's first destination in Africa was Cape Verde. From there, he proceeded to the Ivory Coast, the country which is currently hosting the continental football tournament, AFCON. Unsurprisingly, upon arriving in the West African nation, Secretary Blinken went straight to watch one of the matches live at the Ebimpe Stadium. As he watched the match, he could hear and feel the warmth of the entire African nation. However, he certainly at one point would have heard beforehand or at the stadium that the stadium was constructed by China, the U.S.' key competitor in Africa. Just a week before he walked into the Ebimpe Stadium, China's top diplomat Wang Yi was in that same stadium to promote the "win-win" partnership between his country and Ivory Coast as reported by the Washington Post.

Though a good gesture and seemingly a simple thing, Blinken's visit to the Ebimpe Stadium showed the U.S. Secretary of State as well as the American nation the hard work they need to do if they are to rival China in creating more synergies with African nations. Taking a cue from his pronouncements following his meeting with Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara, Blinken definitely knows the tall task that awaits if the U.S. is to gain significant inroads in deal-making with African countries.

"We're here for a very simple reason, because America and Africa's futures, their peoples, their prosperity, are linked and joined as never before," Blinken said. The visit to the Ivory Coast was necessitated by



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Nigerian President Bola Tinubu during the trip.

the desire to "discuss shared priorities to strengthen democracy and good governance, expand economic growth and trade, improve security in Ivory Coast and the region, as well as programs to advance climate, food, security, and health".

The choice of the four countries that Blinken chose to visit clearly shows that the U.S. is looking for more than just economic cooperation with Africa. The third and fourth countries that Blinken visited after Ivory Coast were Nigeria and Angola. Nigeria and Angola's neighbouring country the Democratic Republic of Congo are currently ravaged by security issues. Nigeria is facing a jihadist insurgency while also having to deal with internal tensions arising from its attempt to stabilise the unrest and tumults in neighbouring West African nations chief among them Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso which have all experienced coups in recent times. DRC on the other hand is battling armed militias which have for so long caused massive problems in the mineral-rich eastern region.

The country is also on the brink of a full-blown war after its President Felix Tshisekedi threatened to "march on Kigali" if Rwanda persists in supporting armed militias in Congo's eastern region.

Speaking after his trip to Angola, Secretary Blinken said, "The United States very much appreciates (Angola's) President Lourenco's continued efforts to de-escalate tensions between Rwanda and the DRC. We believe that the Luanda Process, in tandem with the Nairobi Process, is the best hope for enduring peace. Angola is trusted by all sides. President Lourenco's leadership is vital for breakthrough."

"We are intensely focused on challenges to security in the region, in the Sahel, intensely focused because of the impact that it having on our friends, on our partners," Blinken said. Niger, one of the West African nations that Nigeria is determined to help during its chairmanship of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) used to serve as a major U.S. hub for

counterterrorism operations. Since the country's democratically elected president was deposed, the U.S.' influence in Niger has waned as the leading Junta is sceptical of the U.S. The Niger Junta has instead chosen to bring in the Russian military contractor, the Wagner Group to prop up its rule.

As he left West Africa, Blinken pledged \$45 million which he said will boost security in the region. The latest pledge brings the United States' stability-focused assistance in Coastal West Africa since 2022 to \$300 million. With three of the four countries that Blinken visited being in the West African region, the prioritisation of this region clearly shows that the U.S. is firm on its decision to help stamp out instability and build democracy. Alex Vines who is the director of the Africa programme at London-based think tank Chatham House said the prioritisation of the West African region is also a realisation on the part of the United States that its influence in this region is waning. This is largely

necessitated by the fact that most of the countries that are Junta-led in this region have sought the services of Russian military contractors to prop up their rule.

Daniel Eizenga who is a research fellow at the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies agreed with Alex Vines saying, “If we think of what is going on in West Africa right now and sort of the strategic consideration, one will notice that the security situation in the Sahel is deteriorating quite rapidly and it is putting a lot of pressure on coastal West Africa countries. I think there is an effort to take into consideration just how important those pressures are... I think they are (the U.S.) genuinely looking for opportunities to partner with African governments in ways that strengthen democratic leadership across the world... everyone is very attuned and aware of the fact Africa will be a dominant force in global politics and global economics over the next decades.”

Commenting on Blinken’s Africa trip, Oge Onubogu, the director of the Africa program at the Wilson Centre said the U.S.’ diplomatic offensive in Africa should be guided more by America’s strengths rather than the desire to outdo what China and Russia are doing. Instead of focusing



Secretary of State Antony Blinken shakes hands with Cabo Verde Prime Minister Ulisses Correia e Silva at the Government Palace in Praia, Cabo Verde January 22, 2024

on infrastructural projects and the like, the U.S. should focus more on long-term economic relationships, democracy building, and good governance.

“Infrastructure that people can see and feel, yes, it’s wonderful. But what the U.S. brings to the table is something more long-term... Democracy is something that African citizens value deeply. That

is something that China and Russia do not... For the U.S., I think our hearts are in the right place, but we have to be able to invest the time and the resources to show that the relationship and partnership is for the long term,” Onubogu said.

To this end, Blinken demonstrated that America is willing to embrace long-term partnerships with Africa. In all the four countries he visited,

Blinken stated that the Biden administration is going to continue all its current operations in Africa which include public health measures talk of HIV control and digitising medical records as well as expanding the backing for U.S. private investments.

While Blinken expressed the U.S.’ desire to continue with its long-term cooperation’s with Africa and promised more of such, America in the recent past has proved that it’s ready to enter the race with any country when it comes to investing in Africa. To challenge China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the U.S. embarked on a massive infrastructural project in southern Africa dubbed the Lobito Corridor which aims at connecting Africa with the U.S.

Perhaps as a clear sign of the U.S.’ desire to work more with Africa, it wasn’t just Blinken who kickstarted his calendar year with an official trip to Africa. Also visiting Africa was Linda Thomas Greenfield, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations who attended the inauguration of Joseph Boakai, Liberia’s new president. Ambassador Thomas Greenfield’s Africa trip also saw her visit Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone.



Blinken flanked by CAF President Patrick Motsepe receiving a jersey of Cote d’Ivoire’s national Team with his name from Prime Minister Robert Beugré Mambe. Photo courtesy.

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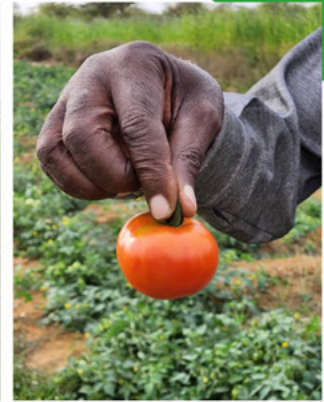
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US-Africa Insights With Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick

By Ajong Mbapndah L

Thanks to the leadership of President Biden and Vice President Harris, there has been a renewed commitment on maintaining engagements across the continent and putting Africa at the forefront, says US Congresswoman Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D-FL 20th District.

Fielding questions from PAV in a Black History Month Interview Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick says the Biden -Harris Administration has shown unwavering commitment in US-Africa engagement. In 2023 alone, 17 Cabinet and leaders of U.S. Government Departments have visited 26 countries in Africa, including Secretary Blinken and Secretary Yellen, says Rep. McCormick, a member of the Foreign Affairs Africa Subcommittee and the Congressional Black Caucus.

“As Black Americans, we have always held Africa in our hearts and knew there would be a day when the world would understand the importance of Africa and her people. the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has spent decades building relationships with African nations and is poised and ready to work with and fight alongside Africans for fair and inclusive treatment in the global community,” Congresswoman McCormick says.



As Black Americans, we have always held Africa in our hearts and knew there would be a day when the world would understand the importance of Africa and her people, says Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick. Photo courtesy.

This interview is being done in the background of the Black Heritage Month, can you situate its context and importance to the African -American community in the USA?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: Black people in America have overcome countless obstacles and systemic persecution. During Black History Month, we remember not just the injustices but the tenacious souls of our ancestors who made America a better place for us all.

We celebrate the countless achievements and progress we have

made as Black Americans throughout history. As we reflect on the sacrifices of those who came before us, we also have a responsibility to uplift Black voices and fight for a better future. This month reminds us of this responsibility and the role each of us must play.

Black History Month is even more important now than ever because we have a growing population of racism deniers and pro-slavery advocates who believe slavery was beneficial and that there is no need for affirmative, systemic steps toward equality.

The public has the impression that Africa is not a priority

for the U.S. As a member of the Foreign Affairs Africa Subcommittee and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), what is your appraisal of the current ties between the US and Africa?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: The international community, as well as the Administration, clearly understands that Africa is at the center of Foreign Affairs. Every nation is pushing to strengthen diplomatic relations as well as economic relations. As Black Americans, we have always held Africa in our hearts and knew there would be a day when the world would understand the

importance of Africa and her people. the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has spent decades building relationships with African nations and is poised and ready to work with and fight alongside Africans for fair and inclusive treatment in the global community.

Since its founding, the CBC has helped chart an improved course for U.S.-Africa relations, while remaining outspoken about the need to confront global health and human rights challenges head-on. Today, we are 60 members strong, including 6 serving on the Foreign Affairs committee and 3 on the Africa subcommittee.

Alongside my colleagues, we sit on the shoulders of those who championed stronger U.S.-Africa relations and I am ensuring that this commitment never wavers, especially in the face of competing foreign policy challenges. My colleagues and I introduced a resolution supporting the African Union's permanent membership in the G20.

Secretary Blinken's recent trip to Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and Angola is a clear indication that Africa matters to the U.S. despite ongoing international conflicts. We are increasing our economic and cultural ties and are committed to strengthening our relationships in a mutually beneficial way.

It has been over a year now since the last USA-Africa's Leaders' Summit took place, how well has the U.S. done in keeping engagements it made?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: Thanks to the leadership of President Biden and Vice President Harris, there has been a renewed commitment on maintaining engagements across the continent and putting Africa at the forefront.

The Biden-Harris Administration has already pledged unprecedented investments to fulfill this commitment. According to the Africa Development Bank, the continent needs to mobilize roughly \$100 billion annually to build its infrastructure. At the G7, we pledged a \$300 million investment in Ghana for data centers as part of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) and are considering funding a \$250 million railway from Angola to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Additionally, the US Export-Import Bank also authorizes \$1.6 billion for infrastructure. During the summit, U.S. and African firms signed \$15.7 billion in agreements in industries including infrastructure, healthcare, renewable energy, technology, and agriculture.

Ambassador Johnnie Carson has been tasked to ensure those commitments are fulfilled and is building out the diplomatic infrastructure to carry out our



Since its founding, the CBC has helped chart an improved course for U.S.-Africa relations, says Rep. McCormick pictured here with some CBC colleagues and officials from Rwanda.

priorities. In September, I was honored to attend the swearing-in ceremony of the President's Advisory Council on African Diaspora Engagement in the United States — which was first announced by the Vice President at the summit. I believe a lot of progress has been made on this front and I anticipate more investment will flow with a robust diplomatic foundation in place.

You joined Vice President Kamala Harris on her trip to Africa. What impressions did you come out with when you visited Ghana?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: The trip itself had several overarching security and economic priorities in mind, which came across in my meetings with the President and his cabinet. I heard and saw it firsthand. We discussed how we can help strengthen democracy and security in the areas closest to Ghana's northern border. We also spoke about the success of Flintlock and the need to continue security exercises, especially with Islamist militants and Russian mercenaries just over the border.

We had extensive conversations about investment and economic opportunities with the African diaspora at the forefront. Ghana was previously one of the region's strongest economies but has had to navigate a debt crisis and rising

inflation. There are opportunities for America to collaborate with Ghana on many economic-related issues, including climate change, irrigation, and recycling.

In the backdrop of these conversations was China, which has extended its influence across the continent and is attempting to put our allies in a tight position to shore up its relationships.

Vice President Harris was spot-on when she said that "African ingenuity and innovation" are what will shape the future of our world. We must redefine what it means to live and work in Africa.

I watched the Vice President connect with the continent in ways that few leaders can, dismantling archaic perceptions of Africa's potential for greatness. This was particularly evident in her interactions with Africa's youth. With the world's youngest population and a median age of 19, African youth have immense potential to drive economic growth and innovation, both on the continent and globally.

Since your election to Congress, you have shown strong interest in the role of the diaspora in supporting trade and investment in Africa and Latin America. As we are entering the second session of the 118th

Congress, Congresswoman, what are you planning to do to foster broader engagement with Africa and the US?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: The world is in the midst of a geopolitical shift and democracy is being tested. In Africa, there are many elections scheduled, no different than in previous years. However, this year is marked by greater security threats. This includes the crisis in ECOWAS countries and its coup d'états (which are supported by Africa public opinion), the first historical elections in South Sudan, and most importantly, the growing strategic and economic importance of the African continent and its diaspora.

For these reasons, I believe we should have a more robust and mutually beneficial agenda toward Africa.

That includes the reauthorization of PEPFAR, an urgent extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the acceleration of implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and deeper bilateral trade ties. We should also make sure we respond to the African people's aspirations by protecting their basic rights, providing humanitarian assistance when it is needed, and creating an enabling environment for people to prosper — especially

entrepreneurs, women, and children.

With your Haitian background, what efforts are you making beyond serving your constituents to get the USA to do more to help in improving the security situation of the country?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: Armed criminal gangs continue to wreak havoc across Haiti, fanning the flames of a worsening humanitarian crisis and leading many to fear for their safety. They have gained strength for years, without any kind of accountability.

I was proud to help introduce the Haiti Criminal Collusion Transparency Act, which unanimously passed in the House. This critical piece of legislation would require the Secretary of State to submit an annual report to Congress on the ties between criminal gangs and political and economic elites in Haiti. It would also impose the necessary sanctions on parties involved in such criminal activities.

Another issue critical to Haiti's security situation is the illegal guns that are coming directly from South Florida and winding up in the hands of gangs. In response to this, I introduced the ARMAS Act with my colleagues. The bill seeks to disrupt gun trafficking from the U.S. to the Caribbean and Latin America by implementing stronger transparency, accountability, and oversight mechanisms for U.S. arms exports.

By shining a light on the connection between these violent criminal enterprises and corrupt leaders, along with levying a series of crippling economic sanctions, we can better address the chaos that has engulfed Haiti.

Are you in support of moves by African countries like Kenya to send forces to Haiti to help with the crisis?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: The response to the gang violence in Haiti depends on support from the entire international community. I have consistently advocated for a multinational security mission in Haiti for over a year, as this remains the most



The Biden-Harris Administration's unwavering commitment to U.S.-Africa engagement is front and center, says Rep. McCormick. Photo credit Bill Clark/CQ-Roll Call/Getty Images

immediate solution to restore order. I am grateful for Kenya's commitment and leadership to spearhead a force.

Past missions to Haiti have violated the rights and dignity of the Haitian people. I am glad that the UN resolution authorizing this mission calls on the mission to establish accountability measures to prevent human rights abuses and has other mechanisms in place to protect the people of the country. For the mission to be successful, any international personnel must be well-vetted, and abide by human rights guidelines. There must also be a monitoring mechanism in place to lessen the chances of abuse.

With his first mandate coming to an end, President Biden is still to personally visit Africa. Does this not send mixed messages about the seriousness of U.S. engagement with Africa?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: President Biden has said, "Africa's success is the world's success." The Biden-Harris Administration's unwavering commitment to U.S.-Africa engagement is front and center. Vice President Harris' trip to the continent was nothing short of historic. In addition, in 2023 alone, 17 Cabinet and leaders of U.S. Government Departments have visited 26 countries in Africa, including Secretary Blinken and Secretary Yellen.

As you represent a district in Florida, why is your position on the House Foreign Affairs Committee important to your state?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: South Florida is an economic engine that fuels international commerce, especially with ports that are the gateway to Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa. As a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I continue to advocate for ongoing trade, investment, and tourism across those three regions and the Sunshine State.

Throughout its history, the CBC's female members particularly have made enormous contributions to the advancement of gender equity. Today, however, significant gender disparities remain, with women around the world. You serve as Chair for Diversity & Inclusion in the Democratic Women's Caucus. How is America stronger on the world stage when its leadership reflects the full diversity of our country? How does greater inclusion lead to better development outcomes, particularly for underrepresented groups?

Rep Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick: I believe gender disparity is not just

an equity issue. It is also an economic issue. I saw this firsthand in Ghana last year with Vice President Harris, when I accompanied her on her historic trip to Africa. Gender disparity costs sub-Saharan Africa close to \$95 billion annually. If gender gaps can be closed in labor markets, education, health, and other areas, then poverty and hunger eradication can be achieved.

Gender equality in the labor market is not just a matter of fairness. It is good economics. Countries that improve gender equality in labor markets through 2030 could see large gains in economic growth.

Currently, women represent more than half of Africa's combined population, but only generate 1/3 of the continent's collective GDP. In the agriculture sector, for example, they represent 70 percent of the labor force and play a crucial role in the entire value chain. However, they still lack access to credit, land ownership, finance, and the global market. We need to address this if we want to tackle food security and climate change.

The solution is economic empowerment. By creating an environment where women have a front seat to economic opportunity, we can expect benefits for their entire communities. While men invest just 30% to 40% of their incomes into their family's needs, studies show that women reinvest up to 90%.

ECOWAS: Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger Call It Quits

By Prince Kurupati

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, West Africa has experienced democracy regression. This is largely necessitated by the several coups and attempted coups that have happened in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Guinea, and Guinea Bissau. The coups have reversed the democratic gains and derailed the democratic path that West Africa was on. Compounding matters even more, the region now faces a possible disintegration following the recent decision taken by three junta-led countries namely Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger to pull out of the regional grouping, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger announced that they are pulling out of ECOWAS in a joint statement that was simultaneously aired on the national televisions of all three states on Sunday 28 January 2024. ECOWAS had taken a big brother role in the governance affairs of all three nations as it sought to expedite a quick return to civilian rule.

Immediately after the news came out, ECOWAS responded saying that it hadn't received formal communication with regards to the withdrawal of the three nations. It went on to state that "Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali remain important members of the Community and the Authority remains committed to finding a negotiated solution to the political impasse".

The decision by the three junta-led countries has been described by security experts as a move that could weaken ECOWAS' influence and authority in the region. ECOWAS was established with only a solitary goal which is, "To promote cooperation and integration... in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability". The withdrawal of the three countries therefore poses a major threat to this goal.

Colonel Amadou Abdramane, the Niger junta spokesman said the decision to quit ECOWAS was



Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger announced that they are pulling out of ECOWAS in a joint statement aired on National TVs of the three countries. Photo credit State of the Nation.

influenced by the regional grouping's reluctance to help countries that are facing security threats posed by terrorists as well as inhumane "coup-related" sanctions. Instead of helping their countries fight security threats that were threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions, Colonel Abdramane said they saw it fit to "take their destiny into their own hands" and for that, they were slapped with "illegitimate, inhumane, and irresponsible" sanctions. He went on to state that ECOWAS has also strayed from the ideals on which it was born albeit not specifying exactly what these ideals are.

"After 49 years, the valiant peoples of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger regretfully and with great disappointment observe that the (ECOWAS) organisation has drifted from the ideals of its founding fathers and the spirit of Pan-Africanism... The organisation notably failed to assist these states in their existential fight against terrorism and insecurity," Colonel Abdramane said.

ECOWAS rules state that any member state which wants to withdraw must give a one-year written notice. During that year, the member state will have to abide by all of ECOWAS' provisions. It's not clear at the moment if any of Burkina

Faso, Mali, and Niger have done so. As all three are landlocked countries, it's also not clear the impact that the withdrawal will have on the citizens of the three countries and others from the region.

Of the three countries, only Niger still has access to the West African Monetary Union (UEMOA) regional financial market and the regional central bank. The other two in the aftermath of their coups were suspended. The members of the eight-nation UEMOA use the West Africa CFA franc which is pegged to the Euro.

In November last year, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger created The Alliance of Sahel States. This grouping was perceived at the time as an attempt to legitimise the junta governments but some analysts now say it may have been the first step in the process of withdrawing from ECOWAS. Withdrawing from ECOWAS does provide the three junta governments with an opportunity to evade the sanctions imposed on them as well as take charge of when they want to relinquish power hence placing it back in the hands of civilians. Ryan Cummings who is the director of Africa-focused security consulting company Sigal Risk said, "If they are no longer part of the ECOWAS bloc, they don't have to abide by previous

transitional timelines promulgated as a means of easing sanctions against them".

Oge Obubogu, the director of the Africa Program at the U.S.-based Wilson Centre think tank said in the recent past, ECOWAS has strayed from its mission to serve the people and as such, it may not find much support from the West African citizens for any plan it may choose to implement. "When you see citizens pushing back and seeing ECOWAS as the leaders' club or leaders who support each other at the detriment of citizens, it doesn't work well".

Commenting on the development, Nigerian security analyst Jaye Gaskia said, "The withdrawal of members of ECOWAS would have implications on ECOWAS itself in terms of its mandate and purpose for integration to ensure joint security and economic integration... I think this is a lesson – that ECOWAS needs to have protocols and mechanisms in place to begin to respond to that situation of insecurity and instability before it leads to a point where governments are actually overthrown. I ask this question – at what point is the constitution of a country actually subverted? Is it at the point where leaders become irresponsible or is it when (the) military responds to it?"



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Neuman & Esser Group In Africa For The Long Haul- Dr. Jiří Rus

By Ajong Mbapndah L

Barely two years into its African foray, the Neuman & Esser Group seems to have found a new home where its expertise is highly needed, and its services cherished. In time of great changes in the energy sector, the circa 200-year-old German owned family business is slowly but steadily making a difference with its premium quality equipment, and top-notch services.

“We do not believe on doing the business in Africa from remote places like Germany, Italy or even Middle East. We have developed our Local Content Concept and the very first rule is to be present on the market and to be close to our customers and partners,” says Dr. Jiří Rus, Sales Director for Africa at the Neuman & Esser Group.

Discussing progress and perspectives on its continental wide strategy, Dr. Jiří Rus says the Neuman & Esser Group is in Africa for the long haul. The Esser & Neuman Group wants to partner and support the development of Africa and help governments, customers, and its people for a better future, says Dr. Jiří Rus in an interview with PAV.

We know already from our last discussion about NEUMAN&ESSER GROUP a bit. However, for those who may not know or did not read our last interview, could you give a very short summary of your company and its services, and products?

Dr. Jiří Rus: Well, it is not easy to introduce a company that was established nearly 200 years ago (1830) in a few words. Let me maybe focus on our DNA and characteristics going beyond only our products and services.

I would emphasize, that we are a family-owned business (in hands of family Peters from 1891) with headquarters in Germany and around 14 subsidiaries around the World. As a



The Esser & Neuman Group wants to partner and support the development of Africa and help governments, customers, and its people for a better future, says Dr. Jiří Rus

child of the first industrial revolution, we went through several business changes and Energy Transitions in our history. Our clear values and vision and mission – to develop and produce high quality equipment with German engineering, quality and reliability helps us to swiftly adapt to changing market and customer requirements. We provide to the market all kinds of reciprocating and diaphragm compressor systems; we do produce electrolyzers and we also have great solutions with our milling and classifying technology. We produce our core equipment in one of our four production facilities in Germany, but the final system design, integration and packaging we do in our Sales Business Units around the World.

With our compression solutions we are traditionally very strong and active in the Oil & Gas sector, especially in the downstream segment. However, we are, I would say enthusiastic and great believers

in the renewable energy sector as well. Our long expertise in hydrogen compression brings a lot of benefits to this segment and we broadened our contribution to the H2-value chain towards the hydrogen production itself by producing PEM electrolyzers and actively working on green solutions with many studies and concept developments.

We are also very strong on our after-market knowledge and expertise for a great benefit of our customers, that are also valuing this very much. We do love old compressors, which we can revamp to meet all state-of-the-art expectations. And this we don't do only on our brands, but in general on any reciprocating compressors.

Regardless of our age, we are very modern and agile company. We do love to develop new solutions and work with our customers on different studies and consultations within our know-how range.

How do the products and

services of NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP align with the development needs of Africa today

Dr. Jiří Rus: I do believe there is a great fit across many industry segments.

We do see these days very strong development of oil and gas production. Most of the gas projects are related to overseas export via LNG and there our equipment plays very strong role in Boil-off Gas application. You can find our equipment also on all floating applications like FLNG, FPSO, FSRU etc.

Due to our history, we are very strong with our compression solutions in all the downstream applications. This means refineries, petrochemicals, but also fertilizers and chemical plants. With the growing population in Africa and also its steadily increasing standard of living, there has to come a demand also for the extension and construction of new plants like that.

Moreover, there are many such plants already, which are in some cases very aged. We can help with our revamping and modernization program with any brand of reciprocating compressor. This is very often more effective (CAPEX and time) way instead of just replacing old equipment by new.

Last but not least, Africa is also using its chance to be an early bird in Energy Transition. There are several locations, which are really blessed for renewable energy, be it wind and / or solar power and biomass. Here we combine our century long H2-compression expertise with our H2-generation knowhow, bringing integrated solutions of e.g., electrolyzers and compression and H2 storage systems into the market. We already participate in several projects in this area, and we also support this development with studies and consultancies.

Can you shed some light on the operations or networks you currently have in different parts of Africa?

Dr. Jiří Rus: I have to say first of all, that we do not believe on doing the business in Africa from remote places like Germany, Italy or even Middle East. We have developed our Local Content Concept and the very first rule is to be present on the market and to be close to our customers and partners.

Historically, we have had for already many years our branch office in Cairo. However, that was it. During the last 2,5 years, when we started the implementation of our Africa strategy and journey, we achieved a lot. We have our branch office as a JV in Libya. Moreover, we cover already additional 9 countries in Africa via our authorized business partners (Representatives) like for example South Africa, Angola, Nigeria, Mauritania, Uganda and others.

We also established with our partner in South Africa – Rotamech (Pty) Ltd - a service workshop and they are able to repair basic components locally. The same we are establishing in Nigeria with our partner MILAT Nigeria Ltd.



Dr. Jiří Rus and the team of MILAT Nigeria after the flooring of the future workshop. A growing number of Nigerian firms are embracing partnership with the Neuman & Esser Group.

And, we are further continuing with this development. Our key objective is to generate value chains and jobs inside the respective countries of installation.

What is the ideal profile of projects or countries that the NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP is looking to expand to in Africa?

Dr. Jiří Rus: Very simply saying – any project or country, that is demanding the application of reciprocating compressor or electrolyzer systems.

But to be more precise, we are of course having our criteria for prioritizing our future development. We are following and developing countries, that already understand

- they need to
- increase their fuel production by increasing their current capacities or constructing new capacities - refineries are our traditional segment.
 - increase of the food independence by having domestic production of urea and fertilizers.
 - establish and increase the LNG-export.
 - take part on the newly developing segment of energy transition by producing green hydrogen, ammonia or methanol.

Those are the main criterions for us to go. Very often each country is focusing on some of those segments and thus it is all the time for me and my team balancing between

our development resources and project maturity and each country's governmental priority.

NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP has been in the continent now for a few years, what has the experience been like for you, and any recommendations to governments to facilitate more business cooperation with companies like yours?

Dr. Jiří Rus: I am very happy to see that governments are steadily developing their own strategies – Gas strategy; Oil strategy; Green Hydrogen strategy etc. I hope that this time the materialization and implementation of these strategies will really take place. It is very

important for the continent and people here. I see a great job of for example Africa Energy Chamber (AEW) under the lead of my brother NJ Ayuk, who is working very hard on the clear naming of the strong energy needs in Africa. Their slogan "Making Energy Poverty history by 2030" is very ambitious, but it is doable. We just need to understand, and we need to lobby for it and explain that (natural) gas plays an important role in that task.

What I would also recommend to all governments or project owners to properly evaluate the alternatives and balance between CAPEX/OPEX and not neglect reliability and safety aspects in case of equipment selections. We have a discussion in ARDA (African Refineries & Distributors Association), led by my friend Anibor Kragha about the long-term reliability and efficiency of equipment. The low CAPEX very often does not mean to buy quality and earn in long term.

What is really a business trouble in Africa are very strict monetary policies, very complicated customs procedures and in general the business environment should be more open. I also do believe that intra-African business should be more developed. Very often the interaction between neighboring countries is still very limited. I think this can be a key future growth driver in the continent.

In the face of competition out there, why should African countries prioritize or consider doing business with your company, what makes NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP stand out from other companies?

Dr. Jiří Rus: I believe there are three main aspects and many small others, which should be a strong argument to go with our products and solutions.

First of all, we are a very stable company with nearly 200 years of history. This shows the stability of our set up, but also ability to be able to react for the market demand changes that happened during that



Dr. Jiří Rus with Mr. Elveli Etghana, MD of Sea Engineering at MSGBC23. Neuman & Esser Group had a booth and participated in a panel discussion.

long period of course many times. We stay here for a high quality and superiority of our products and have many years of experiences. In other words, we know, what we are talking about, both in the traditional Oil & Gas business as well as in the Green Hydrogen market.

Secondly, we are German family-owned company. This means that we think twice or three times before doing a strategic decision. However, once we decide, we go for it, and our decision chain is very short. This is exactly about our mission in Africa. We decided to go here, and we started first to work on our Local Content Concept. We do not want only to sell our equipment and leave. We want to stay on the markets with local partners, help them to develop local people and capabilities. You can call it as a kind of know-how transfer if you wish. We strongly believe that we should also take our responsibility to develop local markets. We have done this in a comparable way e.g., in our location in Thailand, where we started with a service point during the installation of a big chemical park

and developed the location to a full-blown sales business unit serving the entire APAC region with around 100 employees in primary and aftermarket.

Thirdly, we do stay in the market for a strong local aftermarket support. This is very often forgotten during the greenfield projects. We want to provide strong and high-quality support following the local demands and this also means high availability, flexibility, swift responses, and local pricing strategy.

Finally, we are here not to only provide our compressor systems or electrolyzers. We are supporting and cooperating on various studies and projects consultancies. This is very important especially in the newly developing Renewable energy sector.

For 2024, what are some of the major projects that NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP will be working on?

Dr. Jiří Rus: We do have actually 4 main pillars of 2024 objectives.

We want to further explore new markets and will continue with our

fact-finding trips which form the basis for the later local strategies preparation. I just recently came back from Algeria, where I received a lot of interesting inputs and got a basic understanding of this market. In February my Managing Director will also pay a visit to Algeria with the German Vice Chancellor and Minister of Economy and Climate Protection, Dr. Robert Habeck. We will definitely come back and further develop our activity there. Next month I will be for the same reason in Mozambique and other countries will come later.

We also want to continue on our activities across the market presenting our capabilities and showing to end-users, partners, people, what we know and what we can do. We will take a part on several conferences and exhibitions, where we all the time try to give a presentation sharing our experiences and know-how. We also want to present there our partners like for example we did last year at MSGBC in Noaukchott, Mauritania with our partner Sea Engineering or we will do at Nigeria Oil & Gas with our partner MILAT Nigeria Ltd.



Dr. Jiří Rus introducing the NEA Group to the team of SONATRACH 24 in Algeria recently. The NEA Group continues to make inroads across Africa.

Additionally we will show our flag in common events with the VDMA in different parts of Africa. We will continue on our active cooperation with our colleagues in ARDA; AEC and newly we want also to work with Africa Hydrogen Platform (AHP). So, I hope to meet many of readers of PAV in some of those events.

We are about to organize an official opening ceremony of the authorized

service center in South Africa with our partner Rotamech (Pty) Ltd. We will finalize the service center in Nigeria with MILAT Nigeria Ltd and are investigating the next possible locations.

And of course, last but not least, we want to work on our ongoing projects in both primary business as well as aftermarket. We are working for example right now on revamping,

rehabilitation of several compressors in different refineries in Africa. This gives end-users the possibility to continue to use very old compressors from their installed base with the full reliability and efficiency. One of these projects is currently ongoing on compressors that were not originally produced by us. But our expertise allows us to also enhance the capabilities and characteristics of

other brand compressors.

How do you envisage the future of business ties between Africa and NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP?

Dr. Jiří Rus: I am very positive about this. I know we work very hard and intense on our homework. I know that we offer a strong knowhow portfolio to Africa; great products and we are ready to develop our relationship with customers and partners by also sharing our expertise. Just last year we organized our Training on the Road events in South Africa and Egypt. This is the event, where we invite all our customers and partners and dedicate one day training focused on specific topics. We will continue that, and we discuss also for example to organize such sessions with ARDA in their training center for theoretical and hands-on technical training open for all refineries of Africa.

I believe that we all share the same dream and goals. We want to support development of Africa and help governments, customers, people for a better future. I personally am a big “Africa believer” and it is a great honor for me to be a part of this story of NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP in Africa which started just 2.5 years ago in such an intensity.



Dr. Jiří Rus and colleagues from NEA with a team of their agents in South Africa, ROTAMECH, during The training on the Road program in South Africa last year.

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Inside \$20 billion Dangote Refinery: A Game Changer for Nigeria

By Olaye David

Africa's largest refinery, Dangote Petroleum Refinery and Petrochemical has commenced the production of refined petroleum products after receiving the fifth crude oil shipment of one million barrels of Bonny Light supplied by the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) Limited.

In addition to this development, the \$20 billion plant which boasts a capacity of 650,000 barrels per day, began importing crude oil from the United States for the first time.

Designed to handle 100 percent Nigerian crude oil while offering adaptability for various crude types, the refinery is equipped to process a wide spectrum of African crude grades, Middle Eastern Arab Light, US Light tight oil, and crudes from diverse global sources.

«We...thank Nigerians for their belief and support in this project. We have started the production of diesel and aviation fuel, and the products will be in the market within this month once we receive regulatory approvals,» Aliko Dangote, Africa's richest man and Dangote chairman, said.

Analysts believe that the refinery coming on stream will potentially reduce reliance on crude exports for fuel purchases, alleviate financial strain on banks, and enhance fuel quality. However, they also caution against expecting significantly lower prices of refined petroleum products.

«Dangote refinery is a significant step towards revitalising the energy sector and shifting Nigeria from a major importer of refined petroleum products to achieving self-sufficiency in domestic refining capacity,» said Olufola Wusu, an oil and gas analyst.

Despite being the largest producer of oil in Africa, Nigeria relies on imported refined petroleum products due to challenges within its oil and natural gas sector.

Last year, the Chief Executive Officer of the state-owned NNPC Mele Kyari said that Nigeria is on track to stop the importation of refined



The Refinery was inaugurated by President Buhari in May 2023. Photo courtesy.

petroleum products in 2024 and would emerge as a net exporter of the commodities in the same year.

He affirmed that all refineries are slated to achieve full operational status, forecasting that the nation will transition to being a net exporter of petroleum products by the conclusion of 2024.

Impact of Dangote Refinery

Kelvin Emmanuel, CEO of Dairy Hills, stated that the refinery's influence extends beyond traditional fuels such as petrol, diesel, and aviation fuel. He emphasized its ambition to catalyze a notable transformation by incorporating nine essential fuels, thus fundamentally altering Nigeria's energy terrain.

The CEO further highlighted that the Dangote refinery intends to tackle this challenge by refining lighter-grade crude sourced domestically, with a primary focus on transportation fuels. This strategic shift aims to diminish reliance on European imports, promising both financial benefits and enhanced fuel standards within Nigeria.

The refinery's pivot towards utilising locally sourced crude as its primary feedstock signifies a transition towards processing lighter-grade crude. Emmanuel underscored that approximately 80% of the refinery's output will be dedicated to meeting the demand for transportation fuels, with the remaining 20% allocated for non-transportation fuel products.

Fluctuations in pricing for transportation fuels

Despite high hopes for the commencement of operations at the Dangote refinery, analysts caution against expecting a significant drop in refined product prices. Experts emphasize that immediate price reductions may not materialise as swiftly as anticipated.

According to Dr. Kaase Gbakon, a Senior Economist at the Ministry of Energy and Resources in Saskatchewan, Canada, the refinery holds promise for easing financial pressures on banks, diminishing dependence on crude exports for fuel procurement, improving fuel quality, and strengthening foreign exchange

availability for Dangote's enterprises.

However, he underscores the intricate nature of pricing transportation fuels. Dr. Gbakon engages in discussions regarding refinery gate, depot, and pump prices, shedding light on the multitude of factors influencing refinery gate prices. These factors include feedstock costs, transportation expenses, demand fluctuations, and competitor prices.

«Prices from the Dangote refinery will be set to enable the refinery to pay off its debts and other cost obligations and return a profit.»

There's a glimmer of hope among citizens that the new plant could swiftly alleviate the burden of soaring consumer gas prices, which have tripled since the government ceased decades-old subsidies.

However, analysts caution that any potential relief in prices hinges on various factors including industry dynamics such as crude oil costs, governmental interventions like subsidies, and the local currency's exchange rate against the dollar.

Insights: 20 Key Facts about the Dangote Refinery

By Olaye David

Nigeria's long-awaited milestone has arrived as Africa's largest oil refinery commences production. The \$19 billion facility, boasting a capacity of 650,000 barrels per day, has initiated the production of diesel and aviation fuel, marking a significant development for a region highly dependent on imported petroleum products.

Described as a game-changer for Nigeria, the Dangote Petroleum Refinery stands as the country's inaugural privately owned oil refinery.

Here are 20 facts everyone should know about the inaugural private refinery in Nigeria.



Board Chairman Aliko Dangote has been acclaimed for the vision in setting up the refinery.

1. It is located in Ibeju-Lekki, Lagos, covering a land area of approximately 2,635 hectares.
2. The refinery is the world's largest single train with a capacity of 650,000 barrels per day with a 900 KTPA Polypropylene plant.
3. The refinery is powered by a 435-megawatt (MW) power plant.
4. At full capacity, it can meet 100% of the Nigerian requirement of all refined products and also have a surplus for exports.
5. Designed for 100% Nigerian crude with the flexibility to process other crudes.
6. Self-sufficient marine facility with the ability for freight optimization. Largest single order of 5 single-point mooring (SPMs) anywhere in the world.
7. Diesel and gasoline from the refinery will conform to Euro V specifications.
8. The refinery design complies with the World Bank, US EPA, European emission norms, and Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) emission/effluent norms.
9. Incorporates state-of-the-art technology.
10. Designed to process a large variety of crudes, including many African

11. 65 million cubic meters of sand dredged, costing approximately €300 million, using the world's largest dredgers.
12. Bought over 1,200 units of various equipment to enhance the local capacity for site works.
13. Bought 332 cranes to build up equipment installation capacity.
14. Built the world's largest granite quarry to supply coarse aggregate,

15. Developed a port and constructed two quays with a load-bearing capacity of 25 tons/square meter to bring over dimensional cargoes close to the site directly.
16. Constructed two more quays in the port with a capacity to handle up to Panamax vessels to export, and two quays to handle liquid cargoes. The

17. In the course of the civil works, 700 piles were drilled on some days, with a total number of piles up to 250,000.
18. It has 177 tanks of up to 4.742 billion liters capacity.
19. Dangote is one of the few companies in the world executing a Petroleum refinery and a Petrochemical complex directly as an Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contractor.

20. Trained 900 young engineers in refinery operations abroad. Mechanical Engineers trained at the GE University in Italy. Process Engineers trained by Honeywell/Universal Oil Products (UOP) for six months.

Former President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari commissioned the plant on 22 May 2023, which is Africa's biggest oil refinery and the world's biggest single-train facility.



The Refinery is a source of great hope for Nigeria. Photo courtesy.

NJ Ayuk's Centurion Legacy

By Ajong Mbapndah L



There comes a time in life when you have to dedicate yourself to something bigger than your interests, says NJ Ayuk as he scales back from leadership at Centurion.

With offices and a growing network of partners across Africa, Europe and the Middle East, it is with sense of vindication and unbridled optimism in the future that founding CEO NJ Ayuk is stepping down from the leadership of the Centurion Law Group.

From very humble beginnings, the Centurion Law Group has set new standards for the way law is practiced on the continent. Buoyed by a strong vision to offer Africa something different, NJ Ayuk defied the odds and progressively built and blended a cast of brilliant Lawyers and the result is the solid firm with a global reputation that Centurion is today.

From its base in Johannesburg, South Africa, the international trained lawyers, and advisors of Centurion have excelled in advising governments, foreign investors and local companies. With language proficiency in English, Spanish, French, German, and other African indigenous languages, Centurion is

primed to provide choiced services to a broad range of clients in diverse sectors.

For a firm that he was literally synonymous with for decades, stepping down from leadership is not something NJ takes lightly, yet he believes that the best days of Centurion are still to come. In the immensely qualified, and supremely competent new leadership team led by CEO Zion Adeoye, NJ Ayuk says Centurion is in safe hands and will continue to exceed expectations.

Why the decision to step down from Centurion at this point?

NJ Ayuk: I think I have so much energy to give; I have so much legal work to do. I enjoy the work tremendously with the clients; do not forget our client base and the energy industry that we represent with Centurion have made me who I am today. But, I also thought about myself being an African, myself looking at leadership across what we have built. I did not want to be like one of those

African leaders in businesses that have to stay into their 60s and 70s and then they find a family member to come in. I thought it was the right moment. When you look across Centurion, we have been able to train and develop a lot of young lawyers who have also understood the basis of law. We have been able to put the right kind of system, processes, and tradition in place.

It is only important that you pass the ball to the next generation and look at young people who are coming up within the firm and say pick it up, roll the dice and get to work. I am going to continue being involved in one way or another, but it is high time to be a coach. At this moment, I need to coach the other young guys; I need to help them grow. I have led and I have been led but I think this time is a really important time for them to lead me. It is the only important time for me to explain to them day-in-day-out what were my failures, where I succeeded the most and where I also see the firm going.

This younger generation has a lot of ideas, a lot of innovative ideas that can turn the legal industry upside down. It is important to create that space for them to work and sometimes what you have done is great, but you also have to let others do it. So, I thought it was important for me to take a step back and let others lead, let us grow the firm because together we can get it stronger.

Also, the work that I do at the Energy Chamber is very demanding. We have grown the Energy chamber to 4 million members today. I must dedicate more of my time to this work of life because where we see Africa going today with the energy transition, we want a just transition in which we want to see Africans respected, that we want to see Africa industrialize and we want to see our continent be a continent people are proud of. If I can be one of those people who can contribute in my little way, I think this is a really important time to do that. It is going to hurt me financially because I am not going to get the big

payouts from Centurion anymore, but I think that there comes a time in life when you have to dedicate yourself to something bigger than your interests. And this is one of those moments for me.

May we get a background into Centurion, what was the vision you had in starting the firm and how has this evolved over the years?

NJ Ayuk: The vision in Centurion was simple. We wanted to be the premier legal service provider in Africa. We saw what people have done in America. We saw what people have done in Europe. We saw what they've even done in the Middle East. And we said, in Africa,

we can't just have mom and pop shops, because what you see outside South Africa and Nigeria, what you see across Africa is lawyers with their really big egos, trying to have a small law firm, a small shingle with 2 or 3 of them, and sometimes they started fighting. We said we could build something big in Africa, African owned, Pan-African pro-business, Pro-energy and pro young and pro-growth and pro-development. But it has to be a group, it has to be a team. But we will never, ever be possible. We will never, ever be able to give our true meaning to the market. Think about the old story of the centurion, the Roman Centurion soldiers. This was always a band of 80 soldiers fighting at 100%. So that name Centurion is very important for us. We felt we could build something big in Africa, serve the energy industry, really serve Africa, but also demonstrate Black or African excellence at its best. And that was the vision around Centurion. That vision stayed. That vision kept us going to train, develop Africans and build them today. I'm so proud of that because that vision did not only transpire with a lot of young lawyers staying in Centurion, but it did transpire in us going and taking these young lawyers whom we train, develop and work with us, them becoming general counsels today with, with um, with various multinational organizations, multinational corporations, and big



African institutions. There are some countries where you wouldn't go to and not see a lawyer or a judge or a prosecutor, corporate counsel that hasn't gone through a centurion training. That is so important because we are living through the true meaning of what we want to develop Africa by building brick by brick at its best.

In what shape is Centurion today as you leave and how do you situate the importance of the firm in the continent today?

NJ Ayuk: I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish. We took an African company, and within a short time, we made it grow so big with 160 lawyers across the continent, and 14 offices now we even moved into Europe, having offices in European cities and being the first African firm to be listed in the German stock exchange. That is something amazing, and because it has been listed it belongs to the people, it belongs to every African. That is how Africa embraced us, embraced our firm and the work we do. The state of Centurion is stronger now than ever, we are more enthusiastic about the work going forward.

We are driven because right now, every young man, lawyer, tax adviser or business adviser coming to this organization knows that there is no ceiling. You can start from the bottom and become the boss tomorrow. That gives a bigger drive to say if you work hard, you play by the rules, there is nothing that you cannot accomplish

within Africa.

What message do you have for those who may be sceptical about the future of Centurion with your departure?

NJ Ayuk: They have been skeptical about us all the time, but we kept just exceeding expectations and beating them all the time. Centurion is going to go from strength to strength; it is only going to get better, because the leadership that is coming is even better, stronger, and more conscious about Africa than I have ever seen. I am not worrying about the skeptics because when we came into this market most people did not want to give us work because of the colour of our skin. After all, that was another African law firm, and they are going to mess it up.

Most Africans did not want to give us work because they preferred to give it to a guy coming from Europe or America. We have always lived with this type of skepticism, and when we started doing well, even my brothers from Cameroon, some of them lawyers, were my biggest critics. Even when we were doing well, Africans were always our biggest critics, but we kept going on and we know despite the insurmountable odds that have been placed against us, we stayed the course.

I do not expect us not to have skeptics; I know some are saying that Mr Ayuk is not there, and this firm is not going to exist. We are going to surprise them; there is big news that is coming next month and next month

we are going to expand. Centurion is going to have new offices, it is going to take on big cases; a lot of African countries, and multinational corporations are reaching out to Centurion to serve them across the continent.

We welcome the skeptics but know what I like about this generation of Centurion lawyers, they are history writers; they are changing the rules of the game. It is better to be like what Mother Theresa says a pencil in the hand of God writing your history than being the critic that nobody will ever remember them in history. We welcome our critics, but we are going to write our history and we are going to write the next chapter.

On the choice of Zion Adeoye to lead the firm, what are some of the attributes or reassuring traits that made him the ideal choice to replace you?

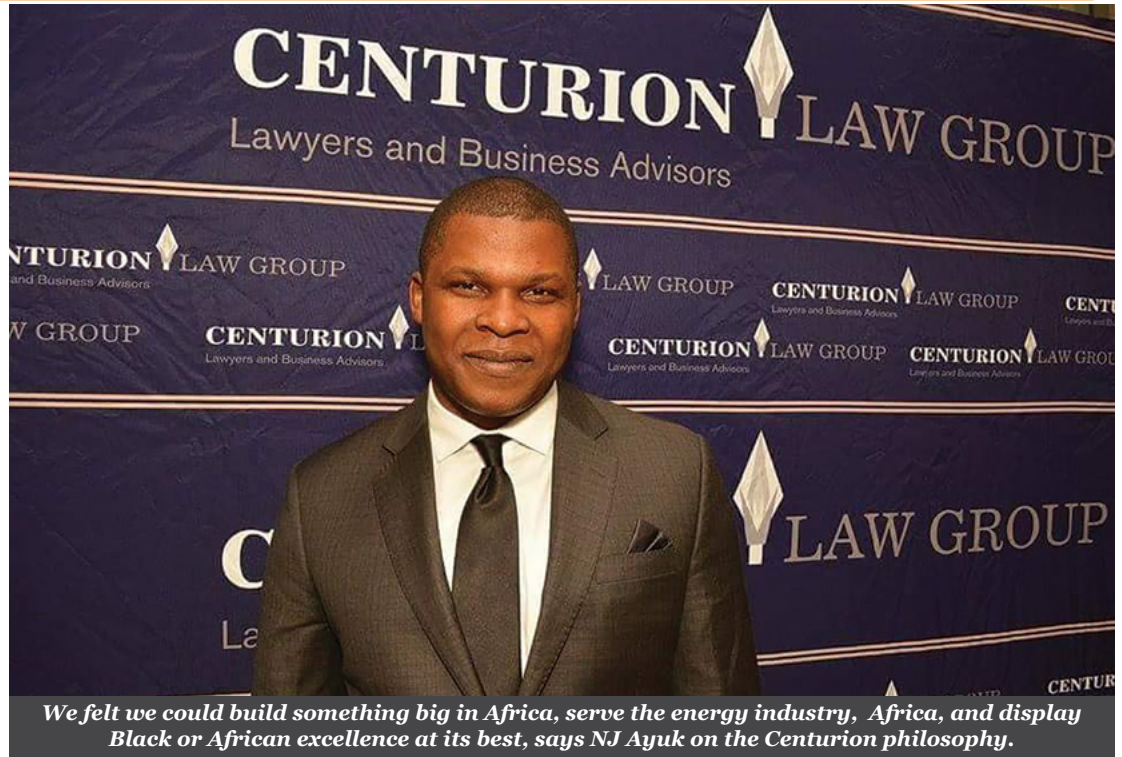
NJ Ayuk: The guy is solid. He's one of the best you have in the continent. He's one of the best. He is just good. You know, most people, most people have been critical. Like he didn't bring this person or that person. This is Ivy League trained Columbia Law School in America, Nigerian trained, went to one of the best Nigerian law schools, University of Ibadan did oil and gas in Dundee. He's been with the firm. He understands the firm through and through, but as a lawyer he's one of the best tax, oil and gas and corporate lawyers Africa has, bar none. He is just the best at what he does. He's solid, very good, temperament

compassionate, cares a lot about the little guy coming into the firm and growing up, and client oriented. So, I've never worked with somebody who is so dedicated to the client. Even when this guy is sick, he shows up at the office on Saturday, he's there on Sunday. He's busy trying to plan the agendas of the client, but he's calling around different offices, trying to empower them and build capacity, bringing everybody together.

He's a team leader and gives everybody space to thrive. The ego is not there. He is just a driver. So, I think Zion has personal qualities, leadership qualities, but also the education and professional qualities are there. Most people that have written him off do that at their own peril. He's tough as a rock and I think that the firm is in good hands. But don't forget, it's not just about Zion. There is Oneyka Ojogbo, who is also a solid lawyer in her own right. Columbia University trained and he went to law school in Nigeria as well, taken some of the toughest cases and won. She is also there on the side. The country offices, some tough team. So, I'm very I'm very confident that we have the right man and the right woman, and we have the right team that is going to carry forward. I could not have been the kind of leader or CEO that I am with Centurion without them right now. They just coming out of the shadows, and they are going to shock everybody.

What are some of the major challenges that you faced in building Centurion into the continental giant it is today?

NJ Ayuk: Skeptics, skeptics. You always face skeptics. I am not afraid to say that being African it was always a big skeptic with people looking and thinking that you cannot make it or do it. We also have to look at the legal environment across Africa; there is a severe lack of legal infrastructure, and skill set is a problem. I had to bring lawyers from the United States, and Europe to work with me and build Centurion. To be able to draw African talents to different countries was sometimes very difficult because we are sometimes quick to not give visas



to Africans to go represent clients in other jurisdictions, but it is easier for Europeans to have.

We also have to address some of the difficult issues; some of the corruption within the judiciary has been a problem to drive up things and move things. We face a payment crisis on the continent; it was always difficult to get clients that paid, and we continued to rely on our big base which has been foreign multinational corporations that have trusted us and African Independent Corporations that continue to work with us.

When you deliver and you get the job done, people might not like you, but you are winning. So, our clients got tired of winning; we won in difficult decisions, some of the toughest cases across the continent. You might not like me, but you will like my results. For me, it has always been about results, because if it was about likeness, I don't look like Leonardo Di Caprio, Messi or Beckham but I will beat them on a difficult case and I think our results have made a difference for us. That culture of winning, that culture of getting results is what has helped us overcome difficult times throughout my leadership as the CEO of the firm.

NJ Ayuk is never short of ideas,

what next for you after the Centurion chapter?

NJ Ayuk: I want to put a black satellite up there; maybe we will have to put a black satellite on the moon. Centurion is going to have a big future. I have seen the plans that the new CEO and his team are putting together, and I am amazed. You go to bed feeling good because you see what they have, you see where they are driving you, you say you know what, I built it, I climbed up that mountain but I didn't just climb but I passed a rope to a young climber and I told him to keep climbing and I am going to watch him climb even better than me because I have other mountains to climb.

The fight and struggle for a just energy transition, investment in our oil and gas in Africa, creating financial vehicles for Africans to benefit from their resources, building up local content, ensuring that women are not the last hired and first fired in the energy industry and empowering Africans to be true owners, not because they are Africans or resource nationalists but being able to use African ingenuity.

We are going to see Africans acquire assets from international companies. We are going to see Africans build Africa stronger and

better by doing gas-to-power projects, doing petrochemicals, small-scale LNG, and working with international partners whether from Europe, Asia, Russia, or America to bring finance to this continent. That is what is going to be the struggle of the next phase. I don't feel tired and anybody that feels like I am going to be tired; as long as the good Lord continues to give me strength, we are going to continue doing. I am very thankful that a lot of Africans see this at this time.

At this moment, we have the sole obligation to this continent. It is not going to be getting some radical populist stuff. I don't do radicalism or populism. For me, it is about free markets, limited government, and low taxes because when we cut taxes in Africa, we improve small businesses to be able to invest and hire more people.

I am dedicating my time to the Chamber, and we are going to continue pushing for an enabling environment and making sure that businesses have a stronger voice to grow in Africa. When the business community is stronger, when investors are feeling comfortable, they hire more people, more money goes around Africa, and we push intra-Africa trade. Get ready for a big push on intra-Africa Energy trade. It is important right now. _____



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African Leaders Must Find Ways to Encourage Ongoing Oil and Gas Investments

Despite the global push for near-instant transition to renewables, the immediate benefits for us (and many African nations) still predominantly lie in oil and gas.

By Tom Alweendo*

As the 2023 U.N. Climate Change Conference, the 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) in Dubai drew to a close, the air was thick with determination among the 200 delegates. Acknowledging that the era of fossil fuels was on its last legs, they collectively pledged to hasten its demise. This was heralded as «the beginning of the end» for coal, oil, and natural gas. The nails and hammers were poised to pound the coffin of a sure- to-be- dead fossil fuel industry.

The conference culminated in a comprehensive agreement known as the “global stocktake”. This ambitious strategy set forth key objectives: tripling renewable energy capacity, doubling the rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030, expediting the reduction of coal power without carbon capture, and intensifying efforts to shift away from fossil fuel reliance in energy systems. The overarching message was clear: a full-scale transition to renewable energy sources is imperative, while fossil fuels must be left in the ground.

However, this either/or binary approach poses a significant dilemma for African nations. The economic and social benefits derived from fossil fuels are still crucial for us – from reducing energy poverty to bolstering our economies. Moreover, we believe that these benefits can be harnessed in tandem with addressing climate change concerns.

Our plea for understanding from Western nations and environmental groups, who are intensifying their efforts to stop new investments in African oil and gas ventures, seems to fall on deaf ears. The struggle to secure project financing is growing. On November 30, 2023, The Economist revealed that 27 banks had withdrawn from financing the East



Tom Alweendo is Minister of Mines and Energy, Namibia

African Crude Oil Pipeline project, and numerous others had decided against directly funding new oil and gas initiatives.

Yet, there are glimmers of hope, particularly in Namibia. Here, we have introduced reforms to reduce the risks for investors. Almost a year ago, significant offshore oil and gas discoveries rewarded the investments of oil majors like Shell, TotalEnergies, and QatarEnergy in Namibia. Following this, Namibia has witnessed a surge in exploration activities. At the beginning of 2024,

Portugal's Galp Energia announced the discovery of a substantial light oil reserve in Namibia's offshore block PEL83. Galp, along with its partners NAMCOR and Custos Investments Ltd., plans to explore deeper depths. Upcoming drilling campaigns by Chevron (U.S.) and Woodside Energy (Australia) are expected to continue this momentum.

This is a testament to an irrefutable fact: despite the global push for near-instant transition to renewables, the immediate benefits for us (and many African nations) still predominantly

lie in oil and gas.

A Reality Check

The immediate shift to renewable energy, as suggested by the COP28 global stocktake is impractical and overly idealistic. The reality is that any swift transition to renewable energy would only be viable if Africa, or indeed the world, were ready to rely entirely on wind, hydro, wave, and solar energy for powering homes, businesses, vehicles, and industries. Unfortunately, we are nowhere close.

For instance, despite Africa's

abundant potential for solar and wind energy — holding 60% of the planet’s capacity — our actual production capabilities are starkly different. We might be termed the “Sun Continent”, but our solar energy generation capacity is a mere 1% of the global total. In sub-Saharan Africa, biomass remains the predominant energy source for many.

Let us be in no doubt; Namibia remains committed to a renewable energy future. We have taken significant strides towards establishing a green hydrogen economy, evident in projects like the 3-gigawatt Tsau Khaeb and others in Kharas, Kunene, and Walvis Bay. However, achieving parity with global renewable energy capabilities will take time and money. A whole lot of money that most, if not all countries that make up the so called “Sun Continent”, do not have.

Lacklustre Funding Support

To be fair, this funding gap has not gone unnoticed. Institutions like the World Bank, the U.N., and the International Energy Agency have urged developed economies to invest in African renewable energy infrastructure. Till date, the financial support has been underwhelming. What this means is that, for all their renewables fervor and promises, the richer western nations — who collectively contribute the highest to global emissions — are not putting their money where their mouths are.

The International Energy Agency estimates that Africa would require over USD200 billion annually until 2030 to meet the Sustainable Africa Scenario’s energy and climate objectives. Yet, despite a rise in global clean energy investment everywhere else, only a mere fraction of this amount, about USD25 billion, have been invested in Africa’s renewable infrastructure development. This shortfall is even more pronounced considering Africa’s burgeoning population, projected to constitute

25% of the global population by 2050. The continent’s energy needs will rise exponentially and the funding gap does not seem to be closing anytime soon. As of today, the Just Energy Transition

Partnerships, a COP26 initiative designed to finance sustainable development in emerging economies, has yet to be effectively implemented or produce significant results. It is within this context that one must challenge the renewables or nothing stance of the Global Stocktake at COP28. If fossil fuels are out, what do we have to replace them, now and into the future?

Unacceptable Interference

The underinvestment in African renewables is just one aspect of a larger problem. Concurrently, there’s a concerted effort by the West to stifle investment in African fossil fuel projects. Even natural gas exploration — the cleanest fossil fuel and a transitional energy source — faces intense scrutiny and opposition.

For instance, a 2021 article in The Guardian reported that some experts advised Africa to prioritize renewable energy adoption at all costs, even if it meant abandoning the exploration of lucrative gas reserves. The intention was noble — to avert a climate crisis and expand clean energy access to millions lacking it. However, practical strategies and timelines to achieve this were notably absent, despite vehement criticism of the oil and gas sector.

This is not to undermine the dedication of climate activists; the reality of climate change impacts is undeniable. However, I believe Africa can address climate change while simultaneously tackling energy poverty through the judicious use of our natural resources. With 600 million people lacking electricity access, a comprehensive approach is imperative to overcome the current energy deficit and mitigate against a larger one in the future.

Namibia’s Logical Response

From the foregoing, it is only logical for African nations to safeguard the socioeconomic advantages from ongoing oil and gas operations. We can do this by enacting policies that incentivize investment and by building inclusive economic and political institutions. The high costs associated with exploration and production must be reflected in our tax and royalty policies. Additionally, factors like stable economies, transparency, and efficient legal frameworks significantly influence investment decisions. We must be committed to ensuring these conditions are met in our countries.

Namibia exemplifies these efforts in both oil, gas, and mining sectors. We continue to collaborate with investors and industry stakeholders to foster further improvements. Our efforts to create an enabling environment for investors played a significant role in driving the drilling campaigns by Shell, TotalEnergies, Galp, and QatarEnergy. The investments these companies are making in Namibia will play a central role in generating government revenue; building roads, bridges, and dams; creating jobs; and improving standards of living for every Namibian in line with the vision of President Hage Geingob.

However, we must not compromise our own needs and priorities in attracting investment. African nations must always seek investments that are mutually beneficial. This can be achieved through balanced and pragmatic local content policies that offer employment, business opportunities, capacity building, and technology and knowledge transfer.

Imperatives for our prosperous future

African countries’ pursuit of fossil fuel projects, especially natural gas, is in line with global practices. Even countries advanced in renewable energy do not rely solely on these sources. For instance, in the U.S., 60%

of electricity is still generated from fossil fuels, predominantly natural gas, while renewables and nuclear energy contribute 21% and 18%, respectively. Natural gas is deemed more reliable, operating at full capacity 65% of the time, compared to solar and wind energy’s 36% and 25% capacity factors, respectively. Asking African nations to disregard natural gas is akin to suggesting we should accept half the power capacity, half the standard of living, and half the safety compared to Western nations. This is not a reasonable expectation.

Capitalizing on Africa’s natural gas resources is about more than just enhancing power capacity or addressing electricity shortages. It is a means to build industrial capacity and revitalize African economies, lifting people from poverty and energy scarcity.

In light of this, there is a clear imperative for African leaders to take immediate actions to foster an environment conducive to oil and gas investments. As for energy companies, we invite you to partner with us. Do not overlook the vast opportunities in Africa. Your investments will not only yield returns but also contribute significantly to eradicating energy poverty, driving economic growth, and paving the way for the development of renewable energy sectors in African countries.

Let’s remember, no nation has achieved industrialization solely through solar or wind power. But those that are industrialized, with financial reserves, are in a better position to finance their energy transitions. For us as Africans, we must be in the position to drive our energy transition initiatives by using what we have now to achieve what we envision for our future. To waiver from this objective is a risky and untenable proposition.

*Tom Alweendo is Minister of Mines and Energy, Namibia



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AfCFTA: The Key to Exploiting Economic Opportunities

By Evelyn Shumba

The Background

The African continent boasts of a vast treasure trove of minerals, oil, gas, and wildlife among many other commodities. Most African economies are heavily reliant on these raw commodities as their main revenue source. For instance, in terms of exports, Botswana's diamonds make up 90%, Nigeria's oil brings in 80% and Zambian copper accounts for 70%.

Since African countries are typically net exporters of commodities in their raw form they are often terribly affected by price shocks and changes in demand.

With intra-African trade making up only 17% of the transactions in Africa, any external shocks in the destination markets take a huge toll on African economies. There is a need for coordinated efforts among African countries to change this narrative.

Demand for Climate Strategic Minerals

The focus on securing strategic minerals from Africa continues to increase. According to a report by the World Bank, the energy transition is anticipated to greatly increase demand for minerals and metals. It is estimated that the required investment in global mining to meet this demand will amount to USD 1.7 trillion.

The Minerals for Climate Action report says demand for minerals such as graphite, lithium, and cobalt could increase fivefold by 2050 to meet the growing demand for clean energy technologies.

Countries such as The Democratic Republic of Congo are endowed with rich cobalt reserves and Guinea holds large bauxite reserves. Estimates highlight that over 3 billion tonnes of minerals and metals will be needed to realise the Paris Agreement's goals of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Consequently, the war in Ukraine has negatively disrupted commodity markets, resulting in hikes in energy prices. This creates a vicious circle where higher energy prices drive the cost of producing metals upwards while higher mineral prices push the cost of renewable energy.

All this demand is a prompt for continental players to think in other terms, especially given that the raw nature of mineral exports means the



Secretary General of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), Wamkele Mene.

continent sells them for a song.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA): The Solution

On paper, the AfCFTA can go a long way in reducing the exploitation of raw materials in Africa through value addition. This is because the continental free trade area is expected to enable companies within the continent to set up assembly, manufacturing and processing firms in any African country.

By doing so, African companies can have access to cheaper means of production and skilled labour. Businesses would be enabled to specialise in different locations within the continent based on competitive advantages thereby increasing their standing globally.

The result will be a reduction in manufacturing costs. Local processing and manufacturing plants will also help to fight unemployment and reduce poverty and vulnerability.

Since the adoption of The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), it has been touted as a solution to boosting African economies. The AfCFTA is a trade agreement that aims to create a single market of 1.3 billion people with an estimated GDP of USD 2.6 trillion.

Although the African Union has been promoting the acceleration of the trade agreement, it is evident that there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed before it can be fully implemented. One of the most pressing issues is the poor working conditions

and environmental degradation caused by unregulated activities. These problems pose a significant obstacle to the successful implementation of cross-border trade.

Further, there is still work to be done on the structural points of the agreement such as reaching agreed tariffs and promoting free mobility of labour.

In addition, the delicate balance between growth and debt continues to rear its ugly head in many African countries. Several countries are currently in debt distress or facing a high risk of distress. Previously Africa's official creditors were mainly concentrated in the global west as well as multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

However, the creditors list has since expanded to include countries such as China, India and Turkey. As the creditors expand, hurdles of debt transparency and more complicated restructuring processes have also arisen. The debt management dilemma goes beyond financial challenges, it also fuels social and geopolitical complications which threaten the smooth implementation of the trade agreement.

Poverty and low productive capacity are other worrisome drawbacks. According to the United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS) 33 African countries remain marginalized

in the world economy. Their financial plight stands in the way of increasing productive capacity and investing in growth.

Political instability is another thorn in the path of continental trade. There have been nine coup-de-dates in the short period from 2020 to date. Add to that the multiple conflicts in various regions and numerous contested elections. Several countries are expected to go to the polls in 2024 which raises the likelihood of further instability.

2024 Prospects

These dynamic developments are not without a glimmer of hope. A report by the Economist Intelligence Unit projects real GDP growth of 3.2%, five percentage points up from the 2.6% growth in 2023.

Also, the expansion and uptake of the Pan-African Payment & Settlement System - PAPSS, sends a positive message in the quest to boost intra-African trade and economic resilience.

The continent's success in 2024 lies in its potential to promote economic growth while managing the reality of debts. A concerted effort by member states to bring the AfCFTA agreement to its full potential will be a major contributing factor to the continent's ability to take advantage of the growing demand for climate action minerals.

It is also imperative that African countries handle international relations strategically and find ways to navigate political instability to win more economic opportunities.

Public Contracts and Corruption: Has Tanzania Overcome Its Demons?

By Ajong Mbatndah L

Since Samia Suluhu Hassan took office as the President of Tanzania in March 2021, she has been working to normalize the country's political and democratic systems. It's an onerous task that involves tackling the pervasiveness of corruption. A challenge apparently well received by the Tanzanian president who, after just two weeks in office, discovered – along with the general public - a scandal involving the over-invoicing of a Boeing 767-300 freighter that was negotiated at \$37 million but invoiced for \$86 million.

“Where did this invoice come from? What did the contract say? And when you received the invoice, you still presented it to the government for payment. Stupid! What steps did you take after you received the invoice?” Samia Suluhu Hassan asked those responsible for this illegal, but far from isolated, money-making operation. The director-general of the Tanzania Government Flight Agency was sacked and other high-ranking officials managing state-owned companies have since faced the same fate.

The March 2023 release of a report for 2021/2022 by the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau (PCCB) and Mr. Charles E. Kichere, the Controller and Auditor General (CAG), was a useful reminder to all those who might try to downplay the magnitude of corruption in Tanzania. The President made public an overbilling that led the government to spend more than \$10 billion on tablets.

Samia Suluhu Hassan said “It's disappointing that all these are happening while we have project supervisors in each ministry and government institutions, the over invoicing occurs every now and then.



Fighting corruption should be treated as liberation for the African continent, says President Samia. Photo credit World Economic Forum

This is unacceptable,” adding “This problem can be seen in all large projects, it's so unacceptable...those who are responsible for supervising the projects have to be patriotic and aggressive in handling this”.

She called on project managers to show «patriotism» and is considering an overhaul of the administrations in charge of (major) projects. Some of these parastatal organizations, such as the National Development Corporation (NDC), are considered inefficient. The President has apparently identified a multifaceted problem.

The Bank of Tanzania might land on this list after having launched a tender in July 2022 to renew the banknotes in circulation. The process has been on a chaotic and as yet unfinished course. The pre-selection

of companies that specialize in banknote manufacturing was revoked early last year following an appeal by global industry leader De La Rue. The renewed invitation to tender, this time under the authority of the Public Procurement Appeal Authority, allowed the British company to be included in the shortlist. However, while the bids were submitted and made public on April 17, 2023, a decision has still not been made.

This standstill becomes even more questionable with the news that some senior officials from the Bank of Tanzania were asked to approach the British company (which recently closed its production site in Kenya) “off the books”, even though the prices announced by De La Rue are about 2 to 3 times higher than those

of the other shortlisted competitors. Could this simply be an issue of mismanaging a tender worth over \$310 million (Sh822 billion)?

There is little doubt that the highest state authorities will have their say on a subject as sensitive as currency. The difficulties and never-ending cash scarcity experienced by Nigeria for almost a year now, show a path that should not be followed.

As President Hassan emphasized last July, «Fighting corruption should be treated as liberation for the African continent». This liberation might be encountering resistance, but by reaching all sectors of the economy, it is the only way to achieve the true economic and democratic development hoped for by everyone.

False Start for Liberia's New President

By Prince Kurupati



Elections are over, partisanship must give way to the forward march of Liberia, President Boakai said in his inaugural speech prior to the malaise. Photo courtesy

In a rather ironic twist, Liberians who for so long yearned for progressive leaders who usher in new innovations and ideas to transform the country voted out the country's youngest ever elected president and voted in the country's oldest ever president. Will the old be more innovative than the young? This is what Liberians will be hoping for, for the next six years, However, if anything that happened on the inauguration of Liberia's new president Joseph Boakai is to go by, then Liberia might be in for a long and strenuous six years.

Joseph Boakai, 79, defeated George Weah by a slim margin as he garnered 50.64% of the votes while Weah polled 49.36% during the presidential election runoff. The victory meant that Boakai who had served for so long as Liberia's second in command finally got his charge to be the man in

charge. From 2006 to 2018, Boakai served as vice president under Liberia's first woman president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

As is the tradition after the electoral victory of any president, a date was set for Joseph Boakai to be inaugurated hence officially starting his six-year tenure in office. The inauguration was held in the capital of Monrovia at the Capitol Building. Multitudes of people attended the ceremony including Ghanaian President Nana Akuffo Addo, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas Greenfield as well as delegations from different African nations.

The United States Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas Greenfield has a long history with Liberia. As she stated in her address at the inauguration, she first landed in Liberia in 1978. She lived in Liberia for several years working as the U.S.

Ambassador to Liberia something which in turn led her to receive special recognition – an honorary doctorate from the University of Liberia. Relaying the message from Washington, Ambassador Greenfield said "The United States looks forward to working closely with you as we strengthen the bonds between our two countries".

After completing the swearing-in formalities, President Boakai gave his maiden speech as the country's leader. In his inauguration speech, Boakai thanked Liberians for placing their confidence in him and giving him the mandate to lead the nation. Acknowledging that it was a close race between him and his predecessor George Weah, President Boakai called upon citizens of the West African nation to embrace "inclusivity and reconciliation". For the first 30 minutes, Boakai used a

conciliatory tone something which demonstrated a clear intent to put the electoral differences aside and hence start planning for the future as a united front. "Elections are over, partisanship must give (way) to the forward march of Liberia... I come to rekindle our hopes," President Boakai said.

Things however took a turn for the worst when 30 minutes into his inauguration speech, Joseph Boakai started stuttering and showing signs of breathing problems. A close aide to the president was then seen fanning him as several other aides surrounded him in the process helping him off the podium. From a joyful and fun-filled atmosphere, the day instantly turned somber and sad. From anticipating what the future holds for the country, citizens started rumour-mongering and anticipating what had happened and what was going to happen to the

president.

The unfortunate event resurfaced some debates which engulfed the country during the campaign period. Many citizens being aware of Boakai's age queried if old age wouldn't affect him to execute his duties in a way expected of the president. Boakai's perceived ill health owing to his age earned him the name 'Sleepy Joe' from his critics. During the campaign trail, Boakai however reassured the nation that there wasn't any need to worry about his health. Rather, he stated that "age should be a blessing to this country".

The presidency department after the incident however allayed any fears of ill health saying that it was just heat exhaustion that affected the president. "It is the heat. The heat was high. They should have had some fan or something around there... At his age, the exhaustion happened. But it is OK now," Mohammed Ali, the spokesperson for the ruling Unity Party said. The temperature on the inauguration day exceeded 30 degrees.

In a statement, Charles Snetter from the president's office said, "His (President Boakai's) doctors have declared him perfectly fine". Amos Tweh one of the top officials in President Boakai's party said the president is doing well and he didn't even need any hospitalisation. The president's office has since said the president has resumed his normal activities. "He has resumed his normal activities. He is expected to meet with the Ghanaian President and other dignitaries today," a statement from the president's office read.

In the short time that he addressed all those who came to see him



Liberians voted out the country's youngest ever elected president and voted in the country's oldest ever president.

officially assume his presidential duties, President Boakai promised to rescue all Liberians from tough economic challenges facing everyone as well as to address corruption while at the same time improving basic services. "We see hard times, we see dysfunction... we see corruption in high and low places. And (its) in these and similar conditions that we have come to the rescue," Boakai said. Corruption was Weah's major Achilles heel as most Liberians castigated him for his lackadaisical approach to combating graft. The mysterious deaths of four government auditors also did not help matters.

Many have placed hope in Boakai after Weah was hugely disappointed by failing to stamp out corruption and improve the economy – things that he had promised to prioritize after his electoral victory. Larry Nyanquoi a former local official in Nimba County

said President Boakai is "seen as somebody who has not engaged in corruption and one who has tried to live the simplest possible life". Owing to this, "expectations of Boakai's presidency are high".

Abdulla Kiatamba an analyst at Geo Baraka Group of Strategists said the population is just hopeful that Boakai may be different from Liberia's past presidents who have been all talk but no action. "Every leader has promised to crack down on corruption and they have failed, so he has to say something different... They have promised improved economic conditions and they have also failed so he has to say and do something that will be different".

The head of the American delegation to the Liberian inauguration Linda Thomas Greenfield expressed great optimism that President Boakai will do a splendid job and meet

the expectations of the public. Ambassador Greenfield also thanked Liberians and Liberian institutions for allowing the conduct of a free, fair, and credible election saying this is a foundation for a great and prosperous future.

"Liberia's peaceful transition is especially important given the democratic backsliding we have seen across West Africa. Throughout the Sahel, coups have denied citizens the right to dictate their own futures. And leaders have consolidated power and isolated themselves from the international community, often with dire, dire consequences. It is devastating, and it's frustrating because just as withdrawing from multilateral institutions can lead to violence and instability, investing in them can lead to safety and progress," Ambassador Greenfield said.

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Threat And Vulnerability Of The Democratic Republic Of Congo (DRC) In Post-Election

By Dr Minga Mbweck Kongo*

On January 20, 2024, thousands of Congolese marched and danced acrobatically to the tune of rumba with surging energy and confidence at the Stade des Martyrs de Kinshasa to witness the swearing-in of president Tshisekedi for his second term. "I solemnly swear... to defend the constitution and the laws of the Republic... to maintain its independence and the integrity of its territory," Tshisekedi, declared during the inauguration ceremony, conducted before the members of the constitutional court and in the presence of several African Heads of State and numerous diplomats from around the world.

One of the most compelling outcomes of the 2023 Congolese elections is the notion that the people's choice actively and decisively contributes to shaping a new political trajectory for Congo. "I am taking back the baton of command that you entrusted to me. We want a more united, stronger and prosperous Congo," Declared President Tshisekedi. Far from merely confirming what is already known, the act of choosing someone the population favours become integral to the process of national constitution. This is particularly significant in a society still grappling with the enduring impact of an extended incursion by Rwanda and facing the unspoken genocide record highlighted in the UN mapping report. To cast a vote and make a choice is to gain knowledge—but always in specific ways. Also to cast a vote and to choose is to know—but always to know in particular ways.

"I am cognisant of your expectations," he affirmed. In his inauguration address, Tshisekedi outlined his vision for the second five-year emphasising six key objectives: enhancing security, fostering job creation, stabilising inflation, diversifying the economy, ensuring broader access to basic services and bolstering the efficiency of the public services. Reflecting on the wealth



Dr Minga Kongo is an Anthropologist, and Development scholar with research interests in water sociality, mobility, urbanism, politics, illness and climate change.

of Congo, Tshisekedi underscored that the security and prosperity of Congolese development would make a substantial contribution to global development.

Threat and vulnerability

The invasion of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been shaped by two pivotal events—the ousting of former president Mobutu by a coalition of Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and a few Congolese dissidents led by Laurent Desire Kabila, and the subsequent assassination of Kabila. These events remain crucial for understanding the internal sources of insecurity as they shattered the perception of Congo's immunity from Rwanda's invasion, lending credence to Congo as a soft security target. This perspective argues the entire country is a victim of international forces exploiting its mineral resources. In his speeches, Tshisekedi has consistently contends that the conflict in DRC is not of the country's own making but is a war into which it is being drawn by Rwanda with the backing of multinationals, without reasonable cause or sound reason.

The recent UN report highlights the presence of the Rwandan army on DRC soil and argues that the perspective of

the DRC is of the breeding ground for multinationals interests.

The argument presented here is that Rwanda's invasion of the DRC with its rebel group M23 has two faces: the face of governance and the face of security. The two faces of invasion are closely associated because security is defined as effective order and control. It is the foundation of governance, promoting participation and accountability. Fragile and dysfunctional security institutions have made the DRC vulnerable and a soft target for invasion since the 90s. It is a security challenge where lax internal security and porous borders foster conditions that M23 rebel groups, supported by Rwanda, exploit. Tshisekedi suggests that building realistic strategies to counter Rwanda's invasion revolves around reforming security institutions, particularly the army.

Governance, security, and a challenging time ahead

The creation of the "Alliance Fleuve Congo" was made official in Nairobi a few days before the DRC election on. At the helm is the self-proclaimed colonel Corneille Nangaa, the former president of the Electoral Commission, who has now assumed the role of a rebel leader.

The decline in security institutions responsible for order and control falls within the broader category of state weakness, a prominent characterisation of the DRC's vulnerabilities or failures, sometimes described in abstract terms. Examining rebel activity in the eastern part of the country, prompts questions about the state and quality of policing and law enforcement. When politicians, police and the security forces turn protective weapons into tools of criminality by participating in armed robberies, betrayal and all manner of criminal activities, it raises crucial questions about the quality of protective institutions.

Moreover, when numerous army generals have small militia groups to protect their business interests in the country's eastern region, it signifies the deterioration of essential control systems central to the protection of sovereignty. The DRC, in its current state, speaks to the absence of effective law enforcement structures and weak or non-existent immigration policies that have all colluded to render the country a weak link in the war on rebellion. President Tshisekedi has promptly formed partnerships with external actors. Mobilising international resources from the

global community to fund the capacity needed for combating armed groups and corruption is relatively feasible.

The disgruntled Nangaa's professed aim is to save the DRC from the chronic instability that has prevailed for three decades. However, his strategies for achieving this are rooted in the Rwando-Ugandan ideology. The mobilising and unifying ideas of the (March 23 Movement (M23), and its leaders, are connected to Kagame.

Despite all the contradictions arising from the war, it is not too late for the outcomes, President Tshisekedi is striving for through his diplomatic efforts, to end the insecurity. He has promised "a profound restructuring of our security and defence apparatus" and is engaging further diplomatic initiatives to address the security crisis in eastern provinces.

* Dr Minga Kongo is an



President Tshisekedi was recently sworn in for a second term. Photo courtesy

anthropologist, development scholar illness and climate change. He is (HUMA) at the University of Cape Town. He can be reached via email kongmbweck@gmail.com

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A Fulfilling Experience For Groundbreaker Foundation In Africa- Dr Serg Bell

By Ajong Mbapndah L

Groundbreaker's projects in Africa and beyond are some of my most fulfilling achievements, says distinguished scientist, entrepreneur, businessman, and philanthropist Dr Serg Bell.

As the founder and leader of the non-profit organisation Groundbreaker (GB), Dr. Serg Bell has been instrumental in providing access to education, empowering individuals, and fostering positive change within communities. Recently, GB successfully completed the construction of schools in Kenya, significantly increasing student enrollment, ensuring a safer environment for girls and teachers, and ultimately enhancing overall productivity and impact.

"As the youngest continent in the world, there is unprecedented demand to provide young people access to quality education across Africa. While Africa's primary school enrollment is above 80% on average, the expansion in enrollment masks huge disparities and inefficiencies. Most programs suffer from a lack of quality learning infrastructure, and Africa still faces some of the highest level of educational exclusion in the world, especially for young women and girls. Through our projects in various countries in Africa, we would like to contribute towards improving this," says Dr Serg Bell in an interview with PAV.

Could you start by introducing the Groundbreaker Foundation for us?

Groundbreaker is a free, non-profit Foundation as a Service that connects motivated donors with small local initiatives in the Global South. The goal is to simplify the process of creating a positive impact and channel the potential of each of our partners. Since all the administrative costs are covered by Groundbreaker, we ensure that 100% of donations reach local projects.



Groundbreaker's projects in Africa and beyond are some of my most fulfilling achievements, says Dr Serg Bell.

Our main focus areas include the provision of educational infrastructure (a place to learn), software engineering scholarships (cultivating a talent pool), and emergency relief in crisis regions. Since our founding in 2019, and with the support of our donors we have built a network of local organizations in 40 countries, directly reaching 32,731 people, and opened 49 school projects, (including nine Computes Labs), three Vocational Training Centers and one Community Center.

How was the vision for the Groundbreaker Foundation conceived and why the interest in Africa?

I believe knowledge is the key to solving the world's most pressing challenges. Groundbreaker is helping to put that vision into practice.

Education should be accessible no matter where you live.

As the youngest continent in the world, there is unprecedented demand to provide young people access to quality education across Africa. While Africa's primary school enrollment is above 80% on average, the expansion in enrollment masks huge disparities and inefficiencies. Most programs suffer from a lack of quality learning infrastructure, and Africa still faces some of the highest level of educational exclusion in the world, especially for young women and girls. Through our projects in various countries in Africa, we would like to contribute towards improving this.

May we get insights into some of the specific projects that the Groundbreaker is working on

in Africa?

We have 20 projects in 15 countries, including projects in Angola, Burkina Faso, DR Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.

One example is our project to build a new school in Wubuye, Kenya. The Mukomari primary school serves a community of over 2,000 school-age children, but the lack of learning facilities means many parents have opted to enrol their children in schools further afield. The school itself previously had seven temporary classrooms and bathrooms in poor condition. Since the construction of six permanent classrooms and latrines, we've already seen fantastic progress. Enrolment has increased to over 350 students within the first six months, with the wellbeing and safety

of students and teachers increasing markedly.

How important are the current programs or projects in meeting the development needs of Africa?

They are incredibly important to providing quality education to the children and the families in the areas where we have projects. Of course, more can be done to help more young people to get access to quality education and achieve their potential. Efforts are needed to remove the barriers preventing children from learning, from a lack of nearby school facilities and overcrowded classrooms to unsafe infrastructure. A lack of quality teachers and adequate school supplies and furniture also impedes the learning experience for young students.

We also have a huge learning gap since the COVID-19 pandemic, which left millions of children and young people deprived of their right to quality education. Working with our local partners, Groundbreaker projects are working each day to recover the learning losses of the last few years and give students a greater chance for a self-determined and fulfilled life.

What has the experience been like engaging with Africa and what are some of the challenges you have faced?

Groundbreaker's projects in Africa and beyond are some of my most fulfilling achievements. This is all due to the incredible Groundbreaker team but especially to our network of local partners that work tirelessly to support their communities. Many of the challenges that other organizations face actually start when they end up picking partners that don't align with their vision. Our team and partner network is incredibly agile, meaning that they are adaptive and responsive to any challenges that may come their way, big or small.



We are always looking to supporting new donors in making a difference, and for new local partner organizations across Africa, says Dr Serg Bell.

May we know the metrics or yard sticks that you will use to measure the success of the Foundation's work in Africa?

Just as we look to invest in projects with measurable impact, we measure success of Groundbreaker's impact across the world. We look at quantitative measures such as the number of schools built, communities served, and children enrolled in schools but also their retention rate. Qualitative measures are just as important – if we can improve the safety and security of students and teachers and contributing to their overall wellbeing, I would also say that is a success.

Any plans to expand the programs of the Groundbreaker Foundation to cover the rest of Africa?

We are always looking to supporting new donors in making a difference, and for new local

partner organizations across Africa. We emphasize the quality of our projects in addition to the quantity, so will only develop partnerships with organizations that are fully accountable, deeply embedded in their communities and have a proven strategy for long-term success.

Beyond the Foundation you are an accomplished tech entrepreneur, investor, and executive, do you currently have investments in Africa or plan to do so?

Africa is a priority region for the work I am doing with Constructor Group, which aims to provide innovative education solutions that cover the entire learning lifecycle and promote technological breakthroughs for the world's most pressing challenges.

I am particularly excited about the application of Knowledge Model Technologies which our team at

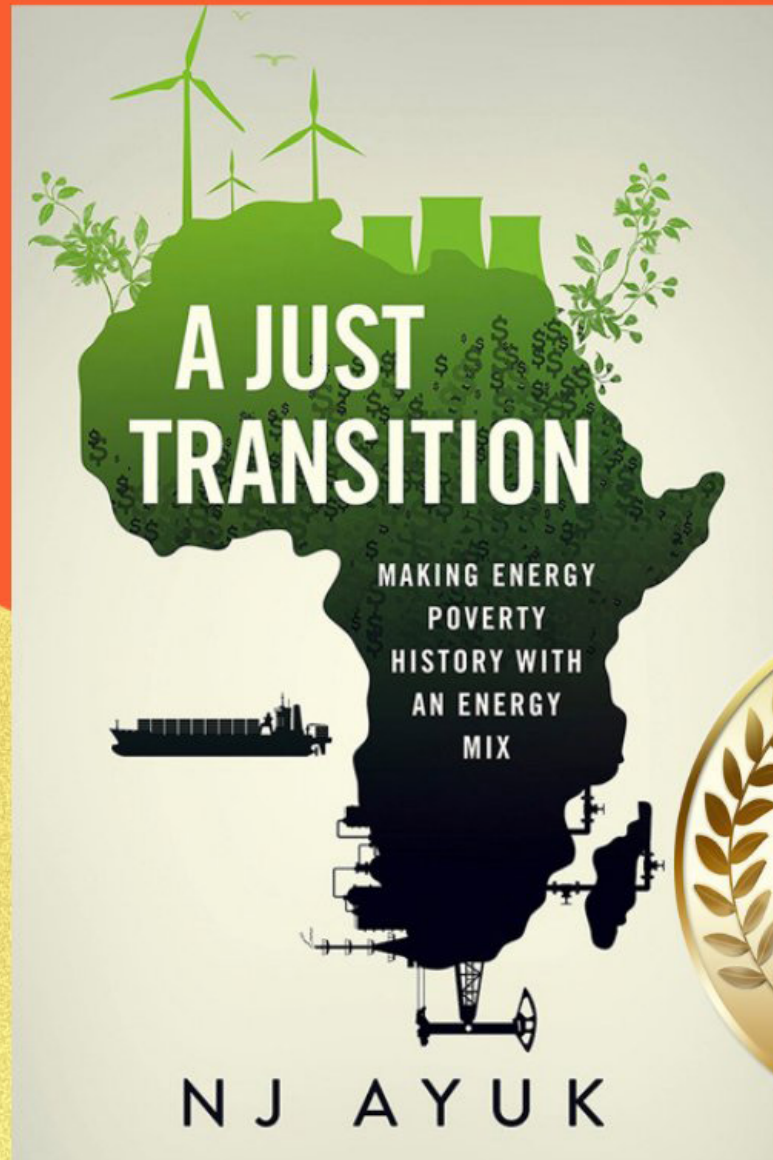
Constructor Technology is leading on. These offer an all-in-one platform for education and research. Leveraging machine intelligence and data science, our digital solutions help teachers be more efficient and effective educators, while also advancing our mission to make knowledge accessible to all.

At Constructor University in Bremen, Germany, we also offer academic excellence to a vibrant and diverse international community. We have over 1,800 students from more than 110 countries, and we look forward to attracting even more of the best talent that Africa has to offer to study at Constructor University.

What are some of the success tips that you can share with aspiring tech entrepreneurs in Africa?

It's hard to give universal advice, but I would encourage any budding entrepreneur to stay ambitious, never give up, and never stop learning.

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Italy's Sales Pitch To Africa

By Prince Kurupati



Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and African leaders. Photo credit Peoples Gazette.

Italy is going to assume the presidency of the G-7 later this year (2024). In preparation for its presidency, Italy presented its “plan for Africa” and this presentation took place during the Italy-Africa Summit held from January 28-29, 2024. The Summit ran under the theme, “Italy-Africa. A bridge for common growth”. At the end of the Summit, Italy pledged a nearly US\$6 billion plan to support African development.

26 heads of state mainly from Africa, EU leaders, over 12 international organisations, and several other high-ranking officials gathered in Rome to deliberate and discuss issues that will mutually benefit Africa, Italy, and the whole of Europe in general.

The Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in her 15 months in power has always stressed her desire to implement the Africa project. While the exact contents of her African project have largely been shrouded in secrecy, she took the occasion of the Italy-Africa Summit to reveal her entire plan – laying every single detail out in the open.

As she relayed her Africa Plan before the whole world, Prime Minister Meloni said “We believe it is possible to envision and write a new chapter in the history of our relationship, a cooperation among equals, far from any predatory imposition or charitable stance towards Africa. There is a natural inclination for Italy to be a bridge between Africa and Europe. The whole world cannot think about the future without Africa.”

The ideals of ‘non-predation’ and ‘cooperation as equals’ which Prime Minister Meloni premises her Africa Plan on were inspired by Enrico Mattei. Owing to this, it’s aptly named the “Mattei Plan”. Enrico Mattei was an Italian public administrator who, in the 1950s advocated for Italy to support North African governments to grow their economies and develop their natural resources. Enrico Mattei is the founder of the state-controlled energy group Eni (ENI.MI). Drawing inspiration from Enrico Mattei and his ‘plan’, Prime Minister Meloni is eager to renew, rejuvenate and

reinvalidate Italy’s relationship and approach to the African continent.

From the get-go, Prime Minister Meloni’s Mattei Plan has received a warm embrace and is regarded as a great panacea to some of the challenges that have bedeviled Italy and Europe as a whole for some time. Writing for *Le Monde*, Allan Kaval said, that by putting the principles of “non-predation” and “cooperation as equals” at the forefront of her Africa project, Prime Minister Meloni believes that pouring in massive European investment in a continent hitherto “exploited by malevolent powers will, in the long term, help to tackle the root causes of illegal migration, which she has promised her electorate she will bring under control”.

Besides stamping out illegal migration something which the Prime Minister promised the electorate she would succeed in doing, the Italian leader announced various initiatives designed to bolster economic links and create an energy hub for Europe while curbing African emigration to

Europe. These initiatives culminated in the initial US\$5.5 billion pledge Italy made. Before announcing the Mattei Plan to all the African leaders, Prime Minister Meloni had already stated that the one area she is prioritising in her deals with Africa is the energy industry.

“If we want to work on a strategy that brings African and European interests together, one example is energy, because Africa is potentially a huge energy producer and Europe has an energy supply problem,” the Italian leader said.

The protracted Ukraine-Russia War has made things much more difficult for Europe as a whole and Italy in particular when it comes to energy issues. Russian oil and gas helped to power up Italy but since the war, the supply chain has been disrupted hence prompting Italy to seek new sources of energy.

By making African development the central theme of the Mattei Plan, Italy and in general the whole of Europe gets to exert its influence on a continent where global powers

like China and Russia have been expanding their political sway.

Considering the massive influence of Russia and China in Africa where the former is actively involved in governance matters of most countries between Sudan and Mali while the latter through its Belt and Road Initiative keeps consolidating its influence in most African countries from Cape to Cairo, it's no surprise that European nations now want to foster relations with Africa. By preaching the principles of "non-predation" and "cooperation as equals", if Italy is to stand by these, it will undoubtedly gain a foothold on the continent.

Speaking after the Summit, the African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki said they would have loved it more if Italy adopted a bottom-up approach in designing the Mattei Plan. He said prior consultation with the African continent would have been desirable but the pledge made by Italy is nonetheless warmly welcomed as it "aligns with Africa's priorities".

Before African leaders flocked to Rome to gather for the Italy-Africa Summit, Arturo Varvelli who is the director of the Rome office of the European Council on Foreign Relations expressed doubt that heavily indebted Italy would be able to fund and implement the Mattei Plan alone considering the sheer amount of money needed to finance



Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni, AfDB President Dr Akinwumi Adesina and Italian Republic President Sergio Mattarella at Palazzo del Quirinale. Photo courtesy.

it (something which has now been publicised thanks to Italy's US\$5.5 billion pledge). Varvelli said Italy would have to partner with other European nations and institutions. He went on to say that It's presumably against this background that Prime Minister Meloni chose 2024, the year of Italy's G7 presidency to pursue the Mattei Plan. As the president of the G7, Italy can lobby other European nations to come on board and support its plan.

"It would be foolish to think you can

compete with China, the United Arab Emirates, or even Turkey... To make sense, this will have to fit into a broader picture of existing European Union initiatives," Varvelli said. Varvelli's sentiments were proved correct as the various institutions as well as leaders of the European Parliament and European Commission who attended the Summit pledged to support Italy throughout the Mattei Plan.

Roberta Metsola the President of the European Parliament after the Summit said, "When Africa prospers,

Europe prospers and the whole world can". These sentiments by Metsola were also echoed by the President of the African Development Bank Group Dr Akinwumi Adesina who said, "With a population of 1.4 billion, the largest youth population in the world, the largest renewable energy sources in the world, the largest deposits of critical minerals and metals globally, and the largest share of uncultivated arable land left in the world, Africa will determine the future of the world."



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Horn of Africa: France's New Entry Point?

By Ermias Mulugeta



Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi formalized the MoU earlier this year. Photo courtesy.

Ethiopia stands as the only nation with a population exceeding a hundred million that is also landlocked, finding itself at the threshold of obtaining sea access for the first time since the neighboring Eritrea declared its independence three decades ago. On the inaugural day of the new year, January 1, 2024, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi formalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This pivotal agreement bestows upon Ethiopia a 20 km of coastal access, while in a reciprocal gesture, Somaliland gains recognition as an independent entity alongside a proportional share in Ethiopian Airlines, a frontrunner in the aviation sector.

The announcement of this MoU has sparked widespread attention both within local circles and on the international stage, catching many by surprise, including a number of Ethiopian government officials. The global community, amidst various continental and international

political upheavals, such as the conflicts in Gaza and the Ukraine-Russia War, is now keenly observing developments in the region. The Horn of Africa, a focal point of interest for global powers, is now even more scrutinized, with numerous warships docked due to the presence of military installations from the world's leading nations.

In this context, the French government is actively pursuing a strategic national interest in Eastern Africa. The region is not unfamiliar to France, especially considering its historical connections with Djibouti and Ethiopia. Despite the competitive presence of various superpowers vying for dominance in the Horn, France is positioning itself to secure a significant stake amidst rising tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia.

Somalia has voiced its opposition to the MoU with the breakaway Somaliland, perceiving it as a potential infringement on its territorial integrity. Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has consistently

cautioned Ethiopia against proceeding with the agreement, citing concerns over national sovereignty. Conversely, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, while disclosing the MoU, clarified that Ethiopia harbors no intentions of compromising the sovereignty of neighboring nations, emphasizing a vision of shared prosperity and resource utilization.

The MoU has polarized the international community, with some factions in support and others in opposition. Political commentators and analysts told Pan African Visions that the ongoing discord between Somalia and Ethiopia concerning the MoU could potentially invite European involvement in the region, with France being particularly poised to reassert its influence in Africa. According to observers, France's diminishing presence in the western part of the continent and its withdrawal from the Sahel have prompted the French government to explore new avenues for re-engagement in Africa. The current tension in the Horn, especially

the dispute between Ethiopia and Somalia, has opened up opportunities for France to play a significant role in ensuring its continued presence in Africa.

The French National Defense and Military Committee recently conducted a courtesy visit to Ethiopia, engaging in discussions with the Ethiopian House of Peoples Representatives' Foreign Relation and Peace standing Committee. These talks reaffirmed the bilateral cooperation between the two nations, with Ethiopia elucidating its stance on the MoU and addressing what it perceives as unbalanced statements from the European Union regarding the recent agreement. Ethiopia also asked France to explain the world about Ethiopia's latest sea access agreement and its importance to the nation.

France's profound understanding of the region's political landscape, aided by the mediating role of francophone Djibouti between Mogadishu and Hargeisa, facilitates France's deepening engagement

in the area. The resumption of military cooperation with Ethiopia, particularly in naval capabilities, underscores the robust partnership between France and Ethiopia. Given Ethiopia's strategic position in the Horn of Africa and its status as the hub of the African Union, France views its engagement with Ethiopia as a gateway to the continent. Political analysts posit that France's keen interest in the developments surrounding Ethiopia's maritime access could significantly benefit Ethiopia if leveraged appropriately.

Moreover, the French Ambassador to Addis Ababa, Rémi Maréchaux, in a recent interview, affirmed Ethiopia's quest for port access as legitimate, aligning with United Nations' principles. However, the European Union, in a swift and brief communique following the MoU's announcement, emphasized the need for the agreement to honor the Unity, Sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Somalia, referencing the charters



French President Macron and Ethiopia's PM Abiy. France sees Ethiopia's quest for port access as legitimate. Photo courtesy.

of both the African Union and the United Nations.

With France assuming the presidency of the United Nations Security Council at the start of the year, it is anticipated that the council will prioritize issues in Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Sahel. The Ethiopia-Somalia situation is likely to emerge as a focal point during

France's presidency. Reports from Somalia, and people who are actively leading the advocacy on objecting the MoU said that there are plans to take the issue to the Security Council, where France's leadership could potentially take a side in the council and sparking debate among member states. Somali activists, particularly concerned about the implications

of the Ethiopia-Somaliland MoU, express mixed feelings about the fairness of the UNSC's deliberations under France's presidency.

Ethiopia, for its part, is navigating the implementation of the MoU cautiously to avoid exacerbating tensions with Somalia. While Ethiopia has portrayed the agreement as a developmental endeavor aimed at economic enhancement, Somaliland's President Muse Bihi has announced the military objectives behind the coastal access of Ethiopia, although he acknowledges Ethiopia's right to use Berbera port for commercial purposes. The active involvement of the French government in supporting Ethiopia's naval ambitions signals a probable increase in French military presence alongside Ethiopian forces in Somaliland, coinciding with France's established military base in Djibouti. This development is set to amplify France's military footprint in the Horn of Africa, especially as it shifts focus from the Sahel.

New Vaccine and Fresh Hope Africa's Malaria Fight

By Jean-Pierre Afadhali

A number of African countries are gearing up for massive Malaria's vaccine roll-out to control the deadly disease that has become an economic and health burden for the continent.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is supporting the vaccine programmes on the continent using the first Malaria vaccine called RTS, S. Cameroon has launched the Malaria vaccine roll-out, becoming the first country to introduce RTS, S after the pilot programme that was implemented in Kenya, Ghana and Malawi. The immunization campaign in the central Africa country targets children aged six months as of 31 December 2023.

Nine African countries are expected to launch the malaria immunization this year. In addition to Cameroon, Benin, Burkina Faso and Liberia have received the vaccine and are finalizing the roll-out plans.

WHO said in a press release



Cameroon became the first country to launch the RTS,S malaria vaccine into its routine national immunization. Photo WHO.

that for an effective vaccine introduction, it is essential that countries put in place comprehensive preparations that include adopting the national vaccination policy and guidelines, integrating the new vaccine into the delivery schedule of other vaccines and health interventions among others.

“The launch of the malaria vaccine marks a significant step in the prevention and control of the disease, especially in protecting children against severe disease and death,” said Dr Phaniel Habimana, WHO Representative in Cameroon.

Cameroon is among the 11 countries most affected by the disease globally. The central African country recorded more than 3 million cases and over 3800 deaths in 2021.

According to the 2023 global Malaria report released by WHO, RTS, S/AS01, has

reduced early childhood deaths by 13 per cent in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi. In October 2023, WHO recommended a second malaria vaccine, R21/Matrix-M. A two-vaccine market will make broad scale-up across Africa possible, says the UN health agency.

As Cameroon kicks off the country’s massive immunization campaign, hailed by public health experts, at least 28 countries in African region have expressed interest in introducing the malaria vaccine. Several countries submitted applications to Gavi (the Vaccine Alliance), and 18 countries have been approved to receive support for malaria vaccine rollout.

“Today marks a historic milestone in public health. RTS, S malaria vaccine is finally introduced after 30+ [more than 30] years of development. Cameroon is the first in Africa to roll out this vaccine. I encourage @_ African Union member States to join Cameroon in rolling out this vaccine,” said recently via X (formerly Twitter) Jean Kaseya, Director General of Africa Centre for Disease Control.

Kasereka was commenting on Cameroon’s RTS, S launch.

LES PARLEMENTAIRES ONT UN RÔLE CLÉ À JOUER POUR ASSURER L'AUGMENTATION DU BUDGET DE L'ETAT ALLOUÉ À LA SANTÉ ET AU PALUDISME EN PARTICULIER.

Dr. Phaniel HABIMANA
Représentant de l'Organisation
Mondiale de la Santé (OMS)
Cameroun



World Health
Organization



The launch of the malaria vaccine marks a significant step in the prevention and control of the disease, says Dr Phaniel Habimana, WHO Rep in Cameroon.

“I chose to vaccinate my twins because I’ve seen how harmful malaria can be,” said Helene, whose twin children were the first to receive the malaria vaccine. “I’m committed to ensuring that my children get all the four doses of the vaccine and I’ll take other steps like making sure they sleep under mosquito nets.”

Despite hopes for the new vaccine that is expected to considerably reduce malaria around the world, challenges remain to control the deadly disease.

Challenges to control Malaria
Malaria burden is the highest on the African continent, which accounted for approximately 94 per cent of global malaria cases and 95 per cent of related deaths in 2022.

Data shows, between 2000 and 2019, case incidence decreased from 370 to 226 per 1000 population at risk, but increased to 232 per 1000 population at risk in 2020, mainly because of disruptions to services during the COVID-19 pandemic, said WHO. In 2022, case incidence declined to 223 per 1000 population at risk.

There was also initial supply chain shortage for the RTS, S now the UN health agency says “a framework for allocation of limited malaria vaccine supply was developed and applied to prioritize the 18 million doses of the first-ever malaria vaccine available for 2023–2025 to 12 countries, for subnational introduction in areas of greatest need.”

Additionally, vaccine hesitancy amid misinformation and disinformation could hinder the first malaria vaccine’s adoption. In an article titled “Vaccine alone won’t stop Malaria”, Rosebell Kagumire, seasoned writer argues that vaccine hesitancy could hinder efforts to stop Malaria. “Mis/disinformation, anti-vaccine propaganda and the militarized responses to the pandemic [COVID-19] in some countries eroded public trust,” wrote Kagumire in a piece published by the New Internationalist.

Other issues cited by public health experts that are hindering efforts to combat Malaria include, rising resistance to insecticide-treated nets and to antimalarial drug regimens.

Also in some areas, malaria parasites are escaping detection from the most widely used diagnostic tests.

Meanwhile, Kenya has begun the distribution of Long-Lasting Insecticidal Net (LLIN) in six high-burden counties in a fresh war against malaria. Long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) are said to be a highly effective tool in malaria prevention and control programmes.

Amid vaccine roll-out and intensified efforts to stop the deadly disease, few countries have completely ended Malaria. Recently WHO declared Cap Verde Malaria-free, making it a global achievement in global health.

The Archipelago was the third country in Africa to be certified as Malaria-free, joining Mauritius and Algeria which were certified in 1973 and 2019 respectively.

“Systems and structures built for malaria elimination have strengthened the health system and will be used to fight other mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever,” noted the UN Health body in a press statement.



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A Looming Hunger: The Nigerian Proletariat in the Jaws of Austerity.

By Aminu Adamu*

The air hangs heavy in the markets in Nigeria, thick with the cloying aroma of desperation. Here, amidst the cacophony of haggling vendors and the weary shuffle of shoppers, a grim reality unfolds. The price of survival has become an obscene joke, a cruel punchline to the already threadbare existence of the Nigerian masses.

A bag of rice, once a staple, now demands a king's ransom of 60,000 naira. Flour, the cornerstone of countless meals, sits at an exorbitant 36,000 naira. Even the humble bag of cement, a symbol of progress and shelter, mocks with its 6,000-naira price tag. Beans, a source of protein for the malnourished, are a luxury at 80,000 naira. Millet and Soya Beans, once affordable alternatives, now flicker just out of reach at 30,000 and 20,000 naira respectively.

These are not mere numbers; they are sentences of hunger pronounced upon the Nigerian proletariat. The minimum wage, a paltry 30,000 naira, is a cruel joke in the face of this gastronomic extortion. It is a wage that forces Nigerians to spend a staggering 98% of their meager income on food alone, leaving nothing for rent, healthcare, education, or even the most basic semblance of dignity.

This is not a new story, but it is one that grows more desperate with each passing day. The Buhari administration, despite its promises of change, has sleepwalked into a quagmire of its own making. The devaluation of the naira, coupled with rising inflation and an overdependence on oil exports, has created a perfect storm of economic hardship. The promised agricultural reforms have sputtered, failing to deliver on their potential to alleviate the burden on the most vulnerable.

But to paint this solely as a failing of the current administration would be a dangerous oversimplification. The seeds of this crisis were sown



The devaluation of the naira, coupled with rising inflation and an overdependence on oil exports, has created a perfect storm of economic hardship in Nigeria.. Photo courtesy.

long before, under the Jonathan administration. The rampant corruption, the profligate spending, and the policy paralysis that characterized those years laid the groundwork for the economic instability we witness today.

However, it is under the current government that the chickens have truly come home to roost. The Marxist critique, with its emphasis on the inherent contradictions of capitalism, offers a chillingly apt lens through which to view the Nigerian predicament. The working class, the very engine of the economy, is being systematically squeezed, its surplus value extracted to prop up a failing system. The rich get richer, while the poor are left to fight over scraps.

The human cost of this economic alchemy is staggering. Children, their bellies distended with malnutrition, stare vacantly at the world through hollow eyes. Families huddle together in cramped shacks, their dreams suffocated by the ever-present threat of hunger. The social fabric, already strained, begins to tear at the seams.

This is not just an economic crisis; it is a moral one. The Nigerian government cannot, in good conscience, stand idly by while its people are slowly immiserated. The time for empty promises and half-hearted measures is over. Concrete action is needed, and it is needed now.

The government must prioritize food security, investing in agricultural initiatives that empower smallholder farmers and reduce reliance on imports. It must crack down on corruption, ensuring that public funds are used for the betterment of all, not the enrichment of a select few. It must raise the minimum wage to a level that allows for a dignified existence, not just bare survival.

These are not radical demands; they are the basic tenets of a just society. The Nigerian people deserve better. They deserve a government that prioritizes their well-being, that understands that their prosperity is not a burden, but the bedrock upon which a strong and vibrant nation is built.

The alternative is too grim to

contemplate. A nation on the brink, its people consumed by the primal urge to survive. A society fractured, its anger simmering just beneath the surface. The Nigerian government must act, and it must act decisively, before the hunger that gnaws at the bellies of its people turns into a roar that shakes the very foundations of the nation.

This is not just a call to action; it is a plea for humanity. In the bustling markets in Nigeria, amidst the desperation and the defiance, a flicker of hope remains. The Nigerian people are resilient, their spirit unbroken. But their patience is wearing thin. The time for action is now. The future of Nigeria, the fate of its people, hangs in the balance. Will the government choose to save them, or will it condemn them to a future defined by hunger and despair? The answer, etched in the faces of the struggling masses, awaits.

* Aminu Adamu is a Sociologist and Freelance Journalist

Tanzania- Flooding Crisis Hit Dar es Salaam

By Adonis Byemelwa



The floods have become a source of great concern in Tanzania. Photo courtesy

Relentless rainfall in Dar es Salaam on Sunday, January 21, 2024, unleashed widespread flooding, causing certain roads to become impassable and submerging homes in low-lying areas.

This alarming event underscores the city's susceptibility to weather-related incidents, prompting concerns about its preparedness and resilience in the face of such challenges.

Between 4:00 AM and 6:15 PM, the Ubungo External area experienced traffic disruptions as water-filled drains along Mandela Road prevented vehicles from Buguruni from passing, resulting in flooded streets.

In the Mbagala ward of Temeke District, the cutting-edge Rapid Bus Transit terminal found itself submerged under floodwaters, prompting residents to question the wisdom of establishing a multi-billion infrastructure in an area seemingly ill-suited for such endeavors.

This scenario mirrors the predicament faced in Jangwani, where a similar bus stand was

constructed, only to remain unused during the rainy seasons, thereby compromising the convenience of commuters.

Pedestrians navigated through water-covered railway tracks due to flooding on the road from Tabata Mwananchi to Tabata Kisiwani. This significantly impacted public transportation to Kawe, Mwenge, Makumbusho, Ubungo, and Mbezi, making travel challenging.

Concerns were raised by a daladala (minibus) driver, Juma Hassan, advising against attempting to pass through the flooded areas, emphasizing the risk of damaging vehicles.

Additionally, the ongoing rain caused the Tabata Kisiwani bridge to overflow, disrupting communication between Tabata Relini and Tabata Kisiwani. Kimara Mwisho residents faced challenges with waterlogged bus stations, making it difficult for passengers to board daladalas.

The Tabata Segerea area also experienced public transportation

difficulties, with passengers enduring long waits at the Tabata Segerea terminal due to the inclement weather.

The rain affected Coco Beach-like conditions in Posta and its surroundings, with some individuals carrying their shoes and lifting their long clothing to continue their journey. Effluent from Posta's sewage pipes mixed with rainwater was observed.

Notably, the report highlighted damaged infrastructure and fallen trees in various parts of the city, including the areas near the National Insurance Corporation (NIC) building and the Ministry of Health.

The aftermath reflects not only the immediate impact of the heavy rains but also underscores the challenges in urban planning that contribute to the ongoing crisis.

The flooding crisis sheds light on the legal and practical challenges associated with the declaration of planning areas.

In the early stages of urban land

use planning, the minister has discretionary powers to declare planning areas.

The lack of a mandatory requirement raises concerns about areas being left out of planning, leading to unregulated development.

This becomes particularly problematic in situations where timely discretion is not exercised, allowing uncontrolled development in vulnerable areas.

The discretionary nature of planning area declaration poses an environmental risk. Without a declared planning area, environmental management issues cannot be integrated into planning efforts.

The consequences are evident in the informal development of many parts of Dar es Salaam, including slums where residents lack the benefits of regulated development and environmental considerations.

While public hearings are a legal requirement before declaring planning areas, opposition from

residents and stakeholders can hinder the process.

This legal challenge creates a situation where areas remain undeveloped due to the lack of formal planning.

Consequently, this fosters informal development, making it difficult for planning authorities to enforce environmental regulations.

The preparation and implementation of master plans face political and bureaucratic hurdles, with stakeholders' support deemed necessary. This often leads to delays in the approval and operationalization of master plans.

The extended timelines for master plans, as seen in Dar es Salaam's case, contribute to unguided and uncontrolled development. The 1979 master plan, which should

guide urban development, has not been reviewed or updated, further exacerbating the challenges.

The practical ineffectiveness of master plans is evident in their failure to bring about desired results. Delays in the preparation process, coupled with the lack of periodic reviews, leave planners without updated guidance. This creates a scenario where ongoing land developments lack proper oversight and control, contributing to the current flooding crisis.

The legal challenges in urban planning directly correlate with the flooding crisis in Dar es Salaam. The lack of timely and mandatory declaration of planning areas has left many parts of the city vulnerable to unregulated development, particularly in low-lying areas prone to flooding.

The absence of effective master plans, compounded by the failure to review and update existing plans, has left the city without the necessary tools to guide sustainable and regulated urban development.

The aftermath of the flooding underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive and enforceable urban planning framework. The legal challenges identified, such as discretionary powers in planning area declaration and the cumbersome master plan approval process, contribute to the city's vulnerability.

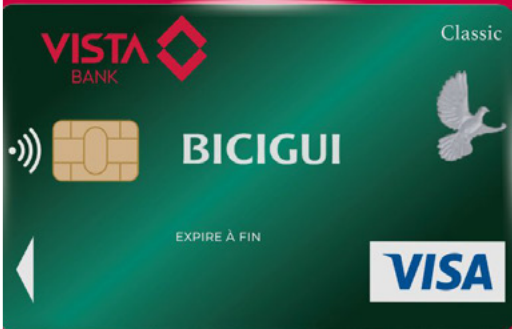
Without addressing these legal issues, Dar es Salaam will continue to face environmental crises, affecting its residents and infrastructure.

A World Bank report from 2018 warned that infrastructure worth over \$5.3 billion (TZS 13.3 trillion) in Dar

es Salaam was at risk of deterioration due to the impact of rainfall and flooding. The economic burden on households was also mentioned, emphasizing the need for measures to address the challenges posed by weather-related incidents in the city.

Therefore, the ongoing flooding crisis in Dar es Salaam is a stark reminder of the intricate link between legal challenges in urban planning and the city's resilience to weather-related incidents. A reevaluation of the legal framework, emphasizing mandatory planning area declarations, streamlined master plan approval processes, and regular reviews, is crucial to mitigating future crises and ensuring sustainable urban development.

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Kenya: Judiciary and Executive In Power Tussle

By Samuel Ouma

The meeting between the President of the Judiciary of Kenya, Lady Justice Martha Koome, and President Ruto at the State House on January 22, 2024, was projected to ease the strained relationship between the two arms of the government.

However, the war between the two organs is far from over, as a section of government officials continue with fierce criticism of judges for ruling against key government projects.

The meeting, which was opposed by the legal experts and opposition politicians, was called by Justice Koome and embraced by President Ruto following graft allegations levelled against judges.

Ruto and his allies alleged that certain judges joined forces with both cartels and his opponents to obstruct his development agenda. They asserted that these unidentified judges receive bribes to rule against the development projects, especially in affordable housing and universal health coverage.

Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua initially stated that he planned to file



President Ruto with Chief Justice Martha Koome. Relations between the Executive and Judiciary are strained. Photo courtesy.

a complaint with the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) against a judge who ruled on one of his corruption cases. He later withdrew the threat

to allow discussions between the Executive and the Judiciary. “Chief Justice called for talks and I want to say I welcome the talks.

On January 2, I committed that we needed a conversation on how to deal with corruption,” said Ruto.

Just a few days after the meeting between the duo, the courts issued two rulings that left Ruto and other government officials fuming.

On January 26, the Court of Appeal declined to suspend orders preventing the government from deducting 1.5 per cent Housing Levy from Kenyans.

The three-judge bench, which included Justices Lydia Achode, John Mativo, and Mwaniki Gachoka, ruled that the public interest favours not granting the government’s requested order.

“The trial Court held that the Housing Levy was introduced without a legal framework. It also held that the levy was targeting a section of Kenyans. In our view, the public interest lies in awaiting the determination of the appeal. This is because if the stay sought is granted at this stage, should the appellate Court affirm the impugned decision, then some far-reaching decisions that



Disobeying court orders will result in anarchy, warns Chief Justice Martha Koome. Photo courtesy.

will have been undertaken pursuant to the impugned laws may not be reversible,” ruled the judges.

“Public interest, in our view, tilts in favour of not granting the stay, or the suspension sought. Public interest tilts in favour, awaiting the determination of the issues raised in the intended appeals,” the judges ruled.”

The Court further ruled that the housing levy was unconstitutional, citing discrimination because the funds were only remitted by Kenyans in formal employment.

On the same day, the High Court halted the plans to deploy police to Haiti for a peacekeeping mission.

Justice Chacha Mwita barred Interior Cabinet Secretary Kithure Kindiki from deploying police until a case filed by petitioner Ekuru Aukot is heard and determined.

“A conservatory order is hereby issued restraining the respondents from deploying police officers to Haiti or any other country until October 24, 2023,” said Justice Chacha.

Justice Mwita further ruled that the National Security Council and National Police Service have no mandate to deploy Kenyan officers to the Caribbean nation.

«In that regard, any purported decision by the National Council or any other state officer to deploy police officers outside Kenya and any other action taken by any other state organ or state officer in furtherance of that decision is invalid, null and void,» he added.

In July 2023, Kenya offered to send police officers to Haiti to restore security in the gang-ridden country. In return, on October 10, the United Nations (UN) Security Council approved this request.

Last year, the Court also termed Ruto’s creation of 50 Chief Administrative Secretaries (CAS) positions unconstitutional. The High court judges said the Constitution only allows the appointment of 23 CASs instead of 50.

«The sequence and procedure leading to the additional 27 posts did not adhere to public participation. The process didn’t meet the threshold,»



Azimio stands for the rule of law and supports the need for an independent and professional Judiciary, says opposition leader Raila Odinga. Photo courtesy.

said the judges.

Adding to Ruto’s setbacks, the High Court issued a ruling in May 2023 that temporarily halted his efforts to establish a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the Shakahola deaths.

The High Court Judge Lawrence Mugambi ruled that because the Senate and the National Police Service were already investigating the same matter using public funds and resources, there was no need to establish a new commission.

Over 400 individuals lost their lives in what is believed to be a cult incident in the Shakahola Forest of Kilifi County, Kenya.

Controversial preacher, Paul Mackenzie of Good News International Ministries, allegedly urged his followers to fast to death to see Jesus.

The opposition outfit Azimio la Umoja One Kenya Alliance filed the lawsuit, alleging Ruto undermined the Senate’s authority.

This claim was based on the Senate’s formation of an ad hoc committee chaired by Senator Danson Mungatana.

The lawsuit claimed that only Parliament, via an Act of Parliament,

had the authority to establish a subordinate court or an independent tribunal.

Additionally, on October 12, the High Court declared Ruto’s directive to lift the logging ban unconstitutional.

Ruto lifted the six-year ban on July 2, but the Environment and Land Court found that the directive did not follow the required procedure, which included public participation.

Following the rulings, Ruto vowed to defy the court orders, especially in housing levy and deployment of police to Haiti, eliciting public uproar.

The President of Kenya’s Supreme Court, Martha Koome, has warned that disobeying court orders will result in anarchy.

«It is regrettable that the leadership of the Executive and legislature, in their recent public declarations, have threatened not to obey Court orders. These threats and declarations are extremely serious and a monumental assault to the Constitution, rule of law and the very stability of the nation and can lead to chaos and anarchy in our motherland,» cautioned Koome.

The opposition leader, Raila Odinga, warned Ruto against

interfering with the independence of the Judiciary.

“Azimio stands for the rule of law and supports the need for an independent and professional Judiciary. Subsequently, we demand that Kenya Kwanza must keep its hands off the Judiciary,» said Odinga.

The Law Society of Kenya (LSK) also protested against Ruto’s sustained attacks on judges. The society pledged to protect the Judiciary, the Constitution, and the rule of law, warning that the nation risks stunted economic and social development unless the use of authority is controlled.

«We took an oath to defend the Constitution, independence of the Judiciary and the administration of justice. And we are going to retake those oaths in public so that we can send an equivocal message to the Executive and those in the Executive who are harbouring false hopes that LSK will cow or be intimidated in the defense of the rule of law,» said LSK President Eric Theuri.



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African SMEs Set For Reboot At Lagos Forum

By Ajong Mbapndah L

African Small and Medium Size Enterprises, SMEs are bracing up for a maiden assembly in Lagos, Nigeria to discuss common issues and fine tune strategies to better serve the continent.

“The Assembly is a Lifetime project for us as it reflects our passion, values and aspirations to disrupt the status quo of a sector that contributes so much to Africa’s economy, yet remains highly fragmented, disjointed, and marginalized,” says Abasiofiok Ibekwe Co-convenor & Project Lead Africa SME Assembly.

Can you shed light on the Africa SME event that you are planning?

Abasiofiok Ibekwe: The Africa SME Assembly aims to empower the continent’s economy by strengthening, digitizing, and accelerating the growth of the highly informal and underserved SME ecosystem. It’s a Pan-African event, with the first edition set to be hosted in J.F. Ade. Ajayi Auditorium (Main Auditorium), UNILAG, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria, and subsequent editions in other leading economies on the continent. The event will convene over 5,000 key stakeholders, including investors, financiers, policymakers, ecosystem builders, and SMEs, with the objective of collectively envisioning, revitalizing, and advancing the SME sector across the African continent.

Why such an event at this point?

Abasiofiok Ibekwe: Micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises represent around 90 percent of African businesses, contribute to more than 60 percent of employment, and make up half of the gross domestic product (GDP). Despite their significant contribution, Africa’s SME sector has faced disproportionate challenges hindering its growth. The Africa SME Assembly is convened at



SMEs contribute so much to Africa’s economy, yet remains highly fragmented, disjointed, and marginalized, says Abasiofi.

this point to address these challenges, spur growth, and create an enabling ecosystem for small businesses in Africa.

Can you shed light on the situation and the importance of SMEs in Africa today?

Abasiofiok Ibekwe: No economy can grow beyond the strength of her SME sector.

It’s evident in developed economies like America, Europe, and Asia.

After spending years studying these leading global markets, we noticed the importance of SMEs in every economy and why utmost attention must be paid to this sector. However, here in Africa SMEs face various challenges hindering their growth, including limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and

regulatory barriers. Addressing these challenges is crucial for unleashing the full potential of SMEs and driving economic growth and development across Africa. To revamp Africa’s economy, the continent’s SME sector must be on a state of emergency. This is the idea behind the assembly.

On the Assembly itself, besides the SMEs, who are some of the government or institutional actors that you expect at the event?

Abasiofiok Ibekwe: Besides SMEs, the Africa SME Assembly expects the participation of government agencies and institutional actors such as SMEDAN, Representative from Federal Governments, Investors, Develop Financial institutions,

Government agencies, Commercial banks, Financiers, Policy makers, Tech Companies building tools for SMEs, Leading Global and continental corporations, Foreign Delegates, Trade Facilitators etc. Additionally, we’ll be Advocating for Free Continental Trade agreement as proposed by AFCFTA.

For SMEs that are interested, what will it take for them to be part of the Assembly?

Abasiofiok Ibekwe: SMEs interested in participating in the Africa SME Assembly can register through the official channels provided by the organizers. Participation is completely free for all SMEs although some big corporations will have to pay for exhibition booths to enable them to promote their business.



Conveners



Treasure Enyinnaya David

Co-founder & CEO, Innovative Village, Convener, Africa SME Assembly



Monalisa Agbata

Regional Marketing Head, CoinW, Co-convener & Head of Marketing Africa SME Assembly



Abaz Ibekwe

Co-founder, Techfield. Co-convener & project lead, Africa SME Assembly

This is the first time such an Assembly is taking place, is this going to be a one-time thing, or do you plan for it to be an ongoing thing?

Abasiofiok Ibekwe: The Africa SME Assembly is envisioned as an ongoing initiative, with subsequent editions planned to be hosted in other leading economies across the continent. The goal is to create a sustainable platform for fostering collaboration, innovation, and growth

within the SME ecosystem in Africa.

Based on the Nigerian experience, what are some of the challenges that SMEs are facing?

Abasiofiok Ibekwe: In Nigeria, SMEs face various challenges including limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, regulatory complexities, lack of skilled labor, and market access barriers. Addressing these challenges is crucial for

unlocking the full potential of SMEs and driving economic growth in the country.

Any last pitch to SMEs out there across Africa on the importance of joining the Assembly in Nigeria, what tangible benefits could they get from that?

Abasiofiok Ibekwe: Joining the Africa SME Assembly in Nigeria presents SMEs with a unique opportunity to network with key

stakeholders, access funding and investment opportunities, gain insights into innovative solutions and technologies, participate in policy discussions, and contribute to shaping the future of the SME ecosystem in Africa. By participating in the Assembly, SMEs can position themselves for growth, expansion, and success in the dynamic African market.

Thrills, Spills as Curtains Come Down on Exceptional AFCON 2023

Ivory Coast becomes the 12 host nation to win the Nations Cup title, while Nigeria will be left to rue a fifth defeat in the showpiece game - and their second in Abidjan after losing to Cameroon in 1984

By Boris Esono Nwenfor & Sonita Ngunyi



Ivory Coast wins third AFCON title after a 2-1 win over Nigeria on November 11

The Elephants of Ivory Coast picked up their third Africa Cup of Nations, AFCON title following a 2-1 over the Super Eagles of Nigeria on Sunday, February 11. Sebastien Haller struck the winning goal to crown a superb AFCON competition that saw the Elephants coming back from the “grave” to win the title on home soil.

William Troost-Ekong had put Nigeria ahead seven minutes before the end of a cagey first half when the centre-back rose highest to powerfully head in from nine yards out following a corner. The Super Eagles went into the break with their noses in front but knew they had to withstand the onslaught from Ivory Coast in the

second half.

And the equalizer will come in the second half as Franck Kessie nodded in the equaliser in the 62nd minute when he was left unmarked at the back post from Adingra's corner. Sebastien Haller who had also netted the semi-final winner just 13 months on from his return from testicular cancer, flicked in Simon Adingra's cross with the toe of his boot with nine minutes remaining to complete a second-half comeback and sparked wild celebrations in Abidjan.

«We dreamt of this moment so many times,» an emotional Sebastien Haller told French broadcaster beIN Sports. «These scenes of joy, the country deserves this too. We

believed until the end. My teammates pushed me to stay on the pitch for as long as possible and thanks to them I scored.»

For the 12th time in history, the host country has won the CAF Africa Cup of Nations and the first since Egypt in 2006. For Côte d'Ivoire, this is their third title ever, after 1992 in Senegal and 2015 in Equatorial Guinea.

Sebastien Haller added: «It was one of my main goals to give everything I could at the Afcon. I was lucky to be here. Now we can say it, they were telling me six to eight weeks with my injury, so based on that today could have been my first match. My ankle still isn't fully healed, but it was OK for today.»

The Elephants pick up \$7m (£5.54m) in prize money, with Nigeria handed \$4m by the Confederation of African Football, CAF. South Africa picked up the bronze medal after a penalty shootout win against DR Congo to capped off a brilliant performance which saw their goalkeeper and captain Ronwen Williams. Bafana Bafana was equally awarded the fair pay trophy.

The Special One Emere Fae Drafted in as the interim coach after the sacking of Louis Gasset, Emere Fae who was the assistant coach to the Frenchman remarkably turned the fortunes of Ivory Coast with the team going on a four-game winning run that culminated in winning the

AFCON.

«It is more than a fairytale. I am struggling to take it all in,» Emerse Fae said after Ivory Coast recovered from behind at halftime at the Ebimpe Olympic Stadium to win thanks to goals by Franck Kessie and Sebastien Haller. «When I think about all we have been through, we are miracle survivors. We never gave up and we managed to come back from so many tough blows.»

Emerse Faé is the very first manager to win a CAF Africa Cup of Nations tournament without starting the edition as head coach of his team. «All our games were difficult. We had to come from behind and we had to draw on all our physical and mental reserves,» observed Fae, who turned 40 on the day he became coach.

«I can't properly express my joy. It is massive. I dreamed of winning the Afcon as a player and didn't manage it,» added Fae, who played in the side beaten by Egypt in the 2006 final. «Now I have had the opportunity as a coach, albeit in strange circumstances. I took over when we were not even sure of getting out of our group. It was a strange birthday but thankfully we got a second chance and grabbed it.»

Chris Hughton, and Rui Vitoria pay the price for poor performance

The Black Stars of Ghana and the Pharaohs of Egypt had an AFCON to forget with the former failing to



Ivory Coast interim coach Emerse Fae picks Best coach award.

come out of Group B while the latter was eliminated at the knockout stage following a penalty shootout to DR Congo.

«The Ghana Football Association wishes to announce that Chris Hughton has been relieved of his duties as head coach of the senior National team with immediate effect,» read a GFA statement. «The Ghana Football Association will in the coming days provide a roadmap on the future direction of the Black Stars.»

Hughton's backroom staff -- including former Aston Villa midfielder George Boateng, ex-Black

Stars keeper Richard Kingston, and Didi Dramani -- have all also been let go by the federation.

Rui Vitoria was appointed coach of the Egyptian national team in 2022, succeeding Ehab Galal. He had signed a four-year deal which would have taken him through to the 2026 World Cup. But after a poor AFCON run, he was relieved of his duties. Vitoria's dismissal follows the departure of several other coaches at Afcon 2023.

Algeria coach Djamel Belmadi, Gambia's Tom Saintfiet, Tunisia's Jalel Kadri and Ivory Coast boss Jean-Louis Gasset all parted ways with their teams. The coach of Burkina

Faso, Herbert Velud is also expected to leave his post when his contract expires.

Captain Fantastic Emilio Nsue The captain of the Equatorial Guinea national team Emilio Nsue won the Puma Golden Boot Award after a brilliant performance from the 34-year-old. He was the shining amour for the Nzalang Nacional who surprisingly won Group A which contained Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Guinea-Bissau.

The striker earned the award after netting 5 goals during the competition to top the score chart. His goals were, however, not enough as Equatorial Guinea fell to Guinea 1-0 at the knockout stages.

Emilio's goals chat increased when Equatorial Guinea battled with Guinea Bissau when he scored the first hat trick of the competition in their 4-2 win. The former Apollon Limassol player became one of the oldest players in the competition to have scored 3 goals in one game in 16 years.

Logging for more goals during the competition, Emilio Nsue scored a brace in their 4-0 win against the host nation Ivory Coast which put her on a scale of if to qualify to the rounds of 16. Winning this special award from Puma, Emilio Nsue takes over Cameroon's Vincent Aboubakar who won the trophy in the last AFCON with 8 goals.



Emilio Nsue picks up golden boot from CAF president Dr Patrice Motsepe.



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