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CONTENTS

Editorial -Rethinking Cameroon's Football Obsession _____	2	Benin - Reckya Madougou's Cry From The Heart _____	40
ECOWAS & The ECOUT Storm _____	4	Forging Mozambique's Future - Overcoming Challenges with Strategic Vision _____	43
Reassessing U.S. Engagement In West Africa _____	6	Book Review-Protecting Minority Language Rights _____	45
Tanzania-Three Years Of Samia's Leadership _____	10	Intra-Africa Migration On The Rise But The Continent Needs Better Policies- AU Report _____	49
Senegal - Democratic Flame Keeps Burning _____	12	Rwanda-Victims Remembered As Genocide Clocks 30 Years ____	52
Ethiopia - A Damning Scorecard On Human Rights _____	15	Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger-Matters Arising _____	53
Away from the Spotlight, Sudan Continues to Burn _____	16	For Innocent Chukwuma for Nigeria _____	57
Togo - Constitutional Maneuvers Spark Fears Of Life Presidency _____	19	South Africa - Zimbabwe To The Rescue As Taps Run Dry _____	60
A Pivot To Energy Finance For NJ Ayuk _____	22	Q & A With Somesh Adukia, Managing Director, Canon Central and North Africa. _____	61
Nigeria - Travails Of The Gas Sector _____	27	Cameroon REGARTLESS Returns Pillaged Relics to Lebang Community _____	64
NEUMAN&ESSER GROUP Carves Its African Niche _____	28	Zimbabwe - Hunger Looms as the El Nino Phenomenon Hits Hard _____	67
Rotamech Touts Merits Of Partnership With NEUMAN & ESSER Group _____	32	Wakeup Call From Subsea Cable Failures Induced Internet Black-out _____	68
The Way of an African Legend - A Tribute to Beno't de la Fouchardière of Perenco _____	34	Cameroon FA & Sports Ministry At Daggers Drawn Over New Lions Coach _____	71
Nigeria-Record Revenue Levels For Electricity Distribution Companies _____	37		
African Countries and the Corruption Perceptions Index _____	38		

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Rethinking Cameroon's Football Obsession

By Ajong Mbatndah L

As Senegalese basked in the glory of another people backed democratic transition with the victory and swearing in of Bassirou Diomaye Faye, Cameroonians were deprived or is it hoodwinked into a different talking point-football. A familiar ruse that the Biya regime has used time and again to put Cameroonians to sleep when they should be awake. Indeed, at some point, football has served as a soothing balm to the myriad of problems facing the country. It has served as glue holding together a deeply fragmented nation. Nothing wrong with people loving a sport, but only a mad man would go to sleep with his roof on fire, says a Nigeria proverb. The obsession is getting too much for a country in permanent crisis and game changing elections in 2025.

At the center of the current feud is the country's FA led by the iconic global star Samuel and the Minister of Sports and Physical education on the nomination of the new coach of the Indomitable Lions as the national soccer team is known. Off a calamitous participation at the recent AfCON in Cote d'Ivoire, Rigobert Song, the head coach was the fall guy. A heroic figure in his playing days, the results from Rigobert Song as coach were deemed inadequate and it came as no surprise that his contract was not renewed.

The appointment of Marc Brys, of Belgian nationality as the new coach made the already toxic working relationship between the FA and the Sports Ministry worse. The country is sharply divided into those who back the Samuel Eto'o led FA, and those who back the ministry. The unbridled passion for debating football would not be a problem if the country did not have more pressing and acute challenges.

Looking at Cameroon today, one cannot help but wonder how the country can afford the luxury of spending so much time discussing football. The road infrastructure is in a pitiable state, a conflict that has taken a catastrophic toll on the English-speaking North West



Ajong Mbatndah L, Managing Editor

and South West Regions of the country, a power sector in epileptic state, alarmingly high rates of unemployment, a battered international image, and crucial elections for the succession the 91 years old incumbent president Paul Biya who has been in power for over 40 years. The list of problems and challenges facing Cameroon is elastic and to think that morning, afternoon, and evening football occupies a sizeable chunk of the discourse in the polity is mind boggling.

Since his election as the FA President in 2021, Samuel Eto'o Fils, the global football icon has seen the good, the bad and the ugly side of Cameroon. No one has crystalized debates in the polity and dominated the news cycle more than him. Switch on the cable TV shows and you will see eminent scholars and academics, medical doctors, lawyers, political party leaders, human right leaders, teachers, senior government officials, talking about Samuel Eto'o and football. Watching the screaming matches that some of these debates look like, you are either left with the impression that Eto'o is the source of all the problems facing Cameroon, or he is the panacea, or the messiah expected to resolve the myriad of problems bedeviling the country.

Making Eto'o the boogeyman provides a shield for President Biya and his government from the ire of a deeply frustrated and wounded populace whose reaction is dreaded. Teachers, Doctors, Lawyers, political party leaders, and others all have problems in their own

sectors, problems more serious and with more consequences to the wellbeing and future of Cameroon than football.

Using the ruse of football to keep restive Cameroonians at bay is something that President Biya has been adroit with for years. Faced with the bloody launching of the opposition Social Democratic Front-SDF in May 1990, and the looming threat to his rule, President Biya found a saving grace in football. With Cameroon playing the opening game of 1990 world cup in Italy against reigning world champions Argentina of the legendary Diego Maradona, President Biya made the gutsy move to watch the game at the stadium in Milan. It paid off handsomely for him as Cameroon won the game and besides iconic images of jubilant players and fans, Biya had his moment receiving congratulatory handshakes from other leaders and football icons around him.

Cameroonians tearing themselves over football today forget that ahead of the 1994 world cup in the USA, the cash strapped government of Cameroon was the precursor to the go fund me we have around today. The government launched an appeal for public support and Cameroonians responded most generously. Till date, people are unable to say with certainty what happened to the money. Ask many who remember the episode and they will share the refrain that it went missing between Paris and New York.

Football victories, Cameroon has had them under President Biya. The indomitable Lions have won the AfCON 5 times, won gold at the Olympics in Sydney. Participated at 8 editions of the FIFA World cup including Spain 1982 when they became the first African side to come out without losing a game, and Italy 1990 when Cameroon became the first African country to reach the quarter finals. In fairness, few things have done more to put Cameroon on the global map than football.

Beyond the exploits, what has football brought to Cameroon in terms of development? Has it improved tourism, or attracted investors? When people look up the Cameroon of global icons like Thomas Nkono, Roger Milla,

Patrick Mboma, and Samuel Eto'o just to name a few what do they see? If they visit the country, what will they see? Instead of football serving as a catalyst for development, it has been used to serve the political interests of a regime that has failed to deliver.

If Cameroonians could channel the energy directed towards Samuel Eto'o and football on other sectors and actors in the polity, things may change. The FA for all the intricacies of its ties with the Cameroon government is supposed to be a private entity. Holding Samuel Eto'o accountable, scrutinizing his management style, demanding positive results and more are laudable. The question remains, why now, why only with football? Can Cameroonians go beyond this and demand the same from President Biya and his government? Can cabinet Ministers go through the same scrutiny? Can the same energy be used to register for elections, to push for more transparent elections, a better judicial system and more?

In a country where President Paul Biya is 91 and in power for over 40 years, where Senate President Niat Njifenji is 89, Clement Atangana President of the Constitutional Council 82, Cavaye Yeye Djibril President of the National Assembly aged about 84 and serving as speaker of the house since 1992, the need for a generational shift could not be more imperative. Already, there has been a growing chorus from the ruling party and elite for President Biya to run again in 2025. Yet, everyone knows that he deserves rest. Bickering over football instead of registering for elections is one sure way of keeping President Biya and the regime in place and should that happen, Cameroonians will have only themselves to blame.

This issue of PAV discusses energy developments and the new front that that the African Energy Chamber is opening on energy finance with Executive Chairman NJ Ayuk. Also in focus are the resolve of Senegalese to keep the democratic flame burning, the future of Ecowas, human rights in Ethiopia and more. Happy Reading!!



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Will ECOWAS Weather The ECOUT Storm?

By Prof Wafula Okumu*



ECOWAS Leaders at the 63rd Ordinary Session of Heads of State and Government in Guinea-Bissau.

Following successful military coups in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has tried, including threats to use force, to restore civilian rule in these former French colonies. However, these threats have been met by a *casus foederis* binding three of the countries to come to each other's defence if their sovereignties are attacked. Have the series of coups over the last four years exposed the nakedness of the emperor? Are these coups and concomitant effects a flash in the pan or an emerging and enduring trend? Is regional integration under siege? Is the raison d'être for multilateralism being threatened in Africa?

Established in 1975 through the Treaty of Lagos as an instrument for promoting economic integration, ECOWAS has over the years morphed into a group dealing with peace and governance challenges. In July 1993, it amended its treaty to handle peace, security and stability issues, and, in December 2001, adopted a

protocol to promote democracy and good governance in West Africa. This protocol requires ECOWAS states to demonstrate "zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means."

But the spate of coups in the region has put ECOWAS under scrutiny, questioning its success in integrating and addressing human security challenges in the West African region. Will it withstand the formation of a new regional arrangement? Is the emergence of the new kid in the neighbourhood a wakeup call to revamp itself? It will be particularly interesting to watch if other African regional economic communities (RECs) are also paying attention to what is happening in West Africa and picking up signals to pull up their socks and reboot themselves to conform to the changed times. How will they face tribulations similar to ECOWAS?

Before "exiting" ECOWAS, the trio in September 2023, signed the Liptako-Gourma Charter establishing the L'Alliance des États du Sahel (AES)

or the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS). AES is a defence and economic pact that calls for joint military assistance if any member is attacked and for the establishment of a new currency called the 'Sahel'. This arrangement includes forming a regional bank to be financed by Russia, China, and Turkey, a common airline, and a common judicial system, among other ingenuities.

The decision to quit ECOWAS (or ECOUT) was prompted by the suspensions after the military ousted civilian presidents in violation of regional norms barring coup d'états. In a strongly worded statement, the trio protested the sanctions imposed on them as illegal, illegitimate and inhumane. They added that ECOWAS has fallen "under the influence of foreign powers," moved away from the spirit of Pan-Africanism and the ideals on which it was founded, and "has become a threat to its member states and its populations whose happiness it is supposed to ensure."

Despite successfully restoring civilian rule in Mali in April 2012

and Burkina Faso in September 2015 after military coups and facilitating a democratic transition in The Gambia in January 2017, ECOWAS has recently been unable to stem a rise of unconstitutional changes of government. The spate of coups in some parts of the continent is drawing attention to the run-of-the-mill implementation of regional and continental norms on constitutionalism and good governance.

Indeed, it is not only ECOWAS that seem to be standing on a shaky ground. In Eastern Africa, while Somalia has just joined the East African Community as its eighth member, the DRC is cold footed barely two years after joining the community. Notably, in December 2023, the DRC blocked the EAC from monitoring and observing its elections, while allowing Africa Union and Southern African Development Community observers to participate. Sudan has also signalled its intention to pull out of the Inter-governmental Authority on Development, further

weakening its influence to address a myriad of human security threats in the volatile Horn of Africa region.

The widespread celebrations following ousters of “democratically elected” leaders has exposed RECs’ proclivity to coddle incumbents who manipulate electoral processes and tamper with constitutions to hang on to power. It is definitely an indictment on the status of ECOWAS as a promoter of democracy and good governance if its weaknesses are continually exploited by putschists. If these countries survive ECOWAS wrath and remain under military rule, then the prohibition of unconstitutional changes of government will be ineffectual.

It will also highlight the waning multilateralism in Africa. It does not matter who will blink first. West Africa and the continent in general are currently facing democratic haemorrhage due bad governance and bad leadership. Popularity of coups in Africa as an alternative to removing disliked regimes from power should put on notice RECs that invoke norms prohibiting removal of from power and shielding sit-tight presidents who



The exit of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger puts the future of ECOWAS in question.

rig elections and abuse constitutional orders.

ECOUT is complicating initiatives to address regionalised common threats such as those posed by Boko Haram and other al-Qaeda-like groups due to less sharing of intelligence information, disjointed operations, and weakened border governance as resources are deployed to secure the centres leaving borderlands exposed to criminal activities such as human and drug trafficking.

It is not only the roles of multilateral institutions to promote human security that are under microscopic watch in Africa. Multilateralism and Africa’s historic ties to the West

are also imperilled. ECOWAS has exposed weakening multilateralism by stuttering, faltering and wavering as it tried in vain to apply sanctions to force the return of civilian rule. Its image is dented by climbing down and lifting all sanctions it had imposed on Niger despite its previous belligerent posture.

The threats to use force that accelerated the formation AES were not endorsed by the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council which have responsibilities for authorising such measures. However, such authorisation was unlikely to be given by the AU whose responsibility to protect clause,

enshrined in Articles 4(h) and 4(j) of its Constitutive Act, is essentially moribund. It appears the current threats to human security in West Africa are unlikely to trigger efforts to review the AU “intervention” clause and to explicitly revise the norm banning unconstitutional changes of government.

The international community, particularly western countries and the UN, should also draw lessons from the way France has faced the wrath of civilian populations for instrumentalising ECOWAS to maintain its neo-imperial

presence in the region. Coincidentally, while kicking out the French and UN forces, ECOUT countries have moved closer, politically and militarily, to Moscow.

If ECOWAS acquiescence to coup d’états, as it seem to be doing, it will not be an isolated case, as the AU has silently revised its ban on unconstitutional changes in government to allow “good coups” as those in Egypt in July 2013, Zimbabwe in November 2017 and Sudan in April 2019 under certain conditions.

If ECOUT is successful, there will be several far-reaching implications. Since this will be the first withdrawal from a continental or regional organisation, it will be interesting to watch if ECOWAS has mechanism in place for ECOUT and if it will follow the pattern of BREXIT. Will ECOWAS and AES enter into bi-regional financial, security and migration regimes? Will ECOWAS countenance a rival arrangement of disgruntled members? Will AES provide future sanctuary to coup leaders? What lessons has the international community learned from ECOUT? It is most likely that ECOUT countries will strengthen their bi-lateral relations by taking advantage of ECOWAS weaknesses and failure to ostracise and turn them in pariah states.

* Boundary and Border Issues Expert and Executive Director of The Borders Institute (TBI)



A glimmer of hope as current ECOWAS Chair President Bola Tinubu of Nigeria meets with newly elected Senegalese President Bassirou D Faye. Photo AFP

Reassessing U.S. Engagement In West Africa

A Comprehensive Analysis of Niger's Withdrawal from Military Cooperation and Its Geopolitical Implications.

*By Ambassador Omar Arouna, MBA**

The recent decision by Niger to withdraw from its military cooperation agreement with the United States marks a significant juncture in U.S.-West African relations. Ambassador Omar Arouna, President of Global Public Affairs and Engagement at Gunster Strategies Worldwide and Chairman of Believe In Africa (BIA), highlights the importance of exploring the historical context, implications, and potential solutions for this development, which has far-reaching consequences for regional stability and U.S. foreign policy. Gunster Strategies Worldwide is a leading public affairs firm known for its strategic approach to advocacy, communication, and engagement on a global scale.

Historical Context of U.S.-Niger Relations:

Niger has been a crucial strategic partner for the U.S. in West Africa, particularly in counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel region. The U.S. has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Niger, including constructing a major airbase in Agadez, serving as a hub for surveillance and counterterrorism operations. This relationship has been instrumental in addressing security challenges posed by jihadist groups affiliated with al-Qaida and ISIS. However, the partnership has faced challenges. The U.S.'s alignment with former colonial powers, notably France, has raised concerns about neocolonialism. The perception that the U.S. is upholding French interests has eroded its credibility as an honest broker in the region.

Implications of Niger's Withdrawal:

Niger's withdrawal signifies a reevaluation of its foreign policy priorities and a move towards diversifying its alliances. The decision came after a visit by U.S. officials, criticized for a lack of diplomatic protocol and a perceived



Niger's National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland Colonel-Major Amadou Abdramane, second from right, is greeted by supporters at a public event in Niamey. Photo AFP/Getty Images.

condescending attitude. This has led to concerns about the future of U.S. counterterrorism operations in the Sahel and the potential for a realignment of regional powers away from traditional Western allies towards alternative partners like Russia, China, and Iran.

Impact on Geopolitical Dynamics:

Russia's Influence: Russia's presence in the Sahel region has been growing significantly. For instance, Russia has provided security assistance, diplomatic backing, and information operations support to the military regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso. Russian military advisers arrived in Mali in late 2021, and Niger recently signed a military cooperation agreement with Moscow, joining more than 40 nations that have established such ties with Russia. This expansion of influence is a part of Russia's broader strategy to strengthen its presence in Africa.

Iran's Engagement: Although specific details regarding a deal between Niger and Iran for access

to Nigerien uranium reserves are not publicly available, such a deal would have significant implications for global geopolitics and nuclear proliferation, given Iran's contentious nuclear program and the strategic importance of uranium.

China's Role: China has been actively expanding its economic and military footprint in Africa, including in Niger. Beijing's investment in infrastructure and resources is part of its broader Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to enhance its global influence. This expansion could potentially diminish U.S. influence in the region.

French Role: France has historical ties to the Sahel region due to its colonial past, and it has been leading foreign counterterrorism efforts in West Africa. However, there has been growing resistance to French presence in the region, with countries like Mali turning to Russia for military support and Niger recently ordering the withdrawal of French troops.

Impact on Counterterrorism Efforts: The withdrawal of Niger from military cooperation with the U.S. could hinder counterterrorism

efforts in the region. The U.S. has relied on its partnership with Niger for surveillance and combat operations against jihadist groups. The realignment of alliances in favor of countries like Russia and China could create a vacuum that extremist groups may exploit, potentially destabilizing the region.

Potential Solutions and Outlook:

Reassessing U.S. Engagement Strategy: The U.S. needs to adopt a more balanced approach, focusing on genuine partnerships based on mutual respect and shared values. Utilizing methodologies for information campaigns, issues advocacy, and opinion research can help improve messaging and remove stigmas associated with U.S. involvement in the region. For example, employing a scientific approach to communications, which blends data-driven insights with an in-depth understanding of cultural nuances, can be highly effective. This method involves conducting opinion and message research to perfect data-

driven persuasive messaging, forming robust alliances through coalition-building, and crafting impactful messages that resonate with the target audience. Additionally, the use of creative strategy and production can ensure that messages connect with the audience through the most suitable platforms and at the right times. By testing messages and visuals prior to launch, the strategy can be optimized to get the most effective and authentic reaction from the audience. Such an approach not only improves the U.S.'s messaging but also helps in building long-term, respectful partnerships with countries in the region, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the U.S. engagement strategy in West Africa.

Addressing Root Causes of Instability in Niger: To effectively address the root causes of instability in Niger, the U.S. should continue and enhance its efforts in economic development, governance, and human rights. Through agencies such as USAID, the U.S. has implemented programs aimed at improving food security, supporting counterterrorism and peacekeeping capacity, promoting democratic governance, and improving health and education in Niger.

These initiatives are crucial for long-term stability and inclusive economic growth. • One key area of focus should be enhancing resilience in agriculture and food security, as over 80 percent of Nigeriens rely on subsistence agriculture. USAID's programs aim to improve livestock, resource management, and agricultural practices, which are vital for coping with recurrent crises such as droughts and floods. • Strengthening governance and increasing citizen participation, particularly in areas vulnerable to violent extremism, is another critical aspect. • USAID supports the Government of Niger's efforts to respond more effectively to citizen concerns through advocacy, dialogue, and cooperation among the legislature, civil society, and local governments. • In addition to these efforts, the U.S. should continue supporting Niger's education sector,



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which is essential for addressing the high illiteracy rate and low school attendance rates. USAID's contributions to the Government of Niger's national education program have led to progress in the sector, which is vital for the country's future development. • Furthermore, the Ambassador's Special Self-Help Fund, managed by the U.S. Embassy in Niamey, provides an excellent model for supporting small community development projects. This fund has enabled initiatives such as building fish smoking ovens for local women's groups in Diffa and training young men with disabilities in Niamey to create artisanal leather crafts and furniture. These projects not only address immediate community needs but also promote self-sufficiency and sustainable development. • To enhance these initiatives, the U.S. should focus on engaging in creative production and earned media to craft impactful messages that resonate with local populations and policymakers. Highlighting success stories and promoting awareness of ongoing programs can strengthen the U.S.'s engagement strategy in Niger and contribute to long-term stability in the region.

Enhancing Diplomatic Efforts: To rebuild trust and credibility, the U.S. should engage in respectful and open dialogue with West African nations, including those within the newly created Alliance des Etats du Sahel (AES). The AES, comprising Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, signifies a shift in the region's geopolitical landscape, with these countries seeking greater autonomy and collaboration in security, political, and economic matters, independent of traditional Western and ECOWAS influences. The U.S. should not dismiss its engagement with Mali and Burkina Faso, as these countries play a critical role in regional stability.

For instance, the U.S. can leverage digital and social media strategies to amplify its positive engagement in the region. By highlighting success stories and promoting transparent communication, the U.S. can demonstrate its commitment to supporting the region's development and security needs.

• Collaborating with the AES on targeted initiatives, such as counterterrorism efforts or economic development projects, can showcase a genuine partnership approach.

Furthermore, the U.S. should consider supporting minilateral cooperation within the AES framework. This approach, focusing on narrowly defined and practical areas of collaboration, can yield quicker results and build confidence among the member states.

• By engaging in areas such as border security, logistics corridors, and technology transfer, the U.S. can contribute to the region's prosperity while respecting the sovereignty and ambitions of the Sahel states. In summary, enhancing diplomatic efforts with the AES and continuing engagement with Mali and Burkina Faso are essential for fostering stability and development in the Sahel region. Through respectful dialogue, targeted collaboration, and effective communication, the U.S. can strengthen its role as a constructive partner in West Africa.

Strengthening Regional Cooperation: Supporting regional initiatives like ECOWAS can enhance collective security and development. Coalition building, grassroots, and grassroots engagement can mobilize support for collaborative efforts.

Investing in Soft Power in Niger

and the Sahel Region: To enhance its soft power in Niger and the Sahel region, the U.S. can consider several initiatives based on its previous successes and the current geopolitical landscape:

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: Drawing from the success of Operation Tomodachi in Japan, where the U.S. Navy's relief efforts significantly improved public perception of the U.S., the U.S. could provide similar humanitarian assistance in Niger and the Sahel region. This could involve sending medical teams, providing emergency food supplies, or assisting in natural disaster recovery efforts, which would demonstrate the U.S.'s commitment to the well-being of the local populations. Educational and

- **Cultural Exchange Programs:** Building on the positive global perception of U.S. universities and cultural products, the U.S. can invest in educational and cultural exchange programs. Initiatives such as the Fulbright Program or the International Visitor Leadership Program can foster mutual understanding and build long-term relationships with future leaders and influencers in the region.

- **Health Infrastructure Development:** Inspired by the Global Fragility Act partnerships, the U.S. can focus on building durable health infrastructure in Niger and the Sahel. This could involve supporting the construction of clinics, training healthcare workers, and providing medical equipment, which would contribute to the region's resilience against health crises and epidemics.

- **Economic Empowerment**



U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Jonathan Braga meets with Maj. Gen. Moussa Barmou at Air Base 101, Niger on June 12, 2023. Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force.

Initiatives: Considering Africa's demographic trends and the potential for economic growth, the U.S. can support initiatives that empower youth and women in the region. Programs focusing on entrepreneurship, vocational training, and access to finance can help unleash the economic potential of these demographics, leading to more stable and prosperous communities.

- **Engagement with Regional Alliances:** As the Alliance des Etats du Sahel (AES) emerges as a significant regional bloc, the U.S. should engage with this alliance to support its goals of sovereignty and economic integration. Collaboration on security, trade, and development projects can help build trust and foster a more stable and prosperous Sahel region. By focusing on these areas, the

U.S. can strengthen its soft power in Niger and the Sahel region, contributing to long-term stability, development, and mutually beneficial relationships.

Conclusion:

The decision by Niger to end its military cooperation with the United States signals a critical point for reconsidering America's involvement in West Africa. To positively influence the region's stability and growth, the U.S. must embrace a more nuanced strategy that addresses the underlying causes of instability and invests in diplomatic and soft power efforts.

In moving forward, it is essential for the U.S. to adapt to the changing dynamics of West Africa and cultivate authentic partnerships rooted in mutual respect, shared values, and a thorough understanding of the region's cultural and geopolitical

complexities. Prioritizing diplomatic initiatives, strengthening regional collaboration, and focusing on soft power approaches that foster long-term development are key to repositioning the U.S. as a reliable and constructive ally in West Africa.

The future trajectory of U.S.-West African relations will largely depend on America's willingness to revise its engagement strategies and interact with the region in a way that honors its sovereignty and ambitions. By employing strategic communication, targeted cooperation, and a sincere commitment to partnership, the U.S. can play a significant role in fostering a stable, prosperous, and secure West Africa.

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Tanzania-Three Years Of Samia's Leadership

-Navigating Challenges Amidst Debt Tapestry in Three Years

By Adonis Byemelwa

Since assuming office following the passing of President John Magufuli, Samia Suluhu Hassan's presidency in Tanzania has been marked by a series of challenges, characterized by a blend of trial and error, corruption scandals, and frequent reshuffling of cabinet and local government leadership. Despite some notable strides, her tenure has been overshadowed by these negatives, compounded by the country's increasing indebtedness.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan's administration in Tanzania faces mounting challenges as corruption scandals, leadership reshuffles, and financial concerns overshadow her tenure. Despite pledges for reform and reconciliation, her leadership has been marred by trial-and-error approaches and a lack of transparency.

Since assuming office following the passing of President John Magufuli, President Samia's administration has struggled to combat corruption effectively. Reports of embezzlement and misuse of public funds persist, eroding public trust and credibility in the government.

Furthermore, the frequent



President Samia Hassan Suluhu and Former president John Magufuli on July 24, 2019. Photo credit Ericky Boniphace, AFP.

reshuffling of cabinet and local government leadership has created instability, hindered the implementation of long-term plans, and raised questions about governance effectiveness.

Tanzania's increasing indebtedness under President Samia's watch raises serious concerns about the country's financial stability, with fears of a

fiscal crisis looming as national debt surpasses Sh82.5 trillion.

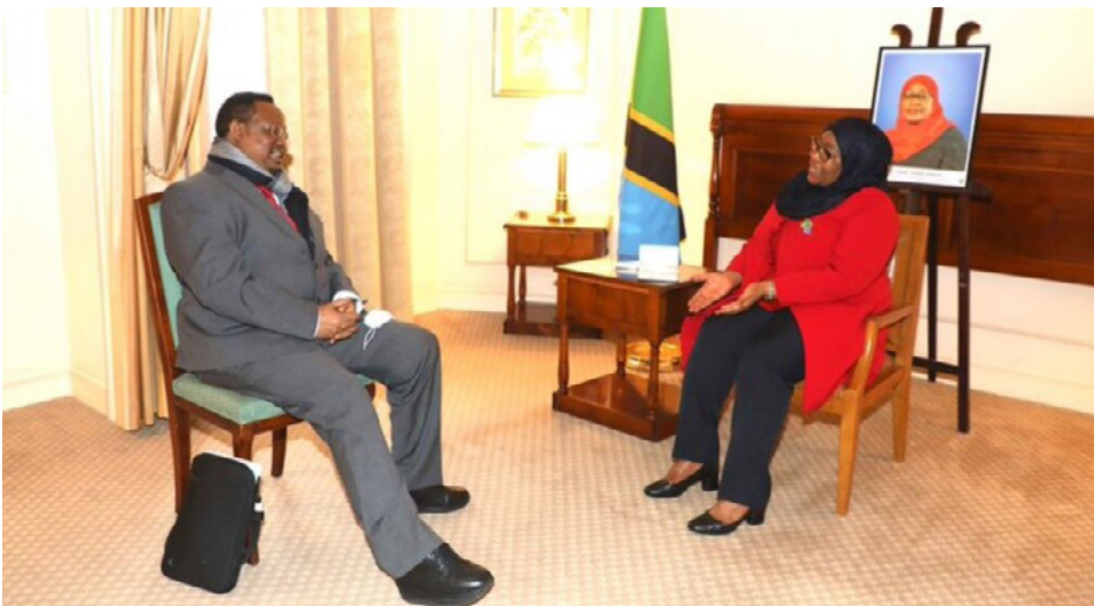
Recent disclosures by former Chief of Defense Forces General Venance Mabeyo regarding the circumstances surrounding Magufuli's demise have reignited scrutiny over Tanzania's political landscape. Calls for transparency and accountability in leadership transitions have

intensified, with advocates emphasizing the importance of open communication and governance reform.

The Chairman of the Chadema Youth Council (Bavicha), John Pambalu, highlights the divisive reception of President Samia's decision to retain much of Magufuli's cabinet. While some commend it for stability, others criticize it as a missed opportunity for necessary reforms, shaping perceptions of her leadership.

Amidst these challenges, President Samia's administration faces criticism for pursuing terrorism charges against opposition figures like Honorable Freeman Mbowe, raising doubts about her commitment to democratic values and the rule of law.

While there have been some notable achievements during President Samia's tenure, they have been overshadowed by the aforementioned challenges. Initiatives aimed at improving healthcare access and infrastructure development have been commendable but have been undermined by broader systemic issues. The lack of sustainable



Samia Suluhu Hassan meeting with opposition leader Tundu Lissu in Brussels, Belgium, Feb. 16, 2022, in this photo posted on Twitter by Tanzania's State House @ikulumawasiliano.

solutions to pressing problems has hampered the administration's overall effectiveness.

Political analyst Dr. Denis Muchunguzi has stated that President Samia Suluhu Hassan's three years in power have strengthened and promoted democracy in the country.

Dr. Muchunguzi made these remarks on March 26 while presenting a topic during a debate analyzing President Samia's three-year leadership organized by Mchambuzi Media Company.

«I commend Dr. Samia's three years because she has achieved significant milestones... we have witnessed political meetings being allowed, and Chadema protests to the European Union were conducted without any hindrance,» Dr. Muchunguzi said.

He also noted that some individuals, including politicians who had left the country for various reasons, have returned.

Another positive development is the allowance of social media platforms that were previously banned. He advised political parties to be financially robust to effectively run their operations.

«Political parties should be financially stable; we do not want to see parties dying,» Dr. Muchunguzi emphasized.

Contributing to the discussion on Economy and Development Projects, Professor Samuel Wangwe advised the government to improve the lives of citizens to uplift them economically.

Professor Wangwe stated that during President Samia's three-year tenure, the economy has grown by 5.2 percent, expressing confidence that the growth rate will increase this year.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan has introduced a new transparency mechanism in loans. She discloses the amount of borrowed money and specifies what it will be used for by listing projects to be implemented, where the funds were borrowed from, and what the terms are. With this transparency, figures like the Speaker of the Parliament Job Ndugai, and those with similar views now have a platform to question and debate.



President Samia meets with US Vice President Kamala in Washington, DC Harris, April 15, 2022. Photo courtesy.

Was it in the interest of former President John Magufuli and his cohorts to conceal transparency and truth regarding the projects he was implementing, such as railways, roads, electricity, hospital construction, and many others, using borrowed funds? Would the citizens have stopped him if they had known he was borrowing? What was being concealed at that time? Where were Ndugai and his cohorts who are now questioning, during that entire period?

During Magufuli's five years as the fifth president who passed away on March 17, 2021, citizens were made to believe that the government was developing infrastructure and undertaking other development activities using domestic funds. Contrary to this belief!

According to my analysis, during Magufuli's five-year tenure, he borrowed more money than all the money Benjamin Mkapa, the third president, borrowed during his ten years in office. Also, Magufuli borrowed more money in his five years than Jakaya Kikwete, who served for ten years, borrowing for the entire period.

In a scathing critique, recent statements by Job Yustino Ndugai, the former Speaker of the National Assembly, have drawn significant

attention to Tanzania's escalating national debt. Ndugai's remarks, while pointing fingers at the current administration's borrowing practices, have sparked debate regarding the ethical foundations of governance and accountability.

The analysis delves into the historical trajectory of Tanzania's debt burden, highlighting a disturbing pattern of successive administrations amassing staggering amounts of debt. Former President Mkapa's initiation of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Forgiveness Program marked the beginning of Tanzania's struggle with debt, a trend that accelerated under subsequent leaders. During Kikwete's tenure, the national debt soared by Sh23 trillion, and Magufuli's administration escalated it further by Sh29 trillion in just five years.

The analysis forecasts a dire future if borrowing practices persist at the same rate. If Magufuli had served another five years, projections suggest Tanzania would have faced a staggering national debt of Sh101 trillion by 2025.

However, amidst the critique lies a deeper question regarding the motives behind Ndugai's outspokenness. Was he genuinely concerned about the nation's financial well-being, or was there a hidden agenda aimed at

discrediting political rivals? The piece suggests that Ndugai's credibility is compromised by his involvement in policies contributing to the debt burden, including excessive allowances and expenditures.

Furthermore, Ndugai's criticisms have been juxtaposed with calls for transparency and accountability in governance. The analysis underlines the importance of a responsible and inclusive government that prioritizes the interests of its citizens over political expediency.

Ultimately, the critique serves as a reminder of the importance of ethical leadership and adherence to principles in governance. Ndugai's actions, including alleged attempts to manipulate laws and regulations for ideological purposes, are portrayed as undermining the very foundations of justice and accountability.

In essence, as President Samia's third year in power unfolds, Tanzania faces both challenges and opportunities. While her leadership has shown strides in addressing governance and transparency issues, concerns linger over the nation's escalating debt burden. Moving forward, Samia's administration must prioritize ethical governance, transparency, and proactive debt management to secure a prosperous future for all Tanzanians.

Senegal: Democratic Flame Keeps Burning

By Prince Kurupati

Senegal has a new president. The new man in charge is Bassirou Diomaye Faye, a 44-year-old whose electoral victory makes him Africa's youngest president. Remarkably, this electoral victory is the first ever election that Faye has ever won! Bassirou Diomaye Faye succeeds Macky Sall under whose leadership Senegal enjoyed relative socio-political stability and steady economic growth. Faye is expected to continue along the same path of transforming Senegal into a middle to high-income nation albeit following his own set of policies which from the onset are in stark contrast to Sall's policies. Thanks to this, Faye from the get-go is being labelled an anti-establishment president.

Faye won the presidential race after garnering 54 percent of the total votes cast beating Amadou Ba who was picked by the outgoing president Macky Sall. Though quite popular in Senegal, Faye wasn't the one most people thought would become the 5th Senegalese president post-independence. Rather, it was the more popular figure Ousmane Sonko whose unfortunate criminal conviction of what many perceive as politically motivated ruled him out of the running. In a clear example of servant leadership something uncharacteristic in Africa, Sonko gave his blessings to Faye to run and with that, the badge of honour which ultimately led him to become Africa's youngest democratically elected leader. Faye's slogan was "Ousmane mooy Diomaye" meaning "Ousmane is Diomaye," a slogan that reinforced the close ties between Sonko and Faye.

Demonstrating just how close the two are, the first act that President Faye did after being inaugurated was to appoint Ousmane Sonko as the country's Prime Minister. Accepting the role, Sonko said, «There will be no question of leaving him (Faye) alone to assume this heavy responsibility... We will spare no effort to achieve the goals we have promised the



Bassirou Diomaye Faye delivers his inaugural speech after his swearing in as Senegal's President in Dakar, Senegal, Tuesday, April 2, 2024. Photo credit Sylvain Cherkaoui, AP.

people». He said he would be by his side and would start the new role by presenting «Faye with a full list of proposed ministerial appointments for his approval.»

The presidential election was without unfortunate dilemmas however especially pre-election day as the outgoing president in a rather bizarre move decided to postpone the election date. Originally scheduled for 25 February 2024, the presidential election was eventually held on 24 March 2024 after the country's Constitutional Court intervened and dismissed President Macky Sall's decree to postpone the elections by 10 months. While justifying his decision by saying the postponement was necessary as key fundamentals such as freeing political prisoners needed to be addressed before heading to the polls, Sall's decision was widely criticized and condemned. By many, it was viewed as a decision to buy time and help garner more support for his handpicked candidate Amadou Ba who was relatively unpopular.

Partly owing to the massive criticism the decree received and partly owing to the desire to safeguard his legacy, President Macky Sall finally relented and left the decision to set a new election date solely in the hands of the responsible authorities. That decision together with the decision to quickly congratulate Bassirou Diomaye Faye on his electoral victory ultimately helped him maintain his political good standing and hence safeguard his legacy. Beyond him, the decision helped Senegal to keep following the democratic pathway.

Faye's victory means that Senegal continues its tradition of peaceful power transition. Located in West Africa, the peaceful power transition that occurred in Senegal couldn't be sweeter at this point considering that eight coups have happened in surrounding nations especially in West and Central Africa since 2020. At the same time that Senegal was witnessing another epic example of democracy and good governance, just nearby in Togo, the country's

president and his administration were busy amending the Constitution to extend the President's stay in office. Juxtaposition these two situations, the peaceful power transition that happened in Senegal just proves to be a treasure to cherish.

Amadou Ba conceded defeat saying, "The Senegalese people have reinforced the good health of our democracy. I wish him (Faye) success at the head of our country".

Following Faye's electoral victory and its subsequent validation by the Constitutional Court, Senegal's new President has received congratulatory messages from all over the continent and beyond. The African Union praised all parties in Senegal for their "unanimous acceptance of the results," while the African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat congratulated President Faye and wished him "full success in his weighty and noble charge".

In the few days that he was released from prison – released 10 days before

Election Day – Faye remained defiant in his stance to let Senegal determine its own destiny instead of relying much on France. This message has led him to be viewed as an anti-establishment leader as Senegal since its colonial days has always been close to France. Perhaps in a way to warm the heart of the new President and begin in earnest to try and change Faye's stance on France, French President Emmanuel Macron soon after the provisional results were announced sent a congratulatory message to Faye and promised to "continue and intensify the partnership" between the two countries.

Faye's anti-establishment stance has been warmly received and welcomed by hordes of youth who view Senegal's former colonial master France as a parasite that feeds itself using their country's resources. By standing alone as a sovereign nation, many believe that the country will channel all its resources and subsequent proceeds to the upliftment of the locals. A local fisherman who spoke to Al Jazeera said he has high hopes in Faye as he "knows how much a kilogram of rice costs... he's young, he was born in poverty, he didn't go to private schools abroad – he's one of us." As a sign of intent, Faye promised that in his first days, he would drop the much-criticized CFA franc currency, which is pegged to the Euro and backed by former colonial power France.



Uncommon scenes in Francophone Africa as President elect Bassirou Diomaye met with outgoing President Macky Sall after the elections to prepare the transition. Photo courtesy.

To some West African countries, the electoral victory of President Sonko sets a good precedent as it illustrates how nations can break away from the yoke of overreliance on former colonial masters. The President of the Political Party Bloc for Recovery and Development of Mali, Oumar MC Kone while commenting on Faye's anti-establishment stance said Faye is moving «in the right direction towards seeking sovereignty and also getting rid of bad practices that

hinder development.» Kone said there is likely to be a «convergence» of views on the withdrawal from the CFA franc zone.

President Faye's anti-establishment stance is not just about France but also about the policies and projects implemented by the previous administrations that ruled Senegal. Faye during the campaign trail prophesized his "distrust" of Senegal's elites and establishment politics. It's in light of this that he

chose to sign a charter for sustainable fishing to expand the fishing zone for artisanal fishermen by 20km while revising fishing deals signed by Senegal with foreign powers especially the European Union with no transparency clauses. It's also this anti-establishment stance that has seen him prioritize fighting poverty, injustice, and corruption.

In his inauguration speech, President Faye acknowledged the role his anti-establishment stance played in helping him garner support and attributed his electoral victory to the huge appetite for change among Senegalese citizens. «The results of the election showed a profound desire for change,» he said. Staying true to his campaign message, President Faye said he would implement «systematic changes» and in so doing, «will always keep in mind the heavy sacrifices made to never disappoint you (the citizens).»

«By electing me, the Senegalese people have chosen to break with the past... I promise to govern with humility and transparency,» Faye said while addressing journalists soon after learning of his electoral victory.



Bassirou has appointed his mentor and former opposition leader Ousmane Sonko as Prime Minister. Photo courtesy.



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Ethiopia: A Damning Scorecard On Human Rights

By Prince Kurupati

On March 22, 2024, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) released a first-of-its-kind 130-page human rights report that fingers the Ethiopian government, law enforcement agents, and judicial officers including judges as perpetrators in major human rights abuse cases. The report compiled following public and private hearings illustrates how government authorities have stamped upon the rights and liberties of the citizens mainly during periods of a state of emergency, during clashes between armed groups and government forces, and in illegal detention centers.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission is a creation of the Ethiopian constitution. The country's Constitution adopted in 1994, empowers the House of Peoples' Representatives to establish 'a Human Rights Commission and determine by law its powers and functions. As a national human rights institution, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission is established with the objectives to educate the public about human rights, ensure that human rights are protected, respected, and fully enforced, as well as to have the necessary measures taken where they are found to have been violated.

In executing its broad mandate to achieve its objectives, the Commission among other measures has full powers to receive and investigate complaints relating to human rights violations made against any person except cases brought before the legislature or courts. It was in light of this that the Commission instituted public and private hearings to investigate allegations of major and complex human rights violations. As relayed by the EHRC Deputy Chief Commissioner Rekeb Messele, the Commission's public and private hearings «investigated the patterns of human rights violations associated with deprivation of liberty in four regions, including the use of public hearings in four cities, namely Adama,



EHRC Deputy Chief Commissioner Rekeb Messele

Bahir Dar, Jigjiga and Hawassa.»

Deputy Chief Commissioner Messele said they opted for a broad-based national inquiry as the preferred investigation tool because «a national inquiry is one of the most effective strategies available to national human rights institutions for investigating and drawing attention to pressing human rights issues. It also constitutes a resource-efficient way of addressing violations that are widespread or systemic and contribute significantly to educating and raising awareness of stakeholders and the broader community about these issues.»

After the work the Commission did in conducting the national inquiry, the conclusion reached was that government authorities chief among them officials from the Ministry of Justice, law enforcement agents, and prison officials are at the forefront of depriving citizens of their liberty. «The major barrier has been violence resulting from attacks of organized armed groups and state responses. In addition, torture and other ill-treatment, detention of family

members, detention for federal crimes in state prisons, corruption of law enforcement agents, lack of accountability, and lack of effective remedy and reparation are systemic problems and are barriers to the enjoyment of the right to liberty and the rights of persons deprived of liberty,” reads the report.

Explicitly, the report states that victims and witnesses who testified during the inquiry all alleged liberty violations by way of arbitrary arrests, failure to appear in court within a reasonable time as per the dictates of the law, deprivation of the right to counsel, and right to bail as well as torture and ill-treatment in detention. It's no surprise therefore why government authorities were fingered as key human rights perpetrators. The police department was also implicated for being rife with bad apples who detain persons for their own benefit as they will be stealthily soliciting bribes.

The government is also implicated in two major constitutional violations. The first one refers to the suspension of non-derogable rights and secondly,

the detention of federal-crime accused persons in regional prisons where they cannot appear in court timely as regions have no jurisdiction over federal cases.

«The prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment cannot be suspended (i.e., nonderogable) even during a state of emergency according to the Constitution and international human rights treaties ratified by Ethiopia. In practice, however, victims testified that they were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment... The federal courts have jurisdiction over federal crimes such as crimes against the state and crimes against the financial interests of the federal government. Federal law enforcement agents have arrested and detained individuals suspected of committing federal crimes such as the crime of terrorism in regional prisons or detention centers.

Regional law enforcement agents held those detainees in custody on behalf of or in trust of the federal law enforcement agents. Regional law enforcement agents did not bring those detainees before state

courts. Unfortunately, federal law enforcement agents also failed to follow up and bring those detainees before the courts, who usually end up forgotten in detention. Most of the detentions for federal crimes in regional prisons were unlawful because federal or regional law enforcement agents did not bring the detainees before the courts within 48 hours,» the report reads.

The Commission resolved that there is a need to create an independent institution to investigate the acts of government security forces. «Legislative measures should be taken to address the accountability deficit in law enforcement agents. These include laws establishing an independent institution at the federal and regional levels for civilian oversight of law enforcement agents. Alternatively, the new law may assign such functions to existing institutions,» reads the report.

As relayed by the Capital Newspaper Ethiopia, the «release



Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali was the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.
Photo courtesy.

of this report marks a critical juncture for Ethiopia as it confronts its human rights challenges head-on. The findings serve as a wake-up call, highlighting the urgent

need for systematic reforms and a commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of all individuals in the country. It is hoped that the Ethiopian government, in collaboration with

various stakeholders, will take swift action to address the violations outlined in the report and ensure a more just and rights-respecting society for all its citizens.»

Away from the Spotlight, Sudan Continues to Burn

By Prince Kurupati

On April 15 last year (2023), international news headlines reported that violent clashes had erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The violent clashes immediately led to the displacement of nearly 8 million people with others fleeing the country in search of asylum and others as refugees. Of course, there were also dozens of fatalities as the fighting forces and some innocent civilians lost their lives. A few weeks and months later, news broke out of several ceasefire agreements reached between the warring groups.

Perhaps most significant were the U.S.-Saudi-led talks in Jeddah, an Egyptian initiative, in which the warring parties came to the roundtable to try and find common ground. Other northeast African leaders also played their part in trying to solve the differences between SAF and RSF. All these efforts however were in vain. Despite the promises of



Sudan has been seriously decimated by the civil war.*Photo Credit NPR.*

ceasefires, the conflict in Sudan is still raging on and with it, many have lost their lives, others their livelihoods while some have been forced to flee from their homes.

Sudan is a country which since 2003

at the inception of the Darfur crisis has experienced intermittent periods of relative stability and periods of strife and conflict. The removal of long-time authoritarian leader Omar al-Bashir in 2019 was welcomed by

many as it was perceived to be a clean slate from which the country would come together to build a unified nation. However, just two years down the line, the unity dream was quashed following a military coup



Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan and his former deputy and current rival, Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo. Photo credit Mahmoud Hjjaj, Anadolu Agency via Getty Images.

that dissolved the then-transitional civilian government. The coup meant that the ‘strong men’ had once again taken the reins. The economic market didn’t welcome this move as almost instantly, Sudan’s economy went downhill and in the process, ignited socio-political troubles.

Having wrestled power from the transitional civilian government, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan commanding the Sudan Armed Forces and General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo popularly known as Hemedti commanding the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces could not agree on anything else. This meant from the onset, the two ruled Sudan with great suspicion of each other. The eruption of the violent clashes on April 15 2023 between their two regiments was thus not a surprise. What is a surprise however is why two power-hungry generals have failed to find common ground in some sort of a power-sharing deal akin to that reached by the warring parties in South Sudan in 2011.

According to Alex de Waal, the executive director of the World Peace Foundation (WPF), General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Hemedti’s

differences have been overtaken by events. Alex de Waal says external forces who have some interest in Sudan have preyed on the differences of the two generals and as such, have necessitated a protracted conflict as they want to advance their interests. This has in essence made “Sudan’s war a vortex of transnational conflicts and global rivalries that threaten to set a wider region aflame”.

“Sudan’s war is entangled in a circle of conflicts involving its African neighbours to the east and west. The RSF originated in the infamous Janjaweed militia of Darfur and recruits from nomads in Chad and Niger, its units active in Libya and Central African Republic,” while Egypt on the other hand, “backs the SAF but wants to suppress the Islamist elements within it,” Alex de Waal said. Moreover, the WPF executive director adds saying, “Ethiopia’s aggressive pursuit of access to the sea has reconfigured East African alliances, Ethiopia is now allied with the RSF, while Eritrea aligns with SAF.”

Adding to the complexity of the conflict is the nature of the fighting groups. “The SAF is a quarrelsome

coalition including Islamist securocrat veterans from the al-Bashir regime, who veto any moves by al-Burhan towards compromise with either Hemedti or the civilians,” while the “RSF is a novel amalgam of army, mercenary forces, trading conglomerate – notably in gold – and a vehicle for Hemedti’s political ambition. It shows indiscipline with some RSF-aligned Arab militias pursuing local vendettas and land-grabbing and may fracture when its fighters run out of cities to loot,” the WPF executive director said.

With all these subplots in play, projections are that the protracted Sudan conflict is simply just going to persist. Alex de Waal however is convinced that to save the almost 25 million people accounting for more than half of Sudan’s population who are in dire need of humanitarian aid and to save the country from total collapse, reaching a consensus to prevent state collapse is in everyone’s best interest including the warring parties. “A common goal of preventing the worst outcome should override differing preferences for who should lead the country,” he said.

Proposing the way forward, the

WPF executive director said there is a need to reconvene the “Sudan Consultative Forum, convened by the United Nations and African Union and involving all interested parties”. He said the African Union Peace and Security Council on its own is now a shadow of its former self and cannot forge such a consensus agenda.

Apart from displacing millions and causing the death of hundreds, the Sudan conflict has also severely destroyed the country’s infrastructure in the process affecting many services including education and health. The Rescue Organisation reports that “the health care system is suffering from an acute lack of staff, funding, and medical supplies in addition to repeated attacks, looting and occupation of medical facilities and hospitals. More than 70 percent of health facilities in conflict-affected regions of Sudan are inoperable or closed... an outbreak of measles has claimed the lives of more than 1,000 children across Sudan... At least 10,400 schools in conflict-affected areas are shuttered, leaving an estimated 19 million children without education and at risk of abuse or exploitation.”



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Togo: Constitutional Maneuvers Spark Fears Of Life Presidency

By Prince Kurupati

In a move that has been described by politics and constitutional law experts as a plot to extend the current president's stay in office, Togolese lawmakers on Monday 25 March, 2024 adopted a new Constitution. Primarily the new Constitution transitions Togo from the presidential system to the parliamentary system. Voters will no longer vote for presidential candidates of their choice but rather, the lawmakers they vote for in legislative elections (from the party with the most seats) will choose the president "without debate".

When adopting the new Constitution, the lawmakers nor President Faure E. Gnassingbe stated when the new constitutional changes would come into force. With the next legislative elections slated for April 20, 2024, many political analysts have raised fears that the new constitutional changes might just get into force as near as April 20. In that case, the president is most likely to be given another mandate to remain in charge acting under the auspices of the "president of the council of ministers".

As part of the new provisions of the Constitution is the introduction of the position of "president of the council of ministers". The new Constitution states that the president of the Council of Ministers will have "full authority and power to manage the affairs of the government and to be held accountable accordingly". The person chosen to be the president of the council of ministers should be the "leader of the party or the leader of the majority coalition of parties following the legislative elections. The position will be held for a six-year term".

For the lawmakers, their election will remain the same as they will be elected by direct universal suffrage, secret for a renewable six years. The new constitutional change was voted for by 89 lawmakers with one voting against and one abstention. Most



Critics fear the constitutional changes may pave the way for a life presidency for President Faure E. Gnassingbe. Photo courtesy.

of the lawmakers who voted for the constitutional change are from the ruling Union for the Republic (UNIR) party.

Currently, there are just a few lawmakers who aren't from the ruling UNIR party. This is largely necessitated by the fact that the main opposition party boycotted the last legislative elections in 2018 citing "irregularities" in the electoral census.

Commenting on the new position of the president of the council of ministers, the chairman of the national assembly's committee on constitutional laws, legislation, and general administration Tchitchao Tchalim said, "The head of state is practically divested of his powers in favour of the president of the council of ministers, who becomes the person who represents the Togolese Republic abroad, and who effectively leads the country in its day to day

management."

Taking a cue from Tchitchao Tchalim's sentiments above, once the new constitutional provisions come into force, they effectively mark Togo's entry into its fifth republic. The move is a clear witty way for President Gnassingbe to extend his family's dominance. Faure Gnassingbe has been in power since 2005. He succeeded his father General Gnassingbe Eyadema who seized power in a coup in 1967. This effectively means the Gnassingbe family has been in power for more than 50 years!

The recent move by President Gnassingbe and his party demonstrates the president's preoccupation with consolidating power as it comes just a few years after another constitutional amendment. In 2019, Togolese members of parliament – mainly those aligned with the ruling party – revised the

Constitution to limit presidential terms to two. However, the changes did not apply retrospectively meaning President Gnassingbe was given a clean slate to compete for the presidency for the next two terms.

If the new constitutional changes take effect starting this April when the country holds its legislative elections, Faure Gnassingbe will remain in power at least for the next six years barring any other constitutional changes. Considering that his party currently controls parliament with 89 of 91 lawmakers coming from the ruling party and the same trend projected to persist beyond the April 20 legislative elections, Gnassingbe's extended stay in power is almost guaranteed. While possessing the power to extend Gnassingbe's stay in power, the new Constitution is quite tough for his predecessors as it introduces a one-term limit.

Opposition political parties

lambasted the move. The Democratic Forces of the Republic, one of Togo's main opposition parties said, "This is the umpteenth preparation of a constitutional coup by a monarchical regime that has held the country's destiny hostage for almost 60 years". Eric Dupay, the spokesperson for the opposition National Alliance for Change Party said, "We know that the struggle will be long and hard but together with the Togolese people, we will do everything we can to prevent this constitutional coup d'état... We are calling on the population to reject this, to oppose it massively."

Meanwhile, other opposition parties have stated that if the President assents to the new Constitution, there will be nationwide protests. The Conference of Togolese Catholic Bishops on the other hand urged the President not to give his assent to the new provisions saying, "Such an important subject which will profoundly change the political life of the country must give rise to broad



This is the umpteenth preparation of a constitutional coup by a monarchical regime that has held the country's destiny hostage for almost 60 years, the says opposition. Photo courtesy.

consultation and a more inclusive national debate."

The constitutional change in Togo accelerates the decimation of democratic and good governance principles in West and Central Africa. Since 2020, eight coups have taken place in the regime alongside several other failed attempts. The region has

also witnessed several nations which include the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Congo Republic, Ivory Coast, and Guinea push through constitutional as well as other legal changes meant to extend the stay in power of the incumbents. However, in the same month that Togo enacted the constitutional changes,

Senegal witnessed a peaceful power transition as Macky Sall relinquished his position whose void was filled by Africa's now youngest (44 years) democratically elected president, Bassirou Diomaye Faye. This demonstrates that not all hope is lost when it comes to safeguarding democratic principles.

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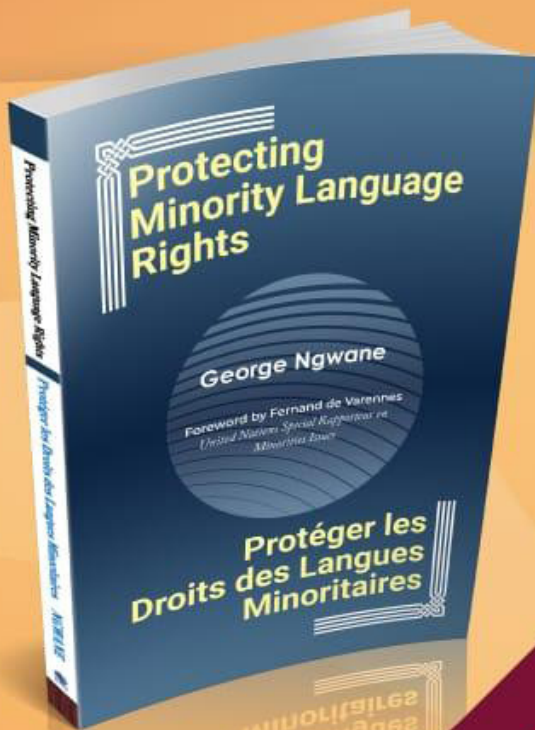
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A Pivot To Energy Finance For NJ Ayuk

By Ajong Mbapndah L

In the relentless crusade to make energy poverty history, the African Energy Chamber under the leadership of Executive Chairman NJ Ayuk are embarking on a stronger push for energy finance to help fund critical projects across the continent. At the upcoming 2024 African Energy Week in Cape Town running from 4-8 November, a major innovation will be the African Energy Finance Summit. With multilateral financial institutions like Afreximbank and S&P Global Commodity Insights as key partners, the Summit will showcase the myriad of emerging opportunities available and connect relevant investors to the projects, says NJ Ayuk.

Fielding questions from PAV, NJ describes the first quarter of the year as a mix bag for the African Energy sector. Enormous challenges with astronomically high numbers in millions for people with no access to electricity and clean cooking fuel, but equally exciting perspectives in terms of the potential that continues to be discovered and the slow but steady progress the continent continues to make, says Ayuk.

"Africa Week 2024 is going to be a blockbuster. We are excited about what we see. People who traditionally have not turned to us are right now part of this movement. Last year we said we are not a conference; we are an energy movement. We are energy people who believe that Africa's time is now," NJ Ayuk, tells PAV in the interview.

The AEC was in Luanda for the Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly, in Ghana for another energy event, and you were recently received by President Macky Sall of Senegal. May we know some of the dividends for the African energy sector from these high-profile engagements?

NJ Ayuk: Angola is an oil-producing country that has received a lot of



African Energy Week 2024 is going to be a blockbuster. We are energy people who believe that Africa's time is now, says NJ Ayuk.

investments to go into the Lobito Corridor, which is very important for the U.S. and other partners around the world, but also for Angola, the DRC, and Zambia. So, you are seeing a lot of fresh money coming into Angola but also there is a push towards a move by hydrogen, not just defined by Western powers but also by Angolans themselves. We wanted to be part of that discussion; our colleagues from the Chamber were in Angola for this Africa-EU Parliamentary meeting.

It was a great opportunity to speak to members of parliament and engage with them because these are decision-

makers whether we like it or not it has to be a content outreach, speaking to our European colleagues, getting them to understand our African perspective, when it comes to climate, energy poverty, producing and using natural gas and our roadmap towards a transition. It is an honour to have the chamber being invited, leading this discussions, and giving Africa a voice.

We also have to take into consideration that these same EU members are the ones that will pass legislation saying that gas is green in the EU, and they can fund it but

natural gas is not green in Africa and we are still staying in poverty and we are not having the chance to develop ourselves. Getting to engage them is important but we also have to keep tabs on their legislative actions and how their legislative actions like that carbon tax that they are working on imposing and other tariffs that they are doing, will affect Africa.

We also must look at our trade deficit; we are buying more from EU countries than we are selling to EU countries. We are refining a lot more African petroleum in the EU than we are doing so in Africa. This kind

of thing needs to be addressed; we have to build refineries, LNG facilities in Africa so that we can process gas in Africa, we can refine our crude in Africa and deal with our fuel scarcity and also produce fertilizers. It is always an intense dialogue; I will be looking to go right back to the European Union and have more discussions with them.

In Ghana it was important to participate at the African Energy Technology Conference. We had discussions about the African Energy Bank with APPO, and the Ghanaian Minister of Energy. It was important for me personally to go into Ghana and also meet with Ghanaian companies looking at accessing energy infrastructure and what they are doing when it comes to gas development and also ensuring energy security.

Ghana is going to be looking to increase production through the jubilee fields. They are also looking at giving out more oil blocks this year. There are going to be intriguing things happening in Ghana.

Macky Sall who was on his way out has been one of the most consequential Presidents in African history; he came into office and reduced term limits and when it comes to the energy industry, he has been a champion. He drove Senegal towards getting the first gas and first oil. He did amazing to get Mauritania and Senegal to work on a deal where cross-border disputes have always been a big problem across Africa. You cannot get a deal done and so most oil and gas are stranded in the ground because of cross-border issues; a case in point is Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. They can't get a deal done and they can't even move faster on the Chevron Yolanda project as there is a big pause there.

Macky Sall changed that when it came to the GTA area; he did just amazing to get that project going. With the SANGOMAR project, they are going to start producing in that country. The energy poverty rate in Senegal has been cut down; renewable growth has surged. He signed on the energy transition partnership with the international community; became



We are the continent that is seeing the lowest amount of investment in energy in the world and that must change, says AEC Executive Chairman NJ Ayuk

a spokesperson for the African energy sector and improved the economy and massive infrastructure. We do salute that kind of leadership but what is even more beautiful is the democratic transition that was observed. We are hoping that the new president will be successful and will ensure that the goals, hopes and ambitions of the Senegalese people are going to be met. We are very confident that the new president is going to do well, if not, better when it comes to energy.

Next month the AEC will be playing a leading role at Invest in African Energy 2024 in Paris. What is the sales pitch you are making to investors and other energy stakeholders for this forum?

NJ Ayuk: Africa is ready, Africa is prepared, and Africa has amazing opportunities. Those opportunities have to be harnessed by Africans. It is not just enough to see foreign investors coming to the continent and profiting alone; everyday people need to be part of that growth. They need to have jobs; they need to have contracts. It is going to be a new way of investment, a new way of looking at investing in Africa not just in

its natural resources but also in its people.

What we are going to be seeing is investment coming in from the Emirates, we are seeing from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, U.S.A. China, across the European Union coming right down to Paris. We are going to be seeing possibly about a thousand investors gathering there. You'll be seeing pitches from African leaders and African businessmen, and we hope to see a lot of deal signing.

We are going to be having roundtable dialogues with EU members of parliament on the transition and where we want to go. We have to be careful about this; there is no energy transition without us dealing with energy poverty. There is no transition without dealing with Africa's deficit when it comes to industrialization and manufacturing. This is Africa's time. We have to seize this moment and issue a clarion call to develop and industrialize Africa. Industrializing does not damage the climate. Industrialization does not hit a climate bomb.

As much as we will be welcoming a lot of investors, we are not going to compromise, and we are not going to back away from our right to produce

every drop of natural gas we can find in Africa.

To potential investors out there skeptical about the investment climate in Africa what are the reassuring messages you have for them about current African realities and any key metrics to enthuse them?

NJ Ayuk: A lot of what has scared investors in the past has been the lack of data. Africa has been a continent where a lot of African countries have not worked on producing data on some of the changes that have come. The Doing Business Index by the World Bank shows that a lot of African countries have improved; a lot of African countries have better regulatory and fiscal regimes that are working. We are seeing democratic transition and good governance in a lot of African countries.

We do have our setbacks, but there is a big push to see that we remain attractive. A lot of businesses understand that a free and structured market is important, but an enabling environment is even better to attract foreign direct investments into the continent. While we are on that topic, we have to know that it is not just about foreign direct investment coming from Western countries; it is also to encourage intra-African trade.

When we trade with ourselves, when we attract cross-border investment, then we are investing in Africa, driven by Africans. We need to put the AfCFTA into effect immediately and start dealing with issues we don't want to touch, dealing with visas across Africa and working on other issues like reducing the rate of red tape and cutting taxes.

African leaders understand today, and most governments that the Chamber has worked with have started to understand that we are not competing just between Zimbabwe and Mozambique or Ghana and Nigeria or Cameroon and Senegal. We are competing between Gabon and Guyana; we are competing between Congo and Qatar. It is not just passing legislation saying we are attractive now; we need to be on top of our game

every day.

We have to say what we can do to be more attractive, what can we do to make capital more welcome, and what can we do to make Africa the capital of hedge funds, private equity, and new financial houses so that they can deploy capital, invest more in infrastructure, energy, roads, bridges, railways, schools, education, healthcare facilities. When we do that, you will see the true potential of Africa being unleashed, especially its young people.

How are preparations going for the AEW 2024?

NJ Ayuk: African Energy Week 2024 is going to be a blockbuster. We are excited about what we see. People who traditionally have not turned to us are right now part of this movement. Last year we said we are not a conference; we are an energy movement. We are energy people who believe that Africa's time is now. Being able to prepare this, we are seeing great confirmation from many energy ministers coming together. We are seeing a lot more push around the finance community. So, there is going to be a big focus on finance, how can we finance our energy growth, renewables, oil, and gas and more.

We are seeing great engagement with international partners from the United States, Europe, Mexico, China, the Middle East, and others. We think it will be a big profit for the African continent because most countries view the African Energy Week as the ideal place where they can meet investors, where they can do deals and exchange vital information. Data is going to be key. We are working with data houses and technology providers to be able to see how we can improve data collection and drive out data on Africa.

We are excited this year and I think the oil companies and gas producers are excited but there is something that most people don't see. We are going to have a big downstream play in this year's Energy Week and Africa's voice is going to be heard right before COP29. We are going to make sure that Africa Energy



With early endorsement from multilateral institutions like Afreximbank and S&P Global Commodity Insights, the African Energy Finance Summit has game changing potentials, says NJ Ayuk.

Week will be the world's last energy meeting before going into COP. Our goal during the Energy Week is to ensure that we leave Cape Town with one solid message and that Africa will be speaking with one voice. We will be able to tell them that Africa needs energy now and we are going to produce every drop of hydrocarbons we can find to save our people and industrialize Africa.

The African Energy Week (AEW) recently announced the Launch of the African Energy Finance Summit; may we get some insights on this?

NJ Ayuk: The Finance Summit is going to galvanize funds, hedge funds, capital-raising institutions, banks, and any kind of financiers to fund Africa. What is happening is that the chokehold in financing is a big problem and that is something people have shied away from and not addressed. There has been a big movement when it comes to the divestment of fossil fuels and cutting funds when it comes to investing in African energy. We are the continent that is seeing the lowest amount of investment in energy than any other

continent.

We cannot just rest on our laurels and just wait. We have to do something by saying we have to get together in an Energy Finance Summit, bringing together all these players, bringing at least 30 African finance ministers, bankers, and central bank governors to deal with this critical issue. We hope to have the African Energy Bank properly represented but we have been very thankful to the African Export-Import Bank for the amazing support on this venture. We are getting the African finance house together; you can't tell me that a continent that has 2.5 trillion dollars of private capital cannot raise sometimes 100 million dollars to do a project. We want to be able to drive up African capital and we make capital believe in Africa as we believe in this continent.

If an Energy Finance Summit is going to be big, it is going to be important, this is the first time in Africa's history that this has happened. We are proud to carry that cause on behalf of not just the energy sector, but everyday Africans that need energy so much.

Can you shed some light on the partnership with multilateral financial institutions like the African Export-Import Bank and S&P Global Commodity Insights, what role will they be playing?

NJ Ayuk: They are bringing a lot of data; they bring a lot of insights and, they bring money. They bring so much knowledge that has been there; they like the Chamber and what we do at Energy Week because we have a platform where we can bring these issues to the table and bring leadership to one house. S&P, being a global institution listed in stock exchanges around the world, can bring some of the best financial houses and top experts from around the world to work with us hand-in-hand.

Data is important; being able to look at the data and crunch it and see where the money is going and how money can come in. We are very proud to have S&P together with the African Export-Import Bank. It will be great to see what comes out there. We will make financiers excited once in their life.

Based on what Aliko Dangote has done in Nigeria with the Dangote refinery, does the AEC think that his example is what others in corporate Africa should be emulating on energy investment?

NJ Ayuk: For a long time, we have seen Africans become wealthy, and invest more in another continent than in Africa. Aliko Dangote did the reverse of that and said I am going to bet on Africa, and I am going to put my money in this continent. I am going to bet on Nigeria and create opportunities and jobs. He built the world's largest single refinery. He galvanized funding from everywhere, put his own money where his mouth was and did that. I think that is a great example of Africans taking action and solving a problem.

Nigeria produces so much crude, but the country has to export its crude outside Nigeria to import finished products into Nigeria. You can think how much that cost for everyday people of Nigeria to be able to buy fuel. Dangote did not just build a refinery; he also built a petrochemical facility. They are going to look at doing clean ammonia, and fertilizer, so you'll be able to power Nigeria and Africa's agricultural basis so we can produce more food for ourselves and not have to wait for Ukraine and Russia to give us wheat.

When you drive agriculture in Africa you create jobs and opportunities. These are the kinds of byproducts from these big investments. It is a road map to encourage other Africans, not necessarily billionaires but also multimillionaires, and small investors to bet on the continent and go big. We need to put more of our money into Africa because that is going to give us a chance to grow and do something bigger than our interests.

As a leading energy voice in the continent, what are some of the projects and in what countries should investors be taking a closer look?

NJ Ayuk: I am an African and the first thing I recommend is every



NJ Ayuk of the AEC Dr Omar Farouk of the African Petroleum Producers Organization (APPO) at the signing of a recent MoU for more synergy in efforts to improve African energy fortunes.

country. I am a Cameroonian and I recommend everybody go and invest in Cameroon. I love this continent so much and I think South Africa with its amazing beauty, and great environment is an amazing place right now to do gas-to-power projects; they have a well-defined structure. You are looking at Mozambique where there is gas, and they could invest in that midstream to drive and produce more power in the country. Look at pipelines that you are going to see across the continent; small pipelines, whether going from Namibia to Zambia. Look at Nigeria; they are making some great moves with gas. There are going to be so many opportunities whether it is looking around the Niger Delta or looking at new fields in shallow or deep-water Nigeria is going to make a play.

I love what they are doing in Congo Brazzaville with the gas. They are turning around to be a gas game. It is an exciting moment. Equatorial Guinea is looking at new investors in its upstream; they want to drive up more oil production and more gas to go into that EGLNG facility which is a world-class facility run by U.S. Company Marathon. Africa is not short of investment; you just need to come in with the money, the technical skill, and the ability to work hand-in-hand with Africans, knowing that you will have to partner with the private sector to drive this.

The idea that you will only come to Africa and work with the government is old. You need to find like-minded people who can also invest. What is beautiful for international investors today looking at the continent is that

you have Africans who have money. They are not just waiting for you to bring all the money; they are ready to match you with your finances.

Africans don't need you to help them; they are not begging you to come and save them, they are asking you to partner with them and when you partner and work with them, then you can grow together. As much as we want investment, we need to walk away from the mentality that we are going to save those poor Africans because we are moving beyond aid. We are looking for the right partnerships and more investments that will show that we can also prove and show that the world must and should respect our people because we are producing African excellence at its best.



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Perenco's core business is developing mature and marginal oil and gas reserves in a sustainable manner. Our strategy is based on the acquisition of assets and the exploration and development of new opportunities, in particular where our specific know-how makes a difference.

As we strive to participate in our host countries' development and energy transition policies, gas has become increasingly key in our strategy. Perenco has been at the forefront of 'Gas to Power' in Central Africa, facilitating the shift from fuel to gas for power plants in Gabon, Cameroon, Chad and DRC. Through this transformation of gas to electricity, as well as gas to LPG, gas to industry, and gas to LNG, Perenco is actively assisting local development wherever it operates.

Founded thirty years ago, Perenco is an independent hydrocarbon producer involved in the entire lifecycle of projects, from exploration to decommissioning. Gross production is over 510,000 BOEPD. The group's strength lies in the technical ingenuity and versatility of its 7,470 employees, who deliver safe and environmentally aware solutions to oil and gas fields around the world. By enhancing and developing local resources, Perenco is proud to support economic growth and social development wherever it works. Perenco operates in 14 partner countries and is based in the United Kingdom.

Nigeria: Travails Of The Gas Sector

By Abubakar Ibrahim

The Nigerian oil and gas sector, once filled with promise upon the declaration of the «Decade of Gas» by former President Muhammadu Buhari, now finds itself grappling with inefficiencies and setbacks, much to the disappointment of stakeholders.

As Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer, needs help to keep pace with its counterparts, questions arise regarding the nation's ability to leverage its abundant gas resources for economic development.

Three years have passed since the proclamation was made on March 29, 2021. However, instead of witnessing exponential growth akin to a thriving partnership, Nigeria's gas sector has encountered missed deadlines, operational inefficiencies, and a litany of excuses.

A recent investigation unveils the grim reality, attributing Nigeria's stagnation in the gas sector to a myriad of challenges hampering the progress of crucial pipeline projects across the nation.

Despite the global trend favouring gas over crude oil for economic advancement, Nigeria's ambitions to transition have been stymied by sluggish progress on key pipeline projects.

Foremost among these is the Ajakuta-Kaduna-Kano (AKK)



pipeline, a 614 km-long conduit envisioned to transport natural gas from Nigeria's southern regions to the central heartland. Commissioned in July 2020 with a projected completion date of 2023, the AKK pipeline remains distressingly incomplete.

Economist Kelvin Emmanuel shed light on the reasons behind the AKK's delay, citing a Mareva injunction obstructing progress and procurement cost distortions due to foreign exchange revaluation losses. This legal hurdle, employed to prevent asset dissipation pending potential judgments, has compounded the challenges besetting the AKK project.

In the same vein, the Obiafu-Obrikom-Oben (OB3) gas pipeline, colloquially known as the East-West pipeline, has encountered protracted delays despite initial optimism.

With an estimated cost of \$700 million and a capacity of 2000 million cubic feet per day, the OB3 pipeline's completion timeline has been repeatedly extended since its inception in 2016. Various setbacks, including adverse weather conditions and contractor transitions, have thwarted efforts to bring the project to fruition.

The Trans-Saharan pipeline, a monumental \$13 billion endeavour spanning over 4,000 km from Nigeria

to Algeria, faces geopolitical hurdles following a military coup in Niger. Diplomatic tensions between Nigeria and Niger have impeded progress, jeopardising the pipeline's ambitious goals of regional energy integration.

Meanwhile, the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP), intended to supply natural gas to countries across West Africa, has fallen short of expectations. Despite spanning 678 kilometers and linking Nigeria to Benin, Togo, and Ghana, the pipeline's reach has been curtailed, hindering its potential to fulfill regional energy demands.

Gas Flaring/Wastage

In 2023, Nigeria flared natural gas worth \$1 billion, according to data from the Nigeria Gas Flare Tracker, a satellite-based technology developed by the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA).

The country flared approximately 275.4 billion standard cubic feet of gas worth \$1 billion (N1.27 trillion at the average exchange rate of N1267/\$) between January and December.

Industry experts said the volume of gas blasted can generate megawatts of electricity, enough to power millions of homes in Africa. According to the United States Energy Information Association, one megawatt (MW) of electricity can provide 1,000 households.

The World Bank, in its 2021



electricity report, revealed that more than 85 million Nigerians lack access to electricity. According to the African Development Bank, over 640 million Africans have no access to energy, corresponding to an electricity access rate for African countries at just over 40 percent, the lowest in the world.

Energy security/Regional cooperation

Riverson Oppong, the Chief Executive of the Association of Oil Marketing Companies, and LPG Marketing Companies, lamented the

WAGP's limitations, highlighting its failure to extend beyond Ghana's borders.

He stated that failures to get the project up and running are missed opportunities for energy security and regional cooperation, emphasising the pipeline's diversion to supply European markets in times of need.

Amidst these setbacks, the proposed Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline offers a glimmer of hope for enhanced energy connectivity. Conceived in 2016 as an extension of the WAGP, this ambitious \$25

billion project aims to transport gas from Nigeria to coastal West African countries and beyond.

However, its completion timeline stretches to 2046, reflecting the formidable challenges inherent in Nigeria's gas infrastructure development.

Emmanuel identified Nigeria's reliance on imported steel as a key impediment to pipeline execution, exacerbating procurement costs and project timelines.

He urged decisive action to address these structural deficiencies,

stressing the imperative of unlocking the sector's vast potential to boost Nigeria's economy and foster regional cooperation.

"The stagnation plaguing Nigeria's gas sector highlights the urgent need for decisive action to surmount entrenched challenges," analysts said. "As stakeholders advocate for institutional reforms and strategic partnerships to drive progress, the realisation of Nigeria's gas aspirations hinges on proactive measures to navigate the complexities hindering its path to prosperity." —

NEUMAN&ESSER GROUP Carves Its African Niche

By Ajong Mbapndah L

For the NEUMAN&ESSER GROUP, it is not business as usual when it comes to Africa. The German company with a two hundred history year has taken Africa by storm carving a strong and growing niche for itself with a unique blend of services and products that make it stand out of the park.

"Our vision is to treat our customers in Africa not just as customers, but as partners. We do offer the know-how of almost two hundred years of business experience, providing superior products and services combined with the willingness to develop local capabilities in Africa. This means our partners are benefiting from our know-how exchange and development program and the way we make our high-quality level affordable by making that close and local," says Dr. Jiří Rus, Sales Director for Africa at the NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP.

Fielding questions from PAV, Dr. Jiří Rus harps on the success of its partnership with the South African based company ROTAMECH. Building on the success of the partnership with ROTAMECH, the NEUMAN&ESSER GROUP is expanding its footprints in Africa with a broad range of programs and partnerships.

How has the first quarter of the year played out for NEUMAN



The NEA Group is open to trainings virtually and helping governments, customers, and people for a better future, says Dr. Jiří Rus, Sales Director for Africa.

& ESSER GROUP operations in Africa?

Dr. Jiří Rus: I believe the year 2024 started as the previous year ended – we are very busy with most of our new setups, and we see the confirmation of the demand for our services. I believe that customers and the market in general appreciate the fact that we "live our values" and we

really work intensely on increasing our local presence and capabilities. Thus, we can be very satisfied with the first quarter.

How satisfied are you with the outcome of your partnership or operations with ROTAMECH?

Dr. Jiří Rus: ROTAMECH is and will all the time have a special

place in my business heart. This was our first partner with which we started the execution of our Africa Strategy and here we also the most developed capabilities in this set up. Our business partner did a great job and has developed themselves withing just two and half years very much. But it does not come for free. Their specialists and Field

Service Supervisors and Technicians participated on our training sessions organized in Germany; they show an excellent motivation and drive to go ahead with our advice, following leads and they also are making a great progress on the market itself. So, we are very satisfied, and I hope our colleagues at ROTAMECH can confirm the same. And I believe that the most benefiting will be our customers in South Africa

What does the success of the ROTAMECH partnership mean for NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP and the future of your projects in Africa?

Dr. Jiří Rus: Their success is our success and very important for us. This is the confirmation for us that the Africa Strategy and the Local Content Concept we created makes sense and is welcomed and well applicable in Africa. Looking back over the last two years I need also to confirm that it was a kind of learning path for us at the NEA GROUP to understand what really needs to be done to turn our



The NEA GROUP is committed to sharing know-how and helping partners and customers to develop their teams.

vision into reality. Important is that we successfully proved the concept, we are already rolling it out in several countries in Africa and we are adding more and more African countries into our business focus.

Any updates on progress with

regards to the service center in Nigeria?

Dr. Jiří Rus: We already started with the establishment of similar workshop like in South Africa also with our Nigerian business partner – MILAT NIGERIA Ltd. Their FSR specialists are coming just now in

April for the training to our facility in Germany. So, I believe that till the end of this year, we should have the same there.

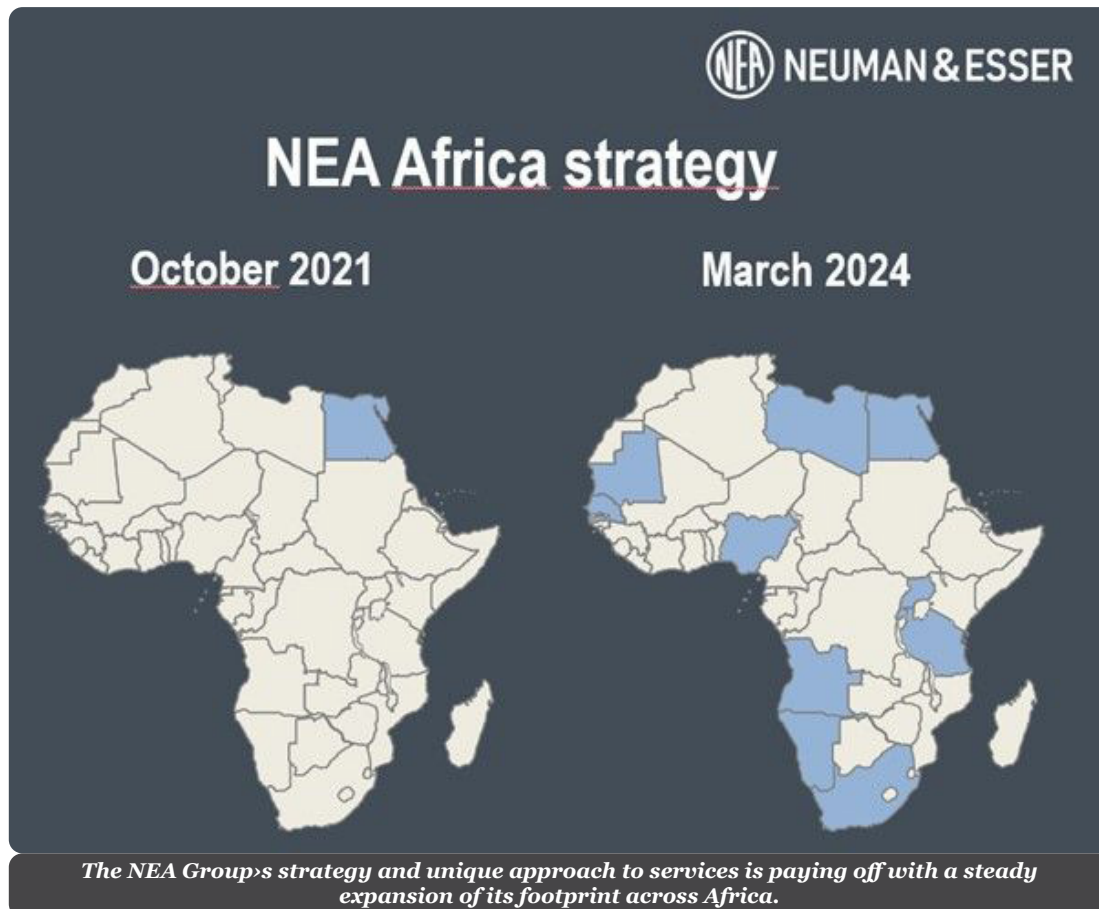
How affordable are the services and products of NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP in Africa?

Dr. Jiří Rus: When having our local set up, I cannot really understand this question. We are local. This means, I believe we are offering the true German quality on spare parts and local support on the maintenance and services (still providing that on the OEM standards). Such a combination is making the complete package from us very affordable.

When speaking about the Primary business (sales of new compressor systems) it is all the time the question, what end-user wants to receive. If quality, reliability, operational perfection, and safety plays an important role, then we are definitely the company to discuss with. Moreover, providing our local after-market services makes our offer comprehensive and interesting.

We also saw a knowledge sharing and capacity building partnership with Société Africaine de Raffinage (SAR) can you shed light on it for us?

Dr. Jiří Rus: Thank you very much for this question. This was



The NEA Group's strategy and unique approach to services is paying off with a steady expansion of its footprint across Africa.

an interesting initiative. We learnt during the technical meeting that SAR is facing some difficulties with their equipment. We proposed as the very first step to organize a technical remote training with and for their team. The training was composed of the theoretical design training of the equipment combined later with the aftermarket experience exchange, sharing proven methods, practices and procedures for maintenance and troubleshooting. Based on the feedback we received it was well appreciated and I would like to follow this pilot initiative with SAR team later this April in Cape Town during the ARDA Week.

What do African companies stand to gain from such training that NEUMAN & ESSER offers and how affordable are there?

Dr. Jiří Rus: Such trainings we organize for end users are beneficial for both – users of existing equipment and the future operators of new equipment.

We focus on sharing our knowledge on technical design bases, which are often underestimated. However, we believe that it is important to understand those, because than the operator see the consequences that can happen in case of incorrect operation or maintenance. After that, we focus on showing the newest design developments of such an equipment to show the state-of-the-art solution. Finally, we share also the methods and procedures for the maintenance as it is these days best practice.

It is beneficial for users of existing equipment (usually well aged) that they can see, what is possible to achieve with modernized compressors. Btw, modernization and revamping is a specific segment we are very active in and is a great opportunity for end users to improve efficiency, safety, environmental footprint and availability of their machines.

The future users of the equipment benefit from such a training a good base knowledge and can start with the best practice maintenance from the beginning.



The NEA GROUP including Rob van Lienen, René Anke, Marc Dr. Langela, Somendra Pandey and Dr. Jiří Rus MBA celebrating the success of the first Training on the Road session in South Africa.

And of course, during such a training, people get to know our specialists, who are all the time happy to assist with advice, help and solutions. This is our DNA.

What makes the services of NEA GROUP different or stand out, why should African countries and companies consider partnership with you over others?

Dr. Jiří Rus: The facts we spoke about earlier – we are having the vision to take our business partners and customers in Africa as partners and not only “customers”. We do offer the know-how of almost two hundred years of business experience, providing superior products and services combined with the willingness to develop local capabilities in Africa. This means our partners are benefiting from our know-how exchange and development program and the way we make our high-quality level affordable by making that close and local. The traditional “Made-in-Germany” is supplemented with a local “Made-by-NEUMAN & ESSER” approach.

Moreover, we started also with the cross-border cooperation of our

business partners in Africa. I strongly believe that Africa needs to intensify its intra-continental cooperation and not to look all the time “overseas”. As the first initiative we organize in May this year the first “Africa Agents Sales Meeting” in South Africa. It will be hosted by our partner ROTAMECH and we will have 4 days of very packed and intense program to share new developments, to share experiences also inside of Africa and to make some hands-on training also in the workshop. This should inspire our partners for the next development.

What are some future engagements and projects that NEUMAN & ESSER will be working on or participating in for the rest of 2024?

Dr. Jiří Rus: Well, we do not slow down. We are going to have again one more pretty exciting year. I of course cannot disclose details of the deals itself, but I can share with you that we do see a high chance to be awarded for several projects in Primary Segment (new compressor systems) being it in renewable segment, LNG, offshore or chemical industry segment. Moreover, we will finalize one very big revamping project, which I will

happily share more information after the end. We do also foresee several further revamping projects and I believe that we will also improve our aftermarket support in some other countries.

We aim to extend our local presence in at least 3-4 more countries again and support our activities by an intensive exhibition – conference program. We have participated already EGYPTES in Egypt. We are going to be in NIEC in Namibia, ARDA Week in Cape Town, MSGBC in Senegal, NOG in Nigeria and many others.

But what we do want to intensify is our development program and activity. We already spoke about the training at SAR. We are going to have in two weeks a training about electrolyzer technology in South Africa and many of similar activities will come. We want to make small “one customer-one topic” training sessions as well as larger group and industry segments focused training too. Let me and our team work on that and we can have more detailed discussion about this next time. I am all the time very happy, when I can share our news, development and ambitions in and for Africa.



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A Windfall For Rotamech From NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP Partnership- Alex du Plessis

By Simnikiwe Hlatshaneni

NEUMAN & ESSER Group is our backbone, especially with training, knowledge and technologies, says Alex du Plessis, Managing Director of the South African based company Rotamech. Touting the success of the partnership between Rotamech and the German based NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP, Alex du Plessis says it has been a unique win-win for both parties.

"We have certified service engineers who actually went over to Germany and trained in Germany, so, our team is fully certified for local repairs as per the OEM standards. We have all the technical support and backup from the NEUMAN & ESSER team. I think that service is just as important as supplying the product. That is where they play a crucial part of our business. We have the complete backbone of the equipment that we already have in South Africa, then we also have the servicing, the maintenance, and the repairs; all of that will be done locally," the Managing Director of Rotamech says.

Fielding questions from PAV, Alex du Plessis says the relationship between Rotamech and NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP is very unique in the sense that both companies have a structured local content concept, and both companies strive to develop within South Africa and Africa in general.

Could we start with an introduction of Rotamech and its services or sectors it operates in?

Alex du Plessis: Rotamech specializes in all high-speed rotating equipment, and turbo machinery. Typically steam turbines, compressors, pumps, gear-boxes fans, and blowers. We also do static equipment such as tubes for furnaces and reformers, supplying the special alloys, we also



Our team is fully certified for local repairs as per the OEM standards and we have all the technical support and backup from the NEA team, says Alex du Plessis.

do process heat exchangers, which is also part of our portfolio. So, typical industries that we work for are oil and gas, renewables, mining, food and beverage and steel facilities, paper and pulp, petrochemical. So, we work in all the various industries. Turbo-machinery is a very specialized product that we deal with and with our specialized team we are able to service our customers effectively..

How important are the services of Rotamech in present-day South Africa?

Alex du Plessis: I think in South Africa there is space for smaller privately owned entities, especially in the turbo-machinery market. We are

filling a gap with a young and dynamic team. Competencies are being lost and we need to ensure we keep on building. South Africa in general are losing many professionals with knowledge and knowhow, we are able to fill that gap with localization, by sourcing and training people locally together with our partners such as Neuman and Esser and the others this is possible. The services we offer are unique in the sense of the equipment we work on.

Can you shed some light on the partnership between Rotamech and the NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP in Germany?

Alex du Plessis: The relationship

between Rotamech and NEUMAN & ESSER is very unique in the sense that we both have a structured local content concept, and both our companies strive to develop within South Africa and Africa in general.

Both companies are open for change and adapt to local markets as needed. Rotamech is responsible for both the new build and aftermarket business for NEUMAN & ESSER in South Africa and Namibia.

What is the experience like working with the NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP Team?

Alex du Plessis: The NEUMAN & ESSER GROUP played a vital role from the beginning of our partnership, the local concept for them is extremely important seeing that they are a German-based company. They believe in developing local entities. They have provided a lot of training for our teams, they have a lot of technological knowledge and know-how on their products want to invest in skill transfer. They add value to our business, They play a critical role in our business in SA but also Africa. NEA works best to be flexible and to understand the local African specifics and demands and listens well to our inputs.

What are the prospects of businesses such as yours using more locally manufactured goods in the near future?

Alex du Plessis: We have a very good skill set in SA and very capable manufacturers of products, so we identify and work with those, that would boost local manufacturing.

Internally we are also building capacity locally to do more manufacturing. This is definitely one of the areas we are focusing on for the future.

Locally manufactured products can be used in many applications within our business. We are continuously searching for more

locally manufactured goods that can be utilized in our service and product offerings.

How important are skills development and transfer in your partnership?

Alex du Plessis: Being a private owned entity, it's much easier for us to develop the people locally and transfer skills. I think the significance of this partnership we have with companies like NEUMAN & ESSER is that we want to develop and train people. There is definitely a gap in South Africa where the older generation, the guys who used to build refineries and oil and gas plants are getting older and moving on leaving a huge gap in terms of boots on the ground - the people that can physically do the work. I think we are a young dynamic team, and we are trying to develop more teams moving forward. So, we are building capacity for the future, so I significantly think that's where we fit.

Only a handful of companies in South Africa are in this field, so it's a unique niche, specialized industry. we need a skills transfer to the young people, and I think a good example is what we want to do, that is, train up young people in South Africa. We are in the process of applying to start a learnership program to get young people, train them in the practical areas, and then get them formally qualified. nowadays and the world is changing because of the digital industrial revolution, but we still need someone to use their hands to do the installation of whatever technology is being used and that is where we come in. We actually want to see boots on the ground, and we need hands that can actually do the gritty work. Not everybody needs to be a programmer; we still need people who can work with their hands!

May we know what impact of this partnership and the products and technology from NEUMAN & ESSER Group on Rotamech?

Alex du Plessis: NEUMAN & ESSER is our backbone, especially with training, knowledge and technologies.



The products and technologies provided by NEUMAN & ESSER are strategically fitting our profile, says Alex du Plessis.

As I said we have certified service engineers who actually went over to Germany and trained in Germany, so, Our team is fully certified for local repairs as per the OEM standards. We have all the technical support and backup from the NEUMAN & ESSER team. I think that service is just as important as supplying the product. That is where they play a crucial part of our business. We have the complete backbone of the equipment that we already have in South Africa, then we also have the servicing, the maintenance, and the repairs; all of that will be done locally.

The products and technologies provided by NEUMAN & ESSER are strategically fitting our profile. Compressors and Electrolyzers to name a few are part of the future of energy transition taking place and are embracing the partnership with the NEUMAN & ESSER team.

How important are partnerships like the one you have with NEUMAN & ESSER Group in changing the energy and technological landscape in South Africa and Africa?

Alex du Plessis: That's an extremely important topic for us and I think the whole world is moving through the energy transition and green hydrogen. We are quite privileged to be in this space working with NEUMAN & ESSER. they have products that fit into the entire green hydrogen value chain, from compressors to electrolyzers. so, we can do everything from the initial stages right until the very end where you fill the truck. .to enable you to move the gas from point A to B you require a compressor. NEUMAN & ESSER have been through all the industrial revolutions having been around for almost 200 years now, so they have seen everything and have been doing hydrogen for more than 100 years.

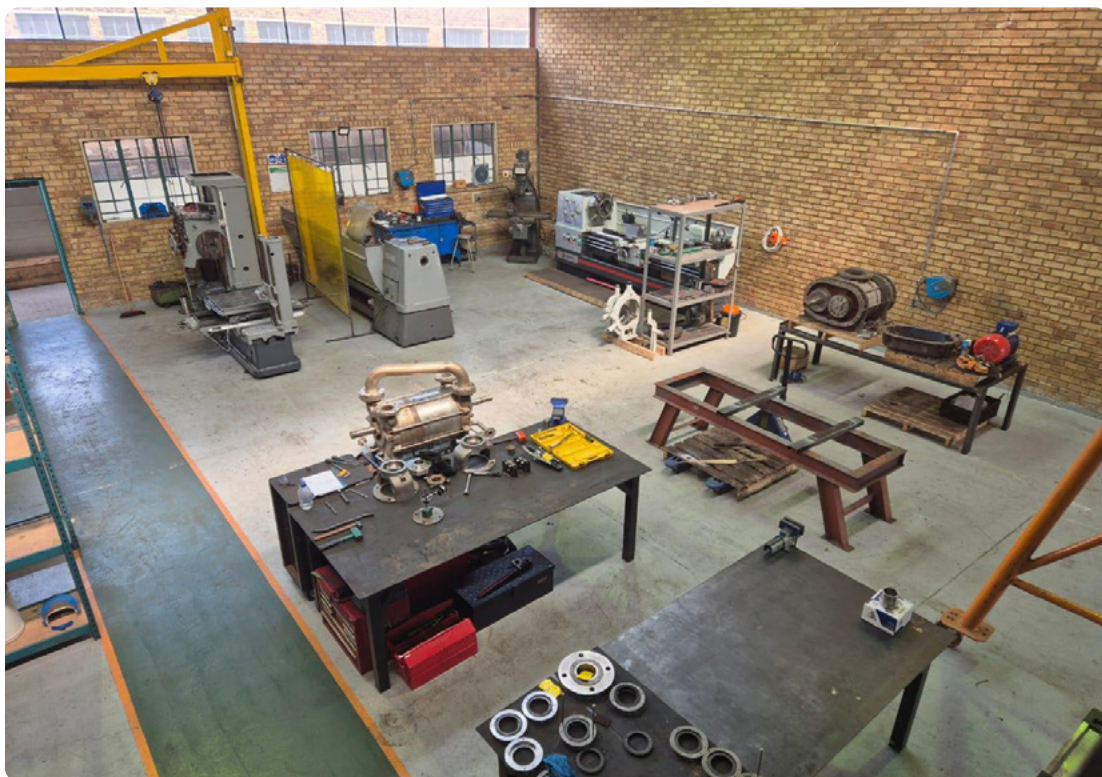
What are some of the challenges that companies like Rotamech face in South Africa?

Alex du Plessis: Load shedding is definitely one of the main challenges for us at the moment. We do not have any power and then you hear there will be tariff increases. So, there are a number of challenges,

one being energy availability and another being the currency exchange rate as we and customers rely heavily on imports at the moment. The conditions at the ports also greatly affect us because of this. The harbours have been a nightmare, with us sometimes not being able to get our containers through. I think the business environment in South Africa generally is quite difficult. When red tape and difficulties at the ports affect this trade, it halts business which not only impacts us but others downstream as well. But we accept those challenges as a sign for us to think out of the box to make sure that we get going and we support each other as industry players affected by these challenges. Our attitude is that we would rather get things going regardless of challenges. We will get things done in South Africa regardless of those challenges. We do what we do to the best of our ability so that it benefits not only us but the people we can help uplift along the way, including local manufacturers, those that we train and transfer skills to, and our contribution to the local economy.

Any other projects in view or events that Rotamech will be participating in for the rest of 2024?

Alex du Plessis: We are actually doing a lot of events this year, we are doing the African Refiners and Distributors Association (ARDA) annual conference; we have also expanded our business into Namibia, so we will be part of the Namibia Energy Conference now in April. We are also hosting the African Agents Week event in May, which is an event where NEUMAN & ESSER hosts all its agents from Africa. This year it's South Africa's turn to host the event and we want to inspire the rest of the guys in Africa by showing them what we have done over the last two years and demonstrating that nothing is impossible, and we look forward to that. We also have Hydrogen Africa coming up and we intend to attend as many of the summits in the green energy space as well.



Alex du Plessis says the relationship between Rotamech and NEUMAN & ESSER Group is very unique in the sense that both companies have a structured local content concept.

The Way of an African Legend: A Tribute to Beno't de la Fouchardière of Perenco

By NJ Ayuk*



A rousing tribute to Benoît de la Fouchardière from the African Energy Chamber.

As the managing director of Perenco, he has driven the company's successful expansion into new territory and has kept it on course to become one of the biggest investors and taxpayers in Central Africa.

On Feb. 6, 2024, the Anglo-French oil and gas company Perenco announced that it had appointed a new CEO to replace the incumbent Benoît de la Fouchardière, who has served in this capacity for the last eight years. In a press release, London-headquartered Perenco noted that de la Fouchardière would be replaced by Armel Simondin, the general manager of the company's Cameroonian division, effective March 15.

At first glance, this press release reads like an unremarkable notice of corporate personnel turnover. It hails the achievements of de la Fouchardière, who is now slated to

take the helm at Dixstone, an affiliate of Perenco. It also includes an upbeat statement from chairman François Perrodo about the company's prospects under Simondin, a long-time employee of Perenco as well as an industry veteran.

In other words, it reads like a short statement about an ordinary example of change in leadership.

In my perspective, however, it's an overly modest tribute to an extraordinary person. It doesn't say enough about the contributions de la Fouchardière has made to Perenco's operational and socioeconomic successes in Central Africa, which is home to about half of the company's assets.

And those contributions are substantial.

Operational Successes

On the upstream front, de la Fouchardière has led the company in expanding its portfolio through Central Africa while also lifting production. Between 2017 and 2020, for example, he guided Perenco through the acquisition of most of TotalEnergies' Gabonese assets. Then in mid-2022, he steered Perenco's acquisition of Glencore's upstream portfolio in Chad, thereby adding the large and untapped Badila and Mangara fields to its list of assets.

Later in 2022, de la Fouchardière also oversaw the company's announcement of a large new oil discovery at the Pointe Noire Grand Fond Sud licence located off the coast of the Republic of Congo. And in 2023, he led Perenco through the signing of a contract for Rio del Rey (RDR), a concession in Cameroon that accounts for about 70% of the country's total crude production.

De la Fouchardière has also championed Perenco's efforts to develop its natural gas value chain by moving beyond production. During his term, the company began the process of transforming Gabon into a gas hub. It has, for example, agreed to work with Gabon's Ministry of Oil and Gas to develop plans for the

construction of a thermal power plant (TPP) that will use locally produced gas as feedstock for electricity production. This project is expected to help alleviate energy poverty within Gabon, thereby ensuring that the country gains direct benefits from its own natural resources.

The company has also made a final investment decision (FID) on a plan to build a facility capable of turning out 0.7 million tonnes per year (tpy) of liquefied natural gas (LNG). This facility, located in Cap Lopez, will also be able to manufacture liquid petroleum gas (LPG). As such, it will be able to process gas to produce LNG for export as well as LPG for domestic and regional use.

This is important, as LNG exports can generate revenue for Perenco — and also for the government of Gabon, which is entitled to a share of profit production. But the benefits don't end there. The LNG project also helps supply Gabon and other Central African states with LPG, a clean-burning fuel for cooking, heating, and lighting that can replace traditional biomass-based fuels such as wood and charcoal and dirtier-burning petroleum products such as kerosene.

Environmental and Social Initiatives

That brings me to another point — namely, what Perenco has accomplished on the environmental and social fronts.

De la Fouchardière outlined some of his company's achievements in an interview with The Africa Report in February. He noted that Perenco had worked to develop new technologies and procedures to minimize environmental risk and asserted that it had gone further in this direction than other international oil companies (IOCs).

"With our subsidiary Petrodec, we are the only ones to have launched a complete dismantling of oil wells that have ceased production and [taken] ad hoc environmental measures. Today Petrodec is working on two rigs in the UK, in the North Sea, but tomorrow

its services could be called upon anywhere — for example, in Africa — to ensure the definitive closure of extractive sites," he explained.

He also pointed out that the company was working with local government bodies to mitigate pollution and environmental damage wherever it occurred. "Despite everything, accidents can still happen and this is true for Perenco as it is for most oil groups," he told The Africa Report. "In this case, we are doing everything we can to contain and treat the pollution, as we have just done in Gabon, in close collaboration with the relevant authorities."

Additionally, de la Fouchardière stressed the company's commitment to cooperation and good relationships with host communities. Perenco has launched multiple social and economic development initiatives to support the residents of the places where it operates and will continue to do so, he said.

"As for relations with local communities, we have a very specific corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy," he stated. "Unlike other companies, we have not delegated it to external service providers but have internalised it because it is a question of responding to the real needs of the populations we meet on the ground. In Muanda [Democratic Republic of Congo], for example, our teams live among the population, including expatriate engineers. In consultation with local stakeholders, we have launched projects to improve access to electricity, education, and agroforestry as well as search for solutions to better preserve fish to be sold in Kinshasa."

Virtuous Circles

These statements hardly come as a surprise to me and my colleagues at the African Energy Chamber (AEC). After all, de la Fouchardière spoke to us in April 2023 about similar steps Perenco has taken in Central Africa and beyond.

"From the beginning, Perenco has been engaged with the Republic of

Cameroon to have a positive impact at local, regional, and national levels. At the national level, through revenues generated by our activity, employment, and training of young Cameroonians from all regions and all disciplines. Locally, we are working with IECD [Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement], a non-governmental organization partner, to develop micro-entrepreneurial initiatives, teaching people to learn how to manage funds and reinvest effectively," he said.

He continued: "[From] a global standpoint, we are engaged in a global initiative to remove plastic waste from the countries where we operate: Plastic Free. We are developing a pyrolysis machine at a small scale and another at an industrial scale (to be installed in Cap Lopez in Gabon). It will clean the plastic from the country and use it to produce diesel in a virtuous circle, also reducing the need for diesel imports."

What's more, this isn't the only virtuous circle Perenco has set in motion. Under de la Fouchardière's leadership, the company has maintained a policy of hiring a majority-African workforce for all of its operations — and it has increased the number of women working in the oil and gas industry. It has worked to maximize local content across its African portfolio, and it has sponsored football competitions in Cameroon and organized annual marathons in Gabon.

These are just some of the reasons why I believe de la Fouchardière deserves a round of applause. As the managing director of Perenco, he has driven the company's successful expansion into new territory and has kept it on course to become one of the biggest investors and taxpayers in Central Africa. At the same time, he's worked to uphold Africans and African interests. We at the African Energy Chamber are fortunate to have worked with him, and we wish him well in his future endeavors.

* NJ Ayuk, Executive Chairman, African Energy Chamber

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Nigeria's Electricity DisCos Break All-time Revenue Records with N1 Trillion

...tops countries with serious power shortages in 2023

By Abubakar Ibrahim

Nigeria's Electricity Distribution Companies (DisCos) have collectively generated a revenue of N1 trillion in 2023, their highest revenue levels in a decade, even amidst persistent power outages across the nation.

Despite the longstanding issue of inadequate power supply plaguing Nigeria, this development is significant in the sector since it highlights the growing importance of the country's electricity distribution industry.

The country's statistics body reported that the fourth quarter of 2023 alone saw DisCos generating revenue of N294.95 billion, contributing to the cumulative total for the year.

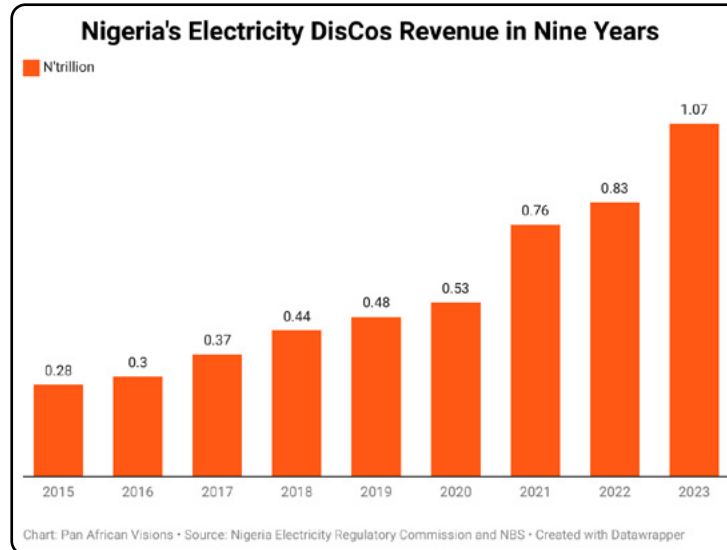
Analysts attribute this remarkable increase in revenue to various factors, including advancements in metering technology, enhanced regulatory oversight, tariff adjustments, substantial infrastructural investments, a growing customer base, and improved collection efficiency.

Pedro Omontuemen, a Partner at PricewaterCooper (PwC) Nigeria, said the power supply must be enhanced while minimising losses to sustain this positive trend.

He highlighted the need for comprehensive customer connection and reduction of technical and commercial losses to ensure continual revenue growth for distribution companies.

On the other hand, Nigeria was ranked first among countries with serious power shortages in 2023, among growing economies such as Pakistan and Kenya, according to a recent International Energy Agency (IEF) assessment.

On September 14, 2023, Nigeria experienced a statewide blackout lasting around 10 hours, due to a



fire on a main transmission line that caused the system to collapse.

Bismarck Rewane, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Financial Derivatives Company Limited said the largest economy in Africa saw 12 national grid failures in 2023.

The Transmission Company of Nigeria also revealed that the country has experienced recurrent power outages, with around 46 grid breakdowns between 2017 and 2023. Nigeria's grid continues to have problems due to aging infrastructure and vandalism.

In 2022, 73 percent of Nigeria's population had access to electricity, a rise of more than 70 million people over the previous decade. Despite the country's total installed capacity of over 13 GW, the average available capacity remained at 4.5 GW in 2023 due to a mix of factors such as aging units, poor maintenance, and liquidity constraints.

According to the IEF, inconsistent power supply due to insufficient grid infrastructure, underinvestment, and inefficient regulatory frameworks have resulted in backup generators producing an estimated 40 percent

of the country's total electricity consumption.

To meet rising demand, the performance of the Nigerian energy delivery Industry (NESI) is being assessed, and the federal government continues to prioritize energy delivery.

Nigeria passed the Electricity Act 2023 in June 2023, to create a comprehensive legislative and institutional framework for a privatized contract and rule-based competitive electricity market to attract private sector investment in the power industry.

"While the act strengthens the role of regulatory bodies, as it introduces consumer protection measures and provides for a transparent tariff-setting process, it also opens up the possibility of multiple licensing regimes by enabling regulation at the state level.

"Although regulation at the federal level remains the rule where no state regulation is specified, careful co-ordination and streamlining of regulatory approaches across states would be required to minimise the uncertainty of different regimes."

Meanwhile, one of 2023's

significant blackouts happened on January 23 in Pakistan due to overloaded transmission lines, resulting in a power drop. Simultaneously, the northern region saw lower power generation due to plant operational concerns.

"These combined causes caused an uncontrollable power surge, resulting in a countrywide blackout that affected 220 million people for more than 12 hours.

Notably, this was the second incidence in a year, following a previous catastrophe on October 13, 2022, which caused a complete blackout in the south and a partial blackout in the north, resulting in a loss of over 8,000 MW.

Also, Kenya faced a massive power outage, affecting more than 50 million people, with power restored about 24 hours later, on August 25, 2023. According to the IEF, the cause of this outage is unknown.

"This incident marked Kenya's fifth nationwide blackout in the past four years and is noted as one of the longest on record. Kenyans saw another nationwide outage in early December. The event lasted less than a day but it was the third major blackout in four months."

In response to the deteriorating situation, Kenya Power, the national power operator, has scheduled power outages throughout December as a load-shedding tactic while also allowing for infrastructure maintenance and modernization.

Other countries that experienced blackouts last year due to insufficient power capacity, fuel supply challenges, grid-related technical issues, and extreme weather events included Egypt, Brazil, Canada, the United States, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, India, Madagascar, Bangladesh, and Yemen.

African Countries and the Corruption Perceptions Index: Don't Blame the Messenger.

By Francis Ben Kaifala*

Transparency International (TI) released its annual Corruption Perception Index earlier this year. As many readers of this blog are likely aware, the CPI is quite controversial, particularly in developing countries that typically fare poorly on the index. When I was a Board Member of the African Union Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC) and President of the Network of Anti-Corruption Institutions in West Africa (NACIWA), it seemed that every time the CPI came up in our meetings, the typical reaction ranged from disapproval to outrage, with many challenging the legitimacy and authenticity of the index. More broadly, many African government officials and business people see the CPI, as well as TI's accompanying commentaries, as part of a Western-driven smear campaign against African countries.

I do not share this view. I agree that the CPI has significant flaws and limitations, which are familiar enough that they need not be rehearsed at length: the CPI relies on subjective and potentially unreliable perceptions, the underlying sources are not always being sufficiently transparent as to the qualifications of the "experts" who assign scores, and the CPI does not cover some of the crucial issues that antigraft fighters focus on, such as tax fraud, money laundering, and illicit financial flows. I share concerns about the way the CPI is sometimes used by TI and other parties to paint an inaccurate and sometimes unfair picture of how well anticorruption fighters are doing their job. Yet despite these shortcomings, the CPI helps put pressure on governments worldwide to do more about corruption, and the index can be helpful in guiding efforts to combat graft in Africa and elsewhere. Indeed, while many African government officials and business elites criticize the CPI, most African civil society actors appreciate it and find it a credible reflection of



We should remind ourselves of the persistence of corruption on the Continent and take more robust steps to reverse its grip on Africa's development, says Francis Ben Kaifala.

the situation in their countries, and it gives them a powerful rhetorical tool to call on their governments to do more on this issue.

Therefore, while it is, of course, reasonable to point out the CPI's flaws and limitations, African government officials—particularly those who work in anticorruption agencies (ACAs)—would do better to focus their energies not on denouncing the CPI but rather on reforms that can present a better picture of their respective countries.

After all, despite complaints that the CPI is unfair and biased against Africa, some African countries—like Seychelles, Mauritius, Botswana, and Rwanda—continue to do relatively well on the CPI. This is not because TI or experts particularly favor them but because their efforts in controlling corruption have been recognized internationally. Also, while CPI scores usually don't change much from year to year, some countries, including some African countries, have achieved meaningful progress. For example, Sierra Leone has steadily climbed since 2017: In 2017, Sierra Leone ranked 130th (out of 180 countries), and in the most recent index, it ranked 108th – still not satisfactory, but a notable improvement.

Therefore, while it certainly can be frustrating for ACAs and governments when an influential index like the CPI, which relies on desk reviews and unidentified experts, gives our countries low scores despite all the work we are doing, we should not necessarily see it as a machinated attack that should discourage the often good work ACAs and some governments are doing. But we can, and should, take this as an added incentive to improve our countries' reputations, and that of the African Continent overall, by working hard to adopt better systems of accountability and transparency. We can do so by studying what other countries faring better in the indexes are doing and seeking to replicate or better them in our respective countries. We can review country-specific information and data in the yearly CPI releases to identify areas of accountability and transparency that need improvement. We can do more to publicize our efforts and successes so that international experts' subjective judgments better match what is actually happening on the ground. We can also constructively engage with TI and domestic civil society groups to assist us in our efforts.

Again, the CPI has significant problems, and I share many of the frustrations that my colleagues and associates express about it. However, we need to recognize that the reason that so many African countries score poorly on an index that measures perceptions of corruption is that many African countries are, in fact, perceived as corrupt. And while those perceptions may be inaccurate or even biased, we cannot deny that the corruption problems in Africa are real. Railing against the CPI's methodology will not change the negative picture it continues to create of African countries. Instead, we should take the yearly release of the index as an opportunity to remind ourselves of the persistence of corruption on the Continent and the need to take more robust steps to reverse its grip on countries' development.

*Francis Ben Kaifala is the Anti-corruption Commissioner of the Republic of Sierra Leone; former Board Member, African Union Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC); former President, Network of Anti-Corruption Institutions in West Africa (NACIWA)



CAIRO, EGYPT
APRIL 19-27



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MAY 4-12



KIGALI, RWANDA
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PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA
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Benin : The Heartfelt Cry Of A Political Prisoner Whose Rights Are Trampled On Even In The Jails.

By Reckya Madougou*

In what state of law is a prisoner forbidden to telephone even his children and his attending physician when he is unwell, and regardless of the law? This is what I alone have to endure at Misséréké prison.

I'm carrying my cross and I'll outlive you, thank God, whatever torments and humiliations you inflict on me. The ordeal I endure day after day is nameless, in defiance of the request for my release by the UN Working Group, which declared my detention to be triply arbitrary. The real «witchcraft» is to forcefully detain opponents, deprive them of their fundamental rights and do everything possible to muzzle them so that they are forgotten and abandoned. It's a lost cause. You'll hear from us. Notwithstanding the ostracism to which I myself am subjected. No injustice is meant to be hidden under a bushel for long.

I've heard from those close to me all the untruths alleged by the authorities, who contradict each other on the torturous and discriminatory management of my prison life. And this has been the case for the last three years. My silence at a given moment was hardly consent, but a personal option in line with my self-imposed spiritual journey. However, there are times when the abuse of oppression calls for protest out of an instinct for survival.

I know, from the evidence I've accumulated over the years, that a special torture agenda is dedicated to me. The authorities are aware of this, and many well-known and anonymous visitors alike have experienced it. Thus, only the administration of the Akpro-Misséréké Civil Prison (PCAM) has received firm instructions regarding the illegal and ferocious nature of the prison regime imposed on me. Most of the officers who have succeeded one another there are doing their



President Talon has kept Reckya Madougou behind bars in difficult conditions despite the global clamour and outcry for her release. Photo courtesy.

utmost, with a redoubtable zeal, headed by the Director General (DG) of the Benin Prison Agency (APB), Mr François Hounkpè. I shall address him publicly this time, for the sake of history.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Nelson Mandela Rules, the United Nations Convention against Torture and the United Nations Convention against Discrimination against Women are all international legal instruments that enshrine the rights of detainees, but which, Mr. APB CEO, you have deliberately chosen to deny me in order to preserve your position. Incidentally, I'm not begging you for a favor, I'm simply inviting you to carry out your duties in compliance with the provisions of article 35 of our Constitution.

For the past three years, Mr. General Manager, you have been abusively and discriminately violating my basic rights, including the right to telephone my children. All prisoners, even those with blood on their hands,

enjoy these rights on a daily basis. In fact, under the sordid apartheid regime, the most famous prisoner in modern history, Mandela, was able to use the telephone booths in the Robben Island prison fortress.

I still remember the day before the «brevet des collèges» exam in June 2023. Although within my rights, I begged your staff to allow me to make a call to my son to tell him how much I love him and to advise him to be mentally strong to face this turning point in his studies, as every parent does to his offspring as school exams approach. I suggested to my jailers that they be present during the call to follow the conversation if they wished. Distressed, your people reassured me that this time I would win my case, even alleging that you were present in the prison and that the Minister of Justice, Detchénou, had also been informed and would soon give us a supposedly favorable response. Oh nay! It was all a bluff. I was wrong to believe in any humanism on your part. But I let it slide again. I shouldn't

have, because any bullying that goes unreported is a breeding ground for more dramatic excesses.

I don't need to remind you of all the lies you've told here and the embarrassment you've caused by your own arguments. You've gone so far as to make me believe that my inability to access the telephone booths is simply a logistical failure that you'll soon fix, even though the phones in question are wireless (mobile). Nonsense...

You also state in your press release that I am receiving a visit from my doctor. But you conveniently omit to point out that, on the one hand, this was obtained after a hard year's struggle and, on the other hand, especially since 2022, when I have experienced various health crises that have led to the prescription of a battery of examinations by specialists who have examined me, your successive managers have never extracted me to go and do them. Their motives vary according to the day and their mood. Sometimes, the



A judge on Reckya Madougou's case fled to France, condemning the charges as "phony," "tragic" and "entirely politically motivated."

President of the Republic wouldn't have authorized it (this is the most frequent reason given to me in these terms: «Madam, please understand that your case is managed directly from the palace, there's nothing we can do about it»); sometimes their hierarchy (you, the DG) refused to allow me to go and carry out my various examinations and X-rays in hospitals, as all prisoners have access to. Or maybe it was the Special Public Prosecutor (PS) who wouldn't allow it. Such deception!

I'll spare you the episode of my crisis in 2021, but since 2022, when every night is an atrocity that I'm constantly exposing to the prison administration, the stewards, the PS and the Ministers of Justice, how many letters have my advisors and I sent? It's only in these first days of April 2024, more than two years later, that I'm allowed to take my exams. At least partially. A new request had to be submitted to the PS, which had previously received several letters on the same issue. Such peregrinations and dilatory tactics, even when it comes to health issues!

Yet every day, my fellow inmates visit public and private health centers, some several times a week. In two years, anything could have happened to me, since my doctor's recent consultation clearly mentions

the serious risks involved. MORE THAN TWO YEARS to obtain a simple authorization to carry out medical examinations in hospitals on the national territory.

And to top it all off, despite the resurgence of my pain, confirmed by the X-ray, I'm forbidden to telephone my personal physician to pass on the results of the tests carried out and discuss the identified pathology with him, pending his next trip to Benin. Yet none of you are unaware that the law gives me the right to do so, and that other prisoners benefit from it. Better still, health is a matter of confidentiality, security and trust.

Nor does my right to information and leisure activities for my mental equilibrium escape the indictment of my deprivations. It's impossible to have a simple radio, as the other inmates each have their own, when your name is Reckya Madougou. In a prison where individual air-conditioning units, refrigerators, freezers, TV sets with access to international channels, microwave ovens, video game consoles... are legion among the privileged, as international NGOs passing through have noted. I won't go into further detail, as you won't be restoring justice in my favor, but rather simulating a dispossession of the people concerned, who

won't take a month to reintroduce the aforementioned household appliances into their homes. And it's their right to enjoy them. This is the circus you indulge in every time your double standards are denounced. I'm the beast you're trying to stun at any cost. But «He who is in me is stronger than he who is in the world».

As regards the news of Wednesday March 29, for ages visitors of all kinds have been scouring Benin's prisons, from north to south, meeting inmates, including political ones. They don't need a permit to visit. The same visitors, civilians as well as politicians, who are common acquaintances of the political detainees spread across Benin's prisons, have never presented any kind of visiting permit before gaining access to other detainees, and they are surprised every time that only Reckya Madougou is not accessible to them, sometimes even thinking it's a whim on my part.

Mr. DG, taking you at your word, since February 2023 when you miraculously unearthed, from the rubble of our country's revolutionary prehistory, the condition of a visitation permit for me, many members of my biological and political family, friends and relatives have written to the PS in order to obtain this sesame, without success.

You're forcing us to go through a series of trials and tribulations that are never followed up!

But what cynicism! Contrary to the allegations made, many members of my family and VIPs who came individually to Misséréte were prevented from seeing me. It's not just my group visitors who have been turned away. The Honorable Nourenou Atchadé, former minister Alassane Tigri, former minister Galiou Soglo, individual Les Démocrates deputies, and many anonymous people sympathetic to my grief all sought to see me individually. All were systematically turned away at the gate.

Mr. DG, it would seem that your mission, apart from making me suffer, is to find some non-existent legal basis for it. How else can you understand, according to what I've been told by the press, that the Special Prosecutor explains that I can receive my ungrouped visitors without obstruction - for some strange reason of Covid measures being maintained - and you, on your side, add a regulatory provision dating back to 1973 that the Constitutional Court declared contrary to the Constitution in 2023? And you're always letting me know that it's the PS that sets the rules for my detention; conditions that are just as alienating.

«Last but not least, last year you crossed the rubicon by banning all my lawyers from the prison. One of the wardens in charge at the time, a torturer in his own right, even justified this measure with a ridiculous argument out of nowhere: «you've already been convicted, haven't you?» Which is, of course, a denial of the code of criminal procedure, very distressing for an officer in charge of running a prison.

I have had the honor of being Keeper of the Seals, Minister of Justice. I have never instructed any prosecutor, magistrate or prison official to deprive anyone of their rights, whatever the charges brought against them. On the contrary, in the course of my duties, I have always devoted my energies to ensuring that the necessary distance is maintained

to ensure that justice is always done, without regard to the interests of the position I held. My friend and former colleague, the Garde des Sceaux Victor Topanou, has testified to this several times in certain circles. He and I were confronted with a case in government, where I stood my ground, despite the consequences I was potentially exposing myself to.

For a long time, my councils and I have been silent about numerous exactions because, Mr. DG APB, you have this annoying tendency to let injustice appear to be corrected by extending it rather momentarily, as I had to point out earlier. Each time

your iniquities are revealed in the public arena, instead of correcting them by being fair, you identify scapegoats to divert attention from my flagrant case.

This is just a sample of the torment I endure at your hands. Surely, to remain silent would be to be complicit in my own destruction.

My Lieutenant-Colonel François Hounkpè, promoted to this honorable rank in 2023 for good and loyal abuse, I leave these traces for posterity, for your children, mine and the children of Benin in general. The role of administering degrading treatment that you accept should no longer be

possible in our country since 1990. I denounce it so that no one suffers it tomorrow, not even those who subject me to it today.

You, your sponsors and accomplices will be held personally responsible for anything that may happen to my physical and mental integrity.

«Even in the tomb Jesus is Lord. My soul blesses Him abundantly. So focus on the hope that Easter brings, a message of resurrection, love and peace for all! Happy Easter to those of you who still have the chance to enjoy your rights.

Reckya Madougou
#ArbitraryDetention

#DiscriminationPrisonsBenin
#AllExpire
#LovingUsLiving

* Reckya Madougou (born 30 April 1974) is a Beninese politician. She served in the Boni Yayi cabinet twice: first as Minister of Microfinance, Youth and Women's Employment; and then as Minister of Justice. She is currently serving a jail sentence on what many see as politically motivated reasons. The country's leadership has refused to heed to calls from the international community and Institutions for her release.



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Forging Mozambique's Future: Overcoming Challenges with Strategic Vision

Following the 2024 elections, Mozambique's incoming administration needs to break away from exploitative capitalism, embrace resilience and leverage natural resources for sustainable development.

By Florival Mucave

In the coming weeks, the Mozambican Ruling Frelimo Party will convene the Party Cadres' Garden to select the next generation of leadership which are set to form the nucleus of Mozambique's post-2024 elections. Whilst embarking on such a complex exercise, the party is reminded of the paramount importance of maintaining focus on the ideals of the liberation struggle and the core principles of independence. This includes the ongoing commitment to nation-building and the creation of a truly unified and inclusive Mozambique, where no individual is marginalized based on gender, race or religious beliefs.

Appointing the Next Generation of Leadership

The choice of the post-Filipe Nyuse's Frelimo and Mozambican leadership cannot be a fluke or a stroke of luck, but rather, it must be a historically appointed confluence of events which can best be described as a political 'force majeure.' Under this doctrine of historical necessity, it is presumed that current President Nyuse will be a catalyst in passing the Mozambique's political leadership baton into the safe hands of a reputable, patriotic, inclusive, committed and hard-working Mozambican, who would in turn continue building on the foundations of our forefathers - our liberation heroes. Therefore, the post-October 2024 Mozambican leadership is tasked to reverse the current socioeconomic situation, and pass the Mozambican economic and developmental torch on to future generations.

It is crucial that the next administration fully grasps the context of the country's present and future direction as informed by its long-suffering past. The bearer of the revolutionary, economic and developmental torch would be



Florival Mucave is an Oil & Gas expert, Chairman of Mwendo Engineering SA, Chairman of Mozambican Energy Chamber.

doomed to fail unless he is willing to candidly confront the totality of the great achievements and gross errors of his predecessors. The lack of collective introspection would result in the upcoming leadership committing senseless mistakes based on a narrow interpretation of the Mozambican socio-political and economic landscape.

Confronting the Challenges of the Past

Mozambique's history is marked by conflict. In most cities and villages, Mozambican families will testify that they have lost a brother, sister, mother, father or cousin during ravaging wars. These include the war for independence (1964-1975), followed by the 16 year-civil war (1976-1982) - instigated and financed by the Rhodesian and Apartheid Regimes before the Peace Agreements of 1992 - and thereafter, the faceless insurgency in Cabo Delgado Province. It is against this historical backdrop that a new leadership will be appointed in 2024. This administration will inherit the historical legacy of our forefathers and liberation heroes such

as Eduardo Mondlane and Samora Machel. Concurrently, they have the unenviable task of Nelson Mandela, Deng Xiaoping, Lee Kwan Yew, Lula da Silva, to mention a few, who against all odds, succeeded in transforming their countries into tangible service delivery and economic benefits.

The incoming leadership will inherit a country grappling with bureaucracy and corruption, following years of disappointing governance. They will be seen as the stewards of nation-building, entrusted with fostering unity and a shared national vision. Additionally, they must address divisive forces such as tribalism, ethnicity, racism, and personality cults. After 49 years of trial and error, Mozambicans expect an enlightened leadership, that creates the foundations for sustainable peace and democracy, demonstrating unquestionable commitment to the country's socioeconomic development, providing unified views while prioritizing education, job creation, an overhaul of the health system, business opportunities and other basic services to all Mozambicans.

Leveraging a Management-by-Objective Approach

The incoming leader faces a monumental task akin to conducting an orchestra. They must select the most qualified individuals to join their team, especially given the rising cost of living and alarming youth unemployment rates. This approach requires a management-by-objective mindset, with ministers demonstrating integrity, technical expertise, and resourcefulness to innovate in response to unforeseen challenges. The incoming leader and their administration must not continue with the current management style. It is crucial to address the issues of apathy, corruption, and nepotism within the civil service, as well as to streamline processes to attract much-needed Foreign Direct Investment.

Mozambique must break away from a failed doctrine of exploitative capitalism, including narco-capitalism and deceptive businessmen, which have eroded self-esteem and forced reliance on international aid. The transition to a new generation of patriotic and capable Mozambicans should eliminate oppressive dogmas, allowing for initiative, creativity, and entrepreneurship regardless of background.

As Mozambicans, we rightfully believe that our resilience, shown in overcoming colonialism and the Cold War, will help us tackle poverty and corruption. With abundant natural resources, Mozambique requires a strategic vision to leverage these assets and avoid perpetual indebtedness.

It has been 49 years since independence, and 49 years of a dream deferred.

*Florival Mucave is an Oil & Gas expert, Chairman of Mwendo Engineering SA, Chairman of Mozambican Energy Chamber



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BOOK REVIEW:

Title: **Protecting minority language rights/ protéger les droits des langues minoritaires**

AUTHOR OF THE BOOK:

GEORGE NGWANE

NATURE: **BILINGUAL**

(ENGLISH/FRENCH) TEXT

PUBLISHER: SPEARS BOOKS,
Denver, Colorado, United States of
America

YEAR OF PUBLICATION: **2023**

NUMBER OF CHAPTERS: **FIVE**

NUMBER OF PAGES: **157**

REVIEWER: **NGOME ELVIS
NKOME (Ph.D.)***

Synopsis of the Book

This is another seminal piece of work by an erudite scholar, writer, Advocate, Pan-Africanist, Mwalimu George Ngwane on a contemporary issue that straddles academic and professional disciplines such as law, ethnology, linguistics, literature, human rights, heritage studies, and languages. The author has demonstrated his unmatched knowledge and knitted experiences of identity, cultural heritage and minority intricacies in the world. His book entitled *Protecting Minority Language Rights* is not only timely but actually gives readers an insight into the origins, manifestations, frustrations and socio-linguistic rationale for protecting minority language rights in the world.

As a key promoter of Cameroon's indigenous cultural and heritage rights, the author understands so well the pitfalls of national 'unconsciousness' in undermining official language rights, in a multi-cultural setting like ours. The author's work is timely, problem-solving and scientifically relevant to academics, policy makers, human rights activists and other professional bodies. The author breaks new grounds in this area of research in which many with myopic views have paid little attention to issues of minority language rights which have the potentials of creating low level conflicts at national level. Few books have previously attempted



Another seminal piece of work by an erudite scholar, writer, Advocate, Pan-Africanist, Mwalimu George Ngwane on a contemporary issue with big ramifications.

to present such a detailed and concise account on language rights in Cameroon with alacrity.

Chapter by Chapter Review Approach

The book is laid out in five chapters excluding the preliminary pages and the end matter. The opening chapter of the book, captioned *Minority language rights as human rights: the global perspective*, departs from

a global discursive linguistico-legal frame of analysis. It examines with attention the rationale principles which assert that language rights are tantamount to inalienable human rights and questions the place of minority languages from a rightist positivist global human right perspective in lieu of existing UN Treaties, Conventions and all other international legal instruments.

Quoting an authority— Rita Izsak-Ndiaye (Former UN Special Rapporteur) on minority issues, inter alia “language rights and linguistic rights are human rights that have an impact on language use, of state authorities, individuals and other entities...” Rita Ndiaye further states as a series of obligations on state authorities to either use certain



Ngwane is a terse researcher, policy Advocate and pan-Africanist who has emerged as one of the most prolific writers and dependable voices in Cameroon's literary, peace, and cultural studies.

languages in a number of contexts, or not interfere with the linguistic choices and expressions of private parties" (pp.1-3). Ngwane highlights key human right mechanisms or treaties on the rights of linguistic minorities that states have been called upon to promote and protect.

Concretely, he cites the following national and international language rights instruments: the various UN Human Rights treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review, the Forum on Minority Issues, the Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and the Durban Follow-Up Mechanisms. In addition, regional human rights mechanisms, government, national human rights institutions have taken measures towards promoting the rights of minorities at national and regional levels.

instruments are further espoused in Chapter One citing UN Gen. Assembly Resolution 47/135 as well as key principles including equality and non-discrimination as contained in specific legislative texts and articles dealing with Cultural Rights such as Articles 1-4 (1); 5 (1) as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of December 16, 1966 by UN Resolution 2200A (XXI). The Chapter also examines several articulations, pronouncements, texts, and legal frame works on minority language rights from a global point of view. This set the pace for subsequent discussions in the succeeding chapters of the book.

In Chapter Two, titled 'Minority Language Rights as Human Rights: From the African Perspective' the author situates his audience within the unfolding concept of minority

language rights as perceived by continental human right agencies, bodies or institutions in Africa. Among other things, the author contends that language rights and in the context of many African countries, poses a charade as indigenous languages in most African countries have hardly received the needed legal linguistic protection and promotion. In comparative terms, colonial languages in Africa especially English and French are regarded as 'national' or 'international' languages. The author raises the argument that these languages are indeed minority languages because they are spoken only by a marginal fraction of the population.

The author presents the Cameroon experience as a befitting illustration of a multi-ethnic nation with over 250 ethnic groups with more than 250 languages. Sadly, none of the

local languages in Cameroon has been aligned with any of the official languages (French or English). Meanwhile, in other African countries their indigenous languages enjoy the same status as their inherited colonial languages. In fact, the author devotes some pages to catalogue some countries in Africa which have adopted one or more indigenous languages which are aligned with national or official languages. Some of these countries include Setswana in Botswana, Amharic in Ethiopia; Kiswahili in Kenya, DRC and Tanzania; Sotho in Lesotho; Malagasy in Madagascar; Chichewa; Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba in Nigeria. The situation is preoccupying in the sense that many countries in Africa like Cameroon, Gabon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Benin, etc have not placed any of their indigenous languages on the same pedestal as their foreign languages. It is within this line of thought that the case of Cameroon could be analyzed and therefore explains why the colonial languages still dominate national life, diplomatic and the media space. By showing examples of countries that have adopted local languages in their political and diplomatic life, the author re-echoes the need for African countries including Cameroon to valorize their minority languages (colonial or indigenous and treat them as human rights issues. Finally, the author raises the vacuum created by regional, national and local legislatures on the protection and promotion of local languages even if Articles 60 to 61 of African Commission for Human and Peoples Rights provide some relief. He concludes by proposing that Africa needs to adopt a dominant language for the entire continent and encourages each country to establish a co-official language alongside one colonial language and the other, indigenous.

Chapter Three is case-specific and it takes up the evolution of language standards in Cameroon leading to the creation of the first-ever language Commission. Using texts, treaties and other legal documents, the author expertly

evokes the historical metamorphosis of language standards in modern day Cameroon and examines how these laws have had an indelible impact on protecting minority language rights in the country. In terms of linguistic rights, English language has minority language status, while French language became the official majority language right after independence. Other scholars that he cites allude to the fact that it is because of her complex colonial past that no indigenous language has been selected in post-colonial Cameroon as official minority or even co-official language.

It has been asserted that Cameroon adopted a neutral policy in dealing language issues to avoid unbridled national language conflict. While the author recognizes the efforts made by the government to address issues of minority language he also presents the struggle and advocacy that the minority language community has gone through in order to give the English language the same service delivery and visibility as the French language.

In chapter Four, the author, examines 'Minority Language Rights as Human Rights: The Role of Language bodies or Institutions.' Among other things, he sheds light as to why language right bodies are created and investigates their textual nomenclature and the scope that reinforces them. Beyond Cameroon, language bodies are known variously as Commission, Commissioner and Ombudsman and their objective is to fill the gap that right groups had been advocating for. Admittedly, the author reveals that language bodies have as objective to preserve the rights of linguistic minority by monitoring the quality of the public service

provided to them. However, language bodies also differ in their political and legislative contexts as well as other facets of their mission. Yet, there are some peculiarities with each language body which differ markedly – they operate under different legal regimes: parliamentary, semi-presidential or presidential systems. The author proffers a pedagogic synthesis of how countries with weak or non-existing language bodies could emulate the examples of renowned language bodies, their modus operandi, methods, mission and how these language commissions or commissioners may be transformed from mere advisory structures to disciplinary instruments with power to sanction. It is against this background that Cameroon's National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism stands to benefit from the expertise of the author in reshaping, training and retraining of professionals and stakeholders in Cameroon. It must be mentioned here that the author's broad and rich experiences in minority language subject which he acquired at various reputed learned societies and institutions abroad notably: the Cardiff –Wales, Commonwealth, Professional Fellowship at the Minority Rights Group International, London and a host of others could benefit the country in many ways to reform, redefine and preserve minority language rights in the country especially with regards to strengthening the Multicultural and Bilingualism Commission of which he is a member.

Lastly, chapter Five focuses on Minority language rights as human rights and questions what roles language bodies or institutions can play in enforcing the laws,

standards, or policies that these bodies or institutions are called upon to implement. The chapter is a technical continuation of the previous one and opens with a rhetorical question: "Are all these international and national legal instruments related to minority language rights concrete legal documents or mere political statements?" The author continues with mind intriguing puzzles, amongst others, 'do language bodies have the enforceable legal and regulatory instruments or provisions to penalize or persecute the non-compliance of language policy or standard towards minority language? Can routine sensitizations alone on the respect of language policy raise enough permanent awareness on and consistent compliance with minority language rights?"

Obviously, these questions and others are an eye-opener to language, heritage and members of language bodies on several fronts. The questions offer insights into how best established and nascent language bodies could better articulate favorable socio-linguistic and legal frameworks that enhance the nexus between minority language rights and human rights. The chapter highlights the challenges, weaknesses and efforts made by institutions, human rights agencies and other language bodies on improving minority language rights through proactive and environmentally friendly laws. The chapter recapitulates some salient proposals from a contextual perspective that the various shades of language bodies could take on board. Some of these include policies such as sanction, visibility, language standardization through the publication of posters, handouts, flyers, plaques and much more. In a

nutshell, the chapter has espoused where the actual challenges lay and how these challenges could be mitigated through emulating best practices, reforming old ones and introducing new ones and making them more resilient and adaptable to the exigencies of each country with minority language rights violation.

Conclusion:

This reviewer highly recommends Mwalimu George. Ngwane's book. It is expertly written with rare case-studies of minority language right violations, it raises thought-provoking questions, proposes helpful suggestions, and recommendations that would greatly impact language bodies and instruments globally. Indeed Ngwane's PROTECTING MINORITY LANGUAGE RIGHTS, undoubtedly unpacks the intricacies surrounding language rights, language bodies, and their diachronic and para-linguistic-legal frames. This book is recommended to human right activists, cultural promoters, historian, jurists, linguists and language commissions. Ngwane is a terse researcher, policy Advocate and pan-Africanist who has established himself through his works as one of the most prolific writers and dependable voices in Cameroon's literary, peace, and cultural studies. I am optimistic this book would satisfy the demands of all those who have the opportunity and privilege of buying and reading it.

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RESERVE YOUR SEAT

Intra-Africa Migration On The Rise But The Continent Needs Better Policies- AU Report

By Jean-Pierre Afadhali



Ambassador Minata Samate Cessouma, AUC Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs, and Social Development.

Contrary to the predominant narrative, migration within Africa has remained higher than outside the continent due to climate change, political instability, economic disparities, revealed a new report jointly released by the African Union Commission and the International Organisation Migration.

The second edition of the Africa Migration report states the prolonged drought in the Horn of Africa and severe seasonal flooding across the continent led to record internal displacements in 2022, adding to the fact that many African countries experienced conflict and climate events at the same time.

Speaking during the report launch, Ambassador Minata Samate Cessouma, AUC Commissioner for

Health, Humanitarian Affairs, and Social Development said: "We convene today to launch the Africa Migration Report, 2nd Edition, joint initiative between the AU and IOM aimed at preserving historical perspectives, portraying the right narrative on African migration. While informing policy frameworks to support migration and human mobility on the Continent."

The latest report assesses countries' migration policies, highlights gaps, achievements, to facilitate migration within the continent.

According to the Africa migration report, climate change governance, particularly at the international level, has been key for African countries to advance the integration of human mobility in the global policy debates on environmental degradation and

disasters.

Climate change increases migration

The study's authors explore the challenge of the climate crisis and how it is transforming human mobility.

Arid and semi-arid areas cover large swathes of the continent. The report says in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad, the nexus between climate change, conflict and migration is becoming a growing concern.

"The rate of climate-induced human mobility – caused by events such as floods, droughts and rising tides – is increasing, which exacerbates life outcomes for about 250 million people who rely and depend on rain-fed and climate-sensitive agriculture," reveals the report.

The study also notes restrictive

measures at borders and restrictive national laws cause migrants to use unsafe and risky routes.

"Internationally, the focus on deaths in the Mediterranean Sea has resulted from European governments' migration policies and their insensitivity to the histories of African human mobility," notes the second report on migration.

The study, says one third of African countries assessed have adopted a strategy to address migration that is linked to environmental degradation and the adverse effects of climate change.

Four out of ten of these countries have also established an interministerial coordination mechanism on migration, showing efforts towards stronger institutional mechanisms, says the report.



Robust policy

The report argues that Africa has a robust policy context, especially at the continental level. But authors emphasize all these policies must align with regional and national policies.

“A better policy regime around migration in Africa can only be enhanced by a deeper understanding of how policy is made and disseminated to manage mobility, and how it interacts with the long history of human mobility and the aspirations of the people.”

While Africa is home to some of the most promising developments in regional cooperation and collaboration, including the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, it is also home to some of the most intricate contemporary patterns of human mobility, states the migration report.

Experts warn, there is no single

solution that can address “these layers of complexity”, and it is crucial for policymakers to have a clear sense of the nature of the challenge in order to properly respond to it.

“The hardest but concomitantly most delicate task will be to fully understand and then manage mobility in ways that are just, inclusive and that place the welfare of the African person front and centre,” suggests the report authors in a chapter on migration governance.

The latest report encourages states to collaborate with non-State partners, including diaspora organizations, employers, civil society organizations and the private sector. This will promote integration.

For instance, in East Africa, the Kenyan Government collaborates with the International Rescue Committee and the IKEA Foundation to support business opportunities for migrants in Nairobi.

“Such non-State actors contribute to migration governance in various ways, but Migration Governance Index (MGI) data show that only 20 percent of African countries assessed formally engage with the private sector and social partners in setting agendas and implementing migration-related initiatives. This figure is lower than the global average (29 percent).

Gender influences migration

Additionally, gender shapes migration experiences, as do other characteristics of migrants such as age and nationality. Data show that 22 per cent of the African countries considered in this analysis have a gender-responsive national migration strategy in place, that is, a strategy that considers differences between gender groups and promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women.

This is slightly higher than for Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) countries globally (19 percent). While gender-responsive strategies are absent in the countries considered in Central Africa and in North Africa, they are present in 45 per cent of the countries considered in West Africa. For example, in Cabo Verde, the National Strategy for Immigration (2012) calls for mainstream gender throughout the policy cycle, and the second National Plan of Action on Immigration and the Social Inclusion of Immigrants (2018–2020) includes a section on immigration and gender.

The new report urges countries to counteract racism, xenophobia, discrimination against all migrants, particularly labour migrants, some key factors that hinder intra-Africa migration.



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The Community

- We provide training, mentorship, networking and investment opportunities
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Rwanda-Victims Remembered As Genocide Clocks 30 Years

By Prince Kurupati



President Kagame lights the Rwandan genocide flame of hope, in commemoration of the 1994 genocide at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre in Kigali, Rwanda on April 7, 2024. Photo credit Reuters.

In 2024, Rwanda is regarded as one of the fastest rising economies. In a continent which is riddled with all sorts of socio-political upheavals, Rwanda under the leadership of Paul Kagame is an emblem of stability. Things however weren't as smooth sailing as they are now 30 years ago. Three decades ago, Rwanda drew international headlines for all the wrong reasons. For a crazy 100-day period, nearly a million Rwandan nationals lost their lives while an approximate two million more were displaced from their homes and lost their livelihoods owing to an ethnic cleansing also known as the Rwandan Genocide.

The 1994 genocide is no doubt a huge dent in Rwanda's history but the country over the years has done an immense nation building job. As a way of further fostering unity in the country hence preventing any smoulders that may reignite ethnic divisions and tensions, Rwanda has prioritised keeping the memories of the 1994 genocide fresh in the hearts and minds of everyone. In so doing, the nation also remembers all those

who paid the ultimate price.

To commemorate 30 years of the Rwandan genocide, the country promulgated a sombre commemoration week which began on April 7. During this week, a series of memorial events will be held across the country and beyond the country's borders. All memorial events run under the theme 'Remember-United-Renew' – Kwibuka30. Among the memorial events to be held is a remembrance walk and a night vigil to honour the victims and survivors both of which are fronted by the country's President.

In addition, President Kagame at the start of the commemoration week ignited a flame of remembrance at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre that will burn for the next 100 days in honour of the victims. The Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre is one of Rwanda's four memorial sites.

As he lit the Flame of Remembrance, President Kagame said the genocide victims should be remembered till the end of time and the survivors should be thanked for graciously carrying the burden of

reconciliation. "Today, our hearts are filled with grief and gratitude in equal measure. We remember our dead and are also grateful for what Rwanda has become... To the survivors among us, we are in your debt. We asked you to do the impossible by carrying the burden of reconciliation on your shoulders. And you continue to do the impossible for our nation, every single day, ad we thank you," he said.

President Kagame in his official address at the start of the commemoration week at the BK Arena described the journey that Rwanda has undertaken from the aftermath of the genocide till today and illustrated the key lessons that the country has learnt. "Our journey has been long and tough, Rwanda was completely humbled by the magnitude of our loss, and the lessons we learned are engraved in blood. But the tremendous progress of our country is plain to see, and it is the result of the choices we made together to resurrect our nation.

The foundation of everything is unity. That was the first choice; to believe in the idea of a reunited

Rwanda, and live accordingly. The second choice was to reverse the arrow of accountability, which used to point outwards, beyond our borders. Now, we are accountable to each other, above all," President Kagame said.

The president also took time to explain how he was personally affected by the genocide, recounting the loss of a close family member. He lamented how at the time the international community chose to turn a blind ear to the calls of hundreds of thousands who were facing the guillotine simply for being of a certain ethnic group saying "It was the international community which failed all of us, whether from contempt or cowardice." U.S. President at the time of the Rwandan genocide Bill Clinton who was in Kigali at the 30-year sombre commemorations said the Rwandan genocide was his administration's biggest failure while current French President Emmanuel Macron said the Rwandan genocide could have been prevented if the international community had the will to stop it.

Several high-profile world leaders travelled to Rwanda for the 30-year Rwanda genocide commemorations. Among these are the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, the Commonwealth Secretary General, former US President Bill Clinton, and former South African President Thabo Mbeki. All these leaders joined the Rwandan President in laying wreaths at the Nyamata Memorial Church, where one of the worst massacres took place.

Speaking emotionally after laying her wreath, the Commonwealth Secretary General Rt Hon Patricia Scotland said, "After 30 years, how can I be so profoundly shocked by the inhumanity of the genocide? The searing pain I experienced as I looked upon the remains of the 10,000 killed in one day and the 45,000 who are buried in the mass grave at the site of

the old church is almost unbearable. To have recovered from such a grievous injury to the soul of a nation is miraculous. Rwanda is that miracle and it enables us to believe that with enough love and forgiveness the human spirit can rise and overcome anything.”

Former Czech diplomat Karel Kovanda who was the first UN ambassador to describe the events of 1994 a genocide said the victims of the massacres should never be forgotten. “The page cannot be turned (but never should) the genocide slip into oblivion,” Kovanda said. The President of the European Council Charles Michel speaking at the commemorations in Kigali said, “On this land of a thousand hills, the absolute horror struck. The choice of forgiveness and reconciliation, however, made it possible to repair the social fabric.”

The UN human rights chief



Former US President Bill Clinton and South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa were among the high-profile guests in Rwanda for the 30th anniversary of the genocide. Photo courtesy AP.

Volker Turk urged the international community to step up efforts of apprehending perpetrators of the genocide who may be harbouring in their countries so they can be tried.

Turk said, “I urge states everywhere

to redouble their efforts to bring all surviving suspected perpetrators to justice – including through universal jurisdiction – and to combat hate speech and incitement to commit genocide.”

The United States President in a statement said, “We will never forget the horrors of those 100 days, the pain and loss suffered by the people of Rwanda, or the shared humanity that connects us all, which hate can never overcome.”

Commenting on the future, President Kagame said not again will there be a genocide in Rwanda. He said they know the causes of a genocide and as such, will never allow for another genocide to claim more lives. “Genocide is populism in its pure form, because the causes are political the remedies must be as well. For that reason, our politics are not organised on the basis of ethnicity or religion and never will be again... Our people will never be left for dead again,” he said. Today, Rwandan national identity documents (IDs) do not mention if a person is Hutu or Tutsi.

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger: Matters Arising

By Kestér Kenn Klomegah

In this insightful interview, Professor Sergiu Mișcoiu at the Faculty of European Studies, Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca (Romania), where he serves as a Director of the Centre for International Cooperation and as Director of the Centre for African Studies, discusses the political situation in the French-speaking West African countries, the existing multiple challenges and Russia's diplomacy within the context of current geopolitical changes and the scramble for influence in Africa. Here are the interview excerpts:

To begin with, what are your arguments that Russia supports military coup makers (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger et cetera) in Africa?

The logic behind backing the coups is quite evident and relates to the strategy of Russia to fight against the West and to (re)entrench itself in Africa. As the former presidents of the three countries have been supported by the United States, by the European Union, and above all, by France, the only strategic option of a Russian



Professor Sergiu Mișcoiu at the Faculty of European Studies.

reemerging empire opposing the West was to back all the anti-Western forces wherever they might act and whoever they would be.

Since the late 2000s, Russia has been increasingly preoccupied with preparing the ground for anti-Western operations. the progressive

entrenchment of the Kremlin-guided paramilitary groups (starting with the infamously Groupe Wagner) in the Central African Republic, then in Mali and to a lesser extent in other parts of Central and Western Africa, has only been the visible peak of the iceberg. More effective

were the troll farms populating the sub-continent with pro-Russian influencers and deploying campaigns of disinformation, which targeted especially the French and UN contingents deployed to fight the jihadist groups. These campaigns contributed in turning the public



Russian President Vladimir Putin with African leaders at the second Russia-Africa summit in Saint Petersburg .Photo credit Reuters.

opinions of those states against the West and more importantly against their presidents, who were denounced as being the “Occident’s puppets”.

While the operations of the coups themselves were most probably not directly coordinated by Russia, the attitude of the national military forces and of the mass of demonstrators who backed the coups was definitely shaped by Russia. The fact that the new juntas in power immediately made declarations and gestures (such as state visits) of rapprochement towards Russia testifies once more of a mechanical convergence of interests between the new strongmen in Bamako, Ouagadougou and Niamey, to which Russia has abundantly contributed over the last decade.

As it explicitly shows, Russia is seemingly interested in military governance in Africa. Does that set the precedence for future military take-overs in Africa?

The outcome of the coups in the three Sahelian states encouraged Russia in pursuing its strategy in other African countries. Nonetheless, the dismantlement of the Wagner

Group and the difficult reorganization of its remaining elements made the Kremlin’s task more difficult, as some axes of penetration into the decision-making and military milieus of the African countries have been strongly shaken, although the new high responsible for the operations, Vladimir Alexeyev, makes substantive efforts to regain control over the remaining networks.

Moreover, the amplitude of the Dimitri Prigozhin’s finally aborted rebellion against the Kremlin raised some questions in the minds of many African political, business and military supporters of Moscow. Among those questions, the most important is the following: If the Russian regime itself was on verge of facing a military attack against its capital, how could it guarantee our support in the eventual case we will try to conduct coups similar to those in the Sahelian countries? Consequently, the other would-be putschists’ enthusiasm in following the Sahelian coups’ path has naturally diminished.

Do transitions from democratic

governance to military governments have any meaning for fighting growing trends of neo-colonialism in Africa?

Neo-colonialism in Africa has been a growing reality after the end of the Cold War and reached a pinnacle by the early 2000s. Then, the combined effects of September 11 and the anti-neocolonial activism of some leaders such as Laurent Gbagbo in the Ivory Coast rebalanced the power relations making the West increasingly dependent of the strategic support of the “friendly” African heads of state.

More salient in the case of the former French colonies, this process could be suggestively described by the transformation of the “Françafrique” into the “Afrique-France”, with Gabon’s historical leader Omar Bongo gaining an unprecedented leverage, going so far as he was able to influence the composition of the French governments of those times. But once again, this page was turned with the world economic crisis of 2008-2011 and with the considerable growth of the jihadist attacks, leading to the destabilization of Mali and to

the risk of generalization over the entire Sahelian region.

The French-led anti-jihadist operations Serval and then Barkhane, deployed in Mali and reshaped later on into an international security task force with a wider focus on Sahel, has implicitly deprived to some extent the democratically elected presidents of Niger, Burkina and Mali of their autonomy in matters related to national security and political strategy. This was seen by many as the ultimate proof of the return to colonialism. As the results of the fight against Islamist terrorism have been increasingly modest, especially after 2019, the contestation of the Western-backed presidents has become widespread at different levels of the society, of the institutions and of the security forces. This explains the popular support for the series of coups perpetrated in the three countries and shows the important potential that anti-neo-colonialism has as a galvanizer of the discontented peoples of Africa.

Despite the above narratives, do you think ECOWAS, the 15-member

regional economic bloc, must be firm with 'Silence-the-Guns' policy adopted several years ago by the African Union?

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was caught in the trap of its transformation from a quasi-economic organization to a semipolitical one. If by the 2010, the policy of sanctions against the illegitimate governments and the direct interventions it operated (like the one in The Gambia against the former president Yahya Jammeh, who refused to leave power after losing the elections in 2017) encountered a relative success, the more recent policies proved inefficacious, culminating with the July 2023 postponed and ultimately cancelled intervention against the putsch in Niger. The legitimacy of ECOWAS has been strongly contested by the new military regimes. At the same, the 'Silence-the-Guns' AU-inspired policy has proved idealist, especially when it comes the conflicts in Sahel that multiplied "under the watch" of the two organizations.

A research report from the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) describes Russia as 'a virtual investor' in Africa, most of its limitless pledges and several bilateral agreements largely aimed at luring (woo-ing) African states and leaders to support its 'special military operation' in neighbouring Ukraine. What are your expert views and arguments here?

Vladimir Putin has intended to restore the mightiness of the Soviet Union, including its influence over the African continent. But unlike the USSR, Russia didn't and doesn't dispose of the financial and logistic resources needed to massively invest in the key-sectors. To compensate its economic debility, the Kremlin inaugurates almost insignificant but ostentatious investment projects and at the same aggressively promotes the anti-Western discourse ("Russia helps, the West takes").

Moreover, it uses the dependence of several African countries of the Russian cereals to "adjust" their positions with regard to the illegal Russian war against Ukraine, especially when it comes to votes taken in the UN General Assembly. A strategy of combination between the Russian para-military presence and massive resource grabbing was applied in the Central African Republic (CAR), where President Faustin-Archange Touadéra saved his seat by relying on a Russian praetorian guard, while in exchange he accepted to formally or informally grant extended rights of exploitation of many gem mines to the companies led by Kremlin-friendly oligarchs, who are the new de facto rulers of the respective mining areas and implicitly of some wider regions in the CAR. Seen as a "laboratory" for the further expansion of this toxic model, the CAR is praised by the Russian military-business elites, who

suffer because of the international sanctions, as an Eldorado, proving once again the particularly aggressive neocolonial strategy that Moscow is implementing while criticizing the West.

In practical terms and compared to China, do you think Russia has made visible impact on the economy and infrastructure development in the continent since the collapse of the Soviet era in 1991?

China has disposed of important financial resources and has been at least between the 1990s and the end of the 2010s incomparably less violent than Russia in spreading its influence all over the African continent. Being led by a regime who spoused the "state capitalist" system, China was capable to use most opportunities provided by the intensive globalization process to extend its presence and to consolidate its soft economic power. And it succeeded in impressing via its investments in the road and railway infrastructures, in ports, in some major public buildings and in other sectors. As compared to China, Russia made almost no difference through its modest investments and bet its entire strategy on this mixture of, on one hand, the renewal of the former USSR networks and the reification of the Soviet past, and on the other, the direct intrusion in the domestic conflicts of the most vulnerable African states.

Can we conclude this discussion with the significance of peace, justice

and strong state institutions (UN SDG 16), what has been achieved over the past few years, the challenges and the way forward in West Africa?

Unfortunately, the SDG 16 is an untouchable horizon for most African states at this stage. The return of the jihadist threat in several regions of the Sahel, Western Sahara, but also Central and Western Africa, with the extension of the operations of various groups affiliated to Al-Qaeda, ISIS or Boko Haram has engendered an important security crisis that crucially affected the stability of the African states.

The series of coup d'états and unconstitutional replacements of the former or acting leaders (in Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger) was a response to the inaptitude of the democratic institutional settings to guarantee the basic rights of the citizens, starting with the rights to live and security. The new geopolitical thick division caused by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine contributed to the aggravation of the security context, especially in terms of food and human security, and deprived many African governments of their capacity to negotiate with multiple actors at different levels, as they are now constrained to pick sides and to act accordingly, like during the Cold War era. If the actual trends continue, I am not optimist at all about the possibility of getting closer to meeting this SDG.



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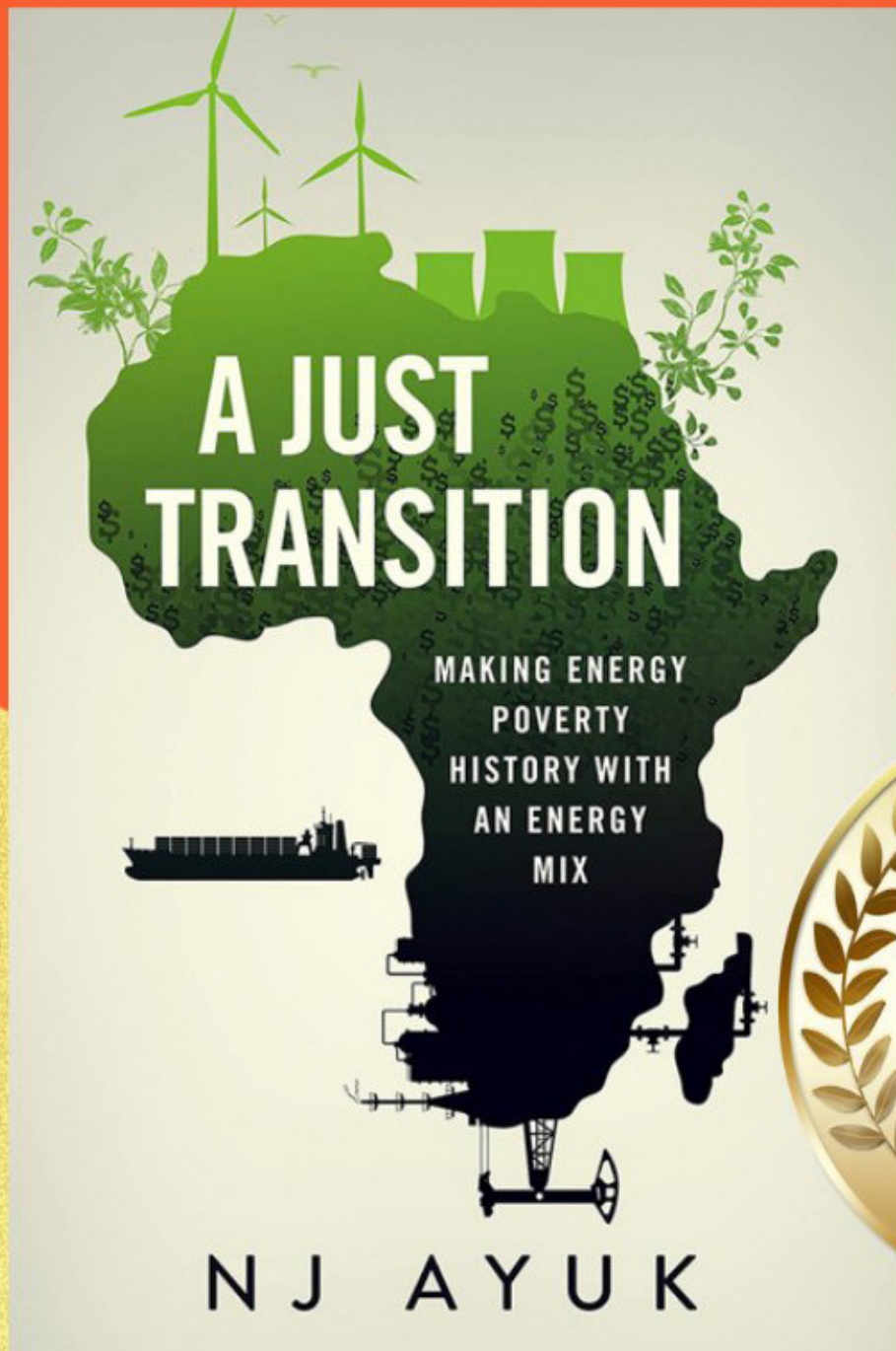
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For Innocent Chukwuma; for Nigeria

By Chido Onumah*

On Tuesday, February 6, 2024, family, friends, and associates gathered at a Virtual Stakeholders' Meeting to mark the one year of operation of the Innocent Chukwuemeka Chukwuma Empowerment Foundation (ICCEF). Founded in April 2022 in honour of Innocent Chukwuemeka Chukwuma, "to continue his impactful work and build on his numerous legacies," ICCEF commenced work in January 2023 with five programme areas: Youth Innovation and Technological Start-ups; Mentoring & Intergenerational Dialogues (Big Brothers & Sisters Project); Community Youth Empowerment & Education; Our Daughters Project; and Legacy Projects.

It was a fitting occasion to remember the man in whose honour ICCEF was named. If Innocent Chukwuemeka Chukwuma were alive, he would have been 58 on Tuesday, February 6, 2024. It has been three years since I got the deeply disturbing call from Prof Chidi Odinkalu, thousands of kilometres away. Three years later, I still remember those terse words, "We may have lost Innocent."

Innocent, the immediate past West African Regional Director of Ford Foundation, was also the Founder of CLEEN Foundation; Network on Police Reforms in Nigeria (NOPRIN) and co-founder of several other organizations and networks. He was a renowned social justice crusader, human rights activist, and one of the leading lights within civil society in Africa, who has been described as "Africa's leading expert on police and law enforcement reform."

Innocent Chukwuemeka Chukwuma was a brother and friend. We were friends for more than three decades until his passing. We share the same birth year and he never stopped talking about how much older he was (with two months between us) and why he would pick kola nut before me in the council of elders. We were both active in the students' movement. We were camp mates at



Innocent Chukwuemeka Chukwuma Empowerment Foundation – ICCEF is a family foundation set up in honor of Innocent Chukwuma to drive his vision of an empowered young generation.

Kashim Ibrahim College of Education during our one-year National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme in Maiduguri, Borno State, where his campaign against poor feeding in the camp led to "punitive" posting to our "Place of Primary Assignment" (PPA). We would reunite in Lagos after our NYSC where he took up a job with Nigeria's foremost civil society organisation, the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) and would go on to found CLEEN Foundation.

I remember and miss Innoma, as I called him. I remember him from our days of student activism; he at the University of Nigeria (UNN) and I at the University of Calabar, where he would seek refuge each time he was in trouble at UNN. I remember the camaraderie, courage and leadership he showed, to his detriment, at the NYSC orientation when those of us who were active in the students' movement became targets of the establishment. We had been admonished to leave our activism at the entrance of the orientation camp.

I remember him from our post-NYSC days in Lagos as young men supporting each other as we tried

to make our marks in our careers. I remember him as the person who saved my doctoral research. Eight years ago, after the publication of the book, *We Are All Biafrans*, and three years into a doctoral programme at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain, I almost gave up because of mental fatigue and lack of funding for a research that spanned two continents (Africa and Europe) and three countries (Nigeria, South Africa, and Spain). Innocent came to my rescue. He not only talked me out of quitting, he facilitated the funding support that enabled me complete my programme three years later.

I miss Innocent with whom I often talked endlessly about the challenges of Nigeria and what to do, shared a good laugh and dinner on many occasions in Abuja or our favourite gizzard any time I was in Lagos and he was available. Each time I remember Innocent, I think of the great Comrades we have lost—Chima Ubani, Emma Ezeazu, Olaitan Oyerinde, Biodun "Revo" Ogunade, Bamidele Aturu, etc.—and the shrinking generation of Nigerian students and youth who were alive

to their historic duty of confronting the brutal dictatorships of Generals Buhari, Babangida and Abacha. It was Frantz Omar Fanon, the Martinique revolutionary and psychiatrist who noted that, "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it."

Innocent was an ideas man who wasn't fazed by any problems, political or otherwise. I wonder what he would make of the current state of Nigeria, a nation at war with itself as seen with the tragic killing of soldiers in the Delta State and the alleged reprisal attacks on civilians by the military, the unmitigated violence by state and non-state actors that has enveloped the country, and the abduction of children whose only crime is the quest for education in a country where our rogue elite have captured the state.

As the nation grieved and concerned Nigerians tried to make sense of the killing of soldiers from the 181 Amphibious Battalion based in Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State by unknown assailants in Okuama community of Ughelli South Local Government Area, which

had been at loggerheads with the Okoloba community of Bomadi Local Government Area in Delta State, on Thursday, March 14, 2024, a Nigerian friend who lives in China reached out, wondering why citizens would “attack their country’s Army, and lay ambush for them.” It is a question that has bothered me since I received the message.

My friend’s solution was to “change the name of our Armed Forces to the Nigerian Defence Forces (NDF) or to the People’s Defence Forces (PDF) Army, the People’s Defence Forces Navy and the People’s Defence Forces Air Force. Something that can give our people the sense or ‘indigeneship’ of our Armed Forces like they have in Botswana that calls their armed forces, Botswana Defence Force (BDF).” What is in a name, we may ask? My friend argued that “lack of patriotism” is the reason citizens would “attack their own country’s

Armed Forces that came to broker peace in their warring communities. The trust building should I think start from change of name...in Europe and in China the people love their Army.”

My friend’s intervention reminds me of the intervention of a former Chief of Army Staff and Minister of Defence. Exactly six years ago, on March 24, 2018, at the maiden convocation ceremony of Taraba State University in the capital city of Jalingo, Gen. Theophilus Aboki Danjuma (retd) called out the Nigerian military in a way that destroyed any shred of integrity or pretense to being a national institution.

Danjuma “accused the Nigerian military of prejudice, urging people to defend themselves, rather than rely entirely on the institution for protection,” in reference to the spate of ethnic killings that had convulsed the northcentral zone of the country. He “charged Nigerians to depend

less on the Armed Forces, which according to him ‘are now biased in their operations.’” He “expressed regret that the institution, which used to be a shield for citizens, irrespective of religion, tribe or political party affiliation, has descended into partisanship.”

Last year, Oby Ezekwesili, a former minister of education, and founder of Fix Politics Initiative, spoke during the second memorial lecture on the death of Innocent Chukwuemeka Chukwuma, which also coincided with the first annual Innocent Chukwuemeka Chukwuma Impact and Legacy Lecture Series. The event served as a powerful tribute to the legacy and ideas of Innocent who left behind indelible marks in various fields.


On April 12, 2024, CLEEN Foundation and ICCEF will jointly host the 3rd posthumous memorial and the 2nd Impact and Legacy

Lecture Series in honour of Innocent. One of Nigeria’s preeminent public intellectuals and Catholic Bishop of Sokoto, Mathew Hassan Kukah, “who has successfully combined pastoral, civic and intellectual roles to his monumental work in human rights, peace building and public service,” is the guest speaker.


As I remember Innoma, I look forward to Bishop Kukah’s intervention on the topic, “The Power of One. Dreams and Nightmares: Thoughts on Innocent Chukwuma.” It should be stimulating at a time of unmitigated national morass in a country, to quote Prof Okey Ndibe, “conceived in hope but nurtured by its leaders into hopelessness.”


To Josephine, Chidinma, Amarachi, and Nkechi, thanks for keeping the dream alive!


*Onumah can be reached via @conumah





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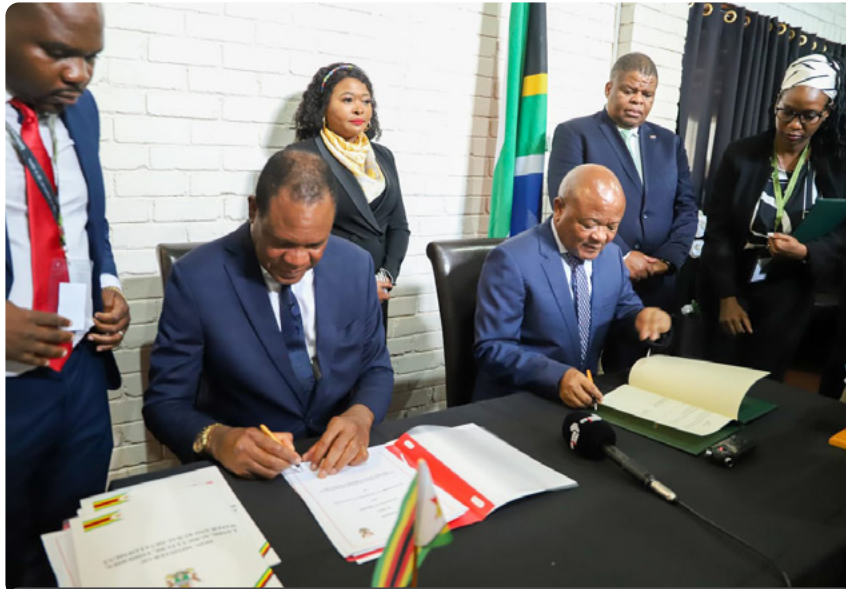
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South Africa: Zimbabwe To The Rescue As Taps Run Dry

By Prince Kurupati

Completely surrounded by water for the best part of its borders, South Africa ironically finds itself experiencing water shortages. Most of the taps in the country's cities and towns have run dry. To try and contain the situation while at the same time preventing the time-ticking health bomb brought about by the shortage of clean water, the Government of South Africa has outlined a combination of long-term as well as medium to short-term solutions. Among the solutions that fall in the latter category is the water deal signed by the Zimbabwe and South African governments.



Zimbabwe's Anxious Masuka and South African Water and sanitation minister Senzo Mchunu at the MOU signing. Photo courtesy.

The water deal was signed on 14 March 2024 by South Africa's Minister for Water and Sanitation Minister Senzo Mchunu and Zimbabwe's Minister of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development, Dr Anxious Masuka. According to the Water Diplomat, the terms of the agreement are that «the Beitbridge Water Treatment Works in Zimbabwe will supply Musina Local Municipality in South Africa with 15 million m³ of treated water per year. The water will be transferred through a 20 km pipeline Beitbridge Water Treatment Works to Musina, which is located at some 15 km from the border. The capacity of the Beitbridge Water Treatment Plant 35 million m³/annum and this capacity is currently not fully utilized in Zimbabwe: only 10% of its current capacity is being used for Beit Bridge, a rapidly growing border town on the Zimbabwean side of the border.»

The water deal with Zimbabwe was viewed as the most feasible short to medium-term measure to address South Africa's current water problems. The population of Musina approximately 132,000 has been facing severe water challenges

for many years now. In 2022, the situation became so severe that protests broke out in the Vhembe District Municipality.

Musina authorities have attributed water shortages to aging and problematic infrastructure. The Water Diplomat states that «The municipality has a total of 36 boreholes which supply the town's water reservoir, but 19 of these boreholes are out of service.» South Africa's Department of Water and Sanitation said that the long-term water plan for the largely dry area of Musina is constructing dams and water treatment plants. However, this solution is «relatively expensive» and hence will be undertaken when the department has gathered the much-needed resources.

The Director general at the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), Dr. Sean Phillips speaking in an interview on state TV SABC said, «There is a shortage of treated water in Musina, and as a result of that the residents and businesses in the area have been experiencing water supply disruptions periodically.» The long-term plan is to construct new dams and water treatment plants but «those

solutions are relatively expensive.» As such, the current plan is to rely on the cheaper alternative, that is, water from Beitbridge in Zimbabwe, as the water there is «underutilized.»

The first phase in the implementation of the water deal will see the construction of a pipeline and pump stations. The two agents that are tasked with overseeing this phase and all others come to fruition are the South African Development Bank and the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA). The project is set to be completed by 2026.

What wasn't explicitly said by the two signing parties are the exact figures South Africa will pay Zimbabwe for its treated water. However, reports state that Zimbabwe is set to earn a substantial amount of foreign currency once it starts pumping water to Musina.

With South Africa's Department of Water and Sanitation annual report for 2023 «indicating that 46% of the (country's) water supply is contaminated, while 67% of treatment plants are either inoperative or on the verge of breaking down,» the signing of the water deal has been heralded in many quarters as a huge step forward.

The same however cannot be said for Zimbabwe.

A huge number of Zimbabweans who took to various social media platforms criticized the decision by the government to export treated water to South Africa when many of the locals don't have access to clean water. The criticism is warranted considering that the «2022 World Health Organization report, (stated that only) 41% of Zimbabwe's 15 million people have access to clean, drinkable water, while another 40% drink highly contaminated water.»

Dr Ferrial Adam, the Executive Manager of WaterCAN also commented

siding with Zimbabweans saying the water deal is quite bizarre on the side of the Zimbabwean government as it is exporting water while it's failing to meet the water needs of its population. «It's an interesting one because if you just think about the fact that Zimbabwe cannot actually supply water to its own people – in the capital Harare, people are actually cut off from water for a few hours [daily] – but now they're exporting water to South Africa...So if you are Zimbabwean I think that you wouldn't be smiling on this particular MOU. A lot of people in Zimbabwe don't have water in their taps, they are dependent on rivers and streams,» Dr Adam said.

On the same day of the signing of the water deal, the South African and Zimbabwean water ministers together with their counterparts from Botswana and Mozambique amended the Limpopo Watercourse Commission (LIMCOM) Agreement in the transboundary agreement. LIMCOM is a transboundary organization established by four member countries to use management of the shared water resources equitably.

Q & A With Somesh Adukia, Managing Director, Canon Central and North Africa.

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

From groundbreaking product launches to impactful market penetrations, we undertook strategic investments in Africa which solidified our position as a leader in the industry, delivering long-term value for our customers and all our stakeholders, says Somesh Adukia, Managing Director, Canon Central and North Africa. In a Q & A with PAV, Somesh Adukia says Canon has not only weathered the global socio-economic storm that characterised the 2023 financial year; but also achieved significant growth highlighting the resilience of its business model.

How was 2023 like for Canon?

Somesh Adukia : In 2023, a year marked by global socio-economic challenges, we at Canon experienced remarkable achievements. Despite the prevailing storm, we not only weathered it but also achieved significant growth, boasting double-digit figures that underscored the resilience of our business model. Our overall financial health remains robust as we set our sights on a 10% increase in turnover for 2024, strategically derived from both Business-to-Consumer (B2C) and Business-to-Business (B2B) channels. This success was further propelled by our Flexibility, Adaptability, and Innovation (FAI) strategy.

Flexibility – Amidst the various economic challenges we continued to hear the voice of our Customers and Partners through ongoing communication platforms. Furthermore, we made a transformative change in our approach to partnership engagement with the launch of - Executive Circle Conference. This initiative is an exclusive platform designed to foster strategic conversations, explore future trends, facilitate networking, and encourage open communication. This new forum signifies a paradigm shift in the company's approach to partnership engagement,



Somesh Adukia, Managing Director, Canon Central and North Africa.

underscoring a strategic focus on elevating the Partner experience.

Adaptability – We bolstered our Closer to Customer strategy and reinforced our distribution network in different countries including Ghana, Libya, Morocco, and Kenya.

Innovation – From groundbreaking product launches to impactful market penetrations, we undertook strategic investments in Africa which solidified our position as a leader in the industry, delivering long-term value for our customers and

all our stakeholders. Notable among these endeavours is the launch of first Canon Contact Centre in Egypt. We also launched 'The Multicam Show', a dynamic event spanning Nigeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria which was a tremendous success. Our partnership with Broadcast System Solutions (BSS) in Egypt resulted in the launch of a new state of the art Imaging showroom specifically targeting verticals like Filmmakers and News Agencies further enhancing the customer experience.

I am also so proud of the fact that our efforts have been recognized in the form of prestigious awards, including the YPP Partner of the Year Award at the Global Good Awards, highlighting our commitment to empowering young individuals in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We also placed second (out of 900 entrants) in the Women Empowerment in the Workplace category at the 2023 Gender Mainstreaming Awards. We received the recognition for not only advancing women in our workplaces

but have also for successfully transforming corporate behaviour and practices.

What are the main challenges that you are facing while operating in Africa and how are you navigating the challenges?

Somesh Adukia : Frequent Currency depreciation against USD and High inflation in African markets were the two major challenges which all the businesses faced last year. Although they directly impacted the spending power of our consumers resulting into issues like inventory management and supply chain efficiency, we remained optimistic and chose to focus on the opportunities that presented themselves amidst these obstacles. We not only weathered the global socio-economic storm that characterised the 2023 financial year; but also achieved significant growth highlighting the resilience of our business model.

The African market boasts youthful demographics, coupled with significant investments and infrastructure development projects. This presents abundant opportunities for us. However, we are equally aware of the challenges posed by frequent currency depreciation against USD and High inflation in African markets which were the two major challenges which all the businesses faced last year. Although they directly impacted the spending power of our consumers resulting into issues like inventory management and supply chain efficiency, we remained optimistic and chose to focus on the opportunities that presented themselves amidst these obstacles.

We not only weathered the global socio-economic storm that characterised the 2023 financial year; but also achieved significant growth highlighting the resilience of our business model. Working closely with our partners in these markets, and supporting them, we are able to navigate some market challenges. While we continually reinforce the vision of becoming the preferred imaging brand in Africa with a steady supply chain, industry-leading

support, and an extensive product portfolio, we, on the other hand, continue to respond to the economic challenges and cater to customer needs with imaging products and solutions.

Canon's approach for 2024?

Somesh Adukia : In 2024, we are introducing an innovative approach for Canon Central and North Africa: Innovation, Customer Experience, Employee Experience (ICE). We emphasize the need for continuous innovation, a seamless customer journey from pre-purchase to post-purchase, and ensuring employee satisfaction and growth. As always, our dedication lies in providing exceptional products and services to our customers while fostering an enriching work environment for our employees. We are driving this growth through significant investment in innovation, dedicating more than 8% of our global sales annually to Research and Development (R&D). I'm excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and the positive impact we can create in the dynamic African markets.

I'm excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and the positive impact we can create in the dynamic African markets.

What are the steps that Canon has put in place to advance its sustainability efforts?

Somesh Adukia : Our philosophy at Canon is Kyosei – a Japanese word meaning 'living and working together for the common good. It underpins our vision for sustainability and everything we do as a business.

Canon has implemented several steps to advance its sustainability efforts. Firstly, we are committed to reducing our environmental footprint by promoting energy efficiency and waste reduction in our operations. We are committed to delivering a 50% reduction in lifecycle CO2 emissions per product by 2030 in line with the Paris Agreement and are currently on track to deliver this, having achieved a cumulative 43% reduction since 2008, with a yearly average

reduction of 4.1% against a 3% target. We will continue to focus on the use of innovative manufacturing to design out waste and use materials responsibly, keeping all our products and materials in use for longer and work towards becoming a more circular business. In addition, we strive towards making both B2C and B2B consumables 100% recyclable or reusable.

Secondly, we are actively involved in recycling programs to responsibly manage end-of-life products and minimize electronic waste. We have a wide range of initiatives supporting our circular business and reducing our environmental impact, both across our own operations and with regards to our products. We continually invest in R&D to create new products that will have longer lifetimes and improved end of life strategies compared to previous models.

Additionally, we are exploring renewable energy sources to power our facilities and operations, thus reducing our reliance on fossil fuels. We recently converted 100% of power to renewable energy at five manufacturing sites for printing business.

Guided by our corporate philosophy of Kyosei, which means living and working together for the common good and creating a better world for everyone in it, our constant effort right from the start has been to ensure we engage in giving back to the communities that we operate in. We have continued to invest in education and empowerment of the youth in Africa. We empower the next generation through social initiatives and storytelling programs through Young People Program, Miraisha, Canon Young Champion of the Year Award, Student Development Programme.

More than 60% of Africa's population is under the age of 25 and young Africans are expected to constitute 42% of global youth by 2030. Africa's youth hold the key to its development potential and how is Canon leveraging the youthful demographics and urbanization?

Somesh Adukia : With more than 60% of Africa's population under the age of 25, Canon recognizes the pivotal role that young Africans play in shaping the continent's future. We are leveraging this demographic dividend by tailoring our products and services to meet the needs and aspirations of young consumers. We are doing our best to listen to the young consumer and follow the trends to provide solutions that meet their expectations. The focus on youth is also being implemented through our educational programs such as Canon Miraisha Programme, Canon Academy Juniors, Canon Academy Photo, Canon Academy Video and Canon Print Hub.

Moreover, as urbanization continues to reshape African cities, Canon is strategically positioned to capitalize on the growing demand for imaging products and solutions. We are actively engaging with urban communities through partnerships and outreach programs to foster digital literacy and empower young talent with skills for the future.

New market opportunities in Africa?

Somesh Adukia : The African market presents exciting new opportunities for Canon's growth and expansion. Urbanization initiatives, such as the development of monorails and airports, are driving demand for imaging products across both the business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) segments. As African economies integrate into the global marketplace, Canon is well-positioned to capitalize on emerging market trends and consumer preferences. Our focus on geographical expansion, investments in new product concepts, and innovative business models, such as vertical business expansion, enables us to tap into new market segments and enhance customer engagement. Moreover, the anticipated inclusion of Egypt and Ethiopia in the BRICS community opens avenues for enhanced collaboration and economic growth, further bolstering Canon's presence and influence in the region.



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Cameroon: REGARTLESS Returns Pillaged Relics to Lebang Community

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

working on cross-cutting global cleans witchcraft from the village the ceremony.



Sylvie Njobati, Founder of REGARTLESS gets royal honour from the Fon of Fontem.

When Sylvie Njobati saw that some of the rich Bangwa artefacts looted decades ago were being sold online, she knew she had to act. It is a fight that she has been waging for some time, fighting for the return of looted Cameroonian artefacts.

The fight seems to be gradually won as the Lebang community has been the recipient of eight (8) significant cultural and spiritual heritages sold in auctions and online in The Netherlands and Germany.

The artefacts include totems of Kings to Sacred (Secret) Society Masks, significant to the people of the Bangwa land was officially handed over by REGARTLESS, formerly known as Sysy House of Fame, a Non-Governmental Organization

issues such as Decolonisation, Social Justice, Women Empowerment, and Human Rights, on Saturday, March 30, 2024, at the ST Muna Foundation in Yaounde.

Experts estimate that more than 95% of Africa's Heritage is held elsewhere in the world. A recent study by the famous Benedicte Savoy and her team shows that 40,000 objects from Cameroon, ranging from Human remains to Royal heritage such as crowns and thrones, are in German museums. Like Nso, Bele Bele, Tibati, Sawa, Bamileke, and Bali, invaluable heritages from Bangwa are among these 40,000.

Most of the artifacts which have been away from their natural home for more than 100 years belong to the Kungang society; a society which

Fight still ongoing for other looted artefacts

The Fon of Fontem, Fon Asabaton said art from Lebang-Fontem is highly prized by collectors and museums. He said: "We are here to take back some of our artefacts which have been away from their natural home for over 100 years. As you see, most of the artefacts we are receiving today belong to the Kungang society, which is the society that cleans witchcraft from the village."

"Our artefacts will never forget their home and I can only imagine the joy that will fill your hearts on the day the Bangwa Queen and King, the royal staffs of Fontem and all our other jewels will be returned to us," Fon Asabaton said, addressing the Lebang indigenes that turned out for

The artefacts at German museums of world culture include textiles, musical instruments, ceremonial masks, royal treasures like stools and thrones, texts, tools, and weapons — «none of which were conceived as display objects for vitrines.

«Most of the arts that are in foreign archives come from Fontem. We know the names of some of the people who made the artworks. Many artefacts were taken out of Fontem between 1897 and when the Germans attacked Fontem, they looted the entire royal collection and burnt down the palace,» Mbe Tazi Ate Awung of Njeh-Mveh, Fontem told Pan African Visions.

Dr Ernest Folefack, who hails from Lebang and a teacher of International Law at the University of Dschang,

said: "These artefacts are very important to us the Lebang people as our culture is based on these artefacts... We want the Germans to understand that we might even give them compensation for the others in their keeping. But they should know that the remaining artefacts belong to us.»

A significant Milestone

For ages, the Bangwa community has been custodians of a rich cultural heritage formed by their history, traditions, and deep-rooted connections to the land. Today, Bangwa has some of the most treasured Heritage on the globe, looming in museums and private collections.

"These eight heritages that have brought us together today were acquired BY REGARTLESS under our new program: Web of Plunder," Sylvie Vernyuy Njobati, Founder of REGARTLESS said. "My respect goes to Chief Charles Taku, who has taken several initiatives to ensure the return of Bangwa Heritage. He raised the alarm on the online trafficking of Bangwa heritage, and during this call, I could see the pain he was going through knowing that his ancestral wreaths were on sale."

"To the Bangwa community, I say this: the return of your cultural



The artifacts handed by REGARTLESS include totems of Kings to Sacred (Secret) Society Masks, significant to the people of Bangwa.

Heritage is a testament to your craving to reclaim what rightfully belongs to you. It recognizes the values your traditions, customs, and cultural expressions bring to Africa and the world."

Sylvie Njobati added: "As we celebrate today, we must remember that we have unfinished business with humanity: reclaiming our dignity, our stories and experiences, our histories and indigenous knowledge, and our

Heritage. It rightly belongs to you. On behalf of REGARTLESS, We pledge to strengthen our collective resolve to protect, preserve, and promote cultural Heritage first on the African continent and then elsewhere." _____



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Zimbabwe: Hunger Looms as the El Nino Phenomenon Hits Hard

By Prince Kurupati



President Mnangagwa has declared a state of emergency urging partners to support Zimbabwe navigate the challenging times.

In the 2023 agricultural year, Zimbabwe produced 297 million kg of tobacco something which had not been done before. What was particularly impressive about the record tobacco crop is that 85 percent of the crop came from smallholder farmers. It was almost the same with all other crops that the country produces albeit without breaking any produce records. Things in 2024 have however started on a very bad note agriculture-wise as the country in the early months of the year finds itself holding a begging bowl.

Zimbabwe like most other countries in the Southern African region normally receives its rainfall between November and February. For the 2023/24 agricultural season, however, the rains that the country received were rather erratic and in all, inadequate to meet the country's needs. Meteorologists in the country attributed the little rainfall Zimbabwe received to the El Nino phenomenon. The net result of this is that most crops on commercial farms as well as those planted by subsistence farmers in the rural areas wilted.

The government of Zimbabwe in the early stages of the agricultural season painted a gory picture of the situation when Information Minister

Jenfran Muswere announced during the last 2023 Cabinet meeting that the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) is facing a supply deficit of grain, with the available stocks of maize, traditional grain, and wheat only covering the demand consumption for 10.2 months and 11.5 months respectively.

“At the prevailing monthly consumption rate of 23 000 metric tonnes per month, the available grain will last 10.2 months. Regarding wheat, the country's current stock stands at 242 508 metric tonnes which are sufficient to provide 1.5 months cover at a monthly drawdown rate of 21 000 metric tonnes,” Minister Muswere.

As the curtain comes down on the 2023/24 agricultural season, the realization that hunger is on the way is now crystal clear and no longer a projection. Armed with reports from several agricultural bodies and security departments, the Zimbabwean President was forced to declare the El Nino-induced drought a state of national disaster.

Addressing the nation live on 3 April 2024, President Emmerson Mnangagwa said, «Accordingly. I now invoke Section 72 Subsection I of the Civil Protection Act (Chapter 10:06), which provides that: «If at any time

it appears to the President that any disaster of such nature and extent that extraordinary measures are necessary to assist and protect the persons affected or likely to be affected by the disaster in any area of the country, the President may, in such a manner as he considers fit, declare that, with effect from a date specified by him, a state of disaster exists within an area or areas specified by him in the declaration».

In light of the Declaration, President Mnangagwa called upon «all Zimbabweans of goodwill, including those in the diaspora; the international community, United Nations Agencies, Development, and Humanitarian Partners, International Financial Institutions; the private sector, churches, and other faith-based organizations, as well as individuals to generously donate towards ameliorating this State of National Disaster.”

Using its Hunger Map LIVE monitoring platform, the World Food Programme (WFP) Zimbabwe division indicated that more than 40% of people in Manicaland and Mashonaland Central provinces fall into the high-risk zone. The other eight provinces aren't any better as they also face massive food shortages. “Manicaland

and Mashonaland Central are in high-risk and deteriorating categories, with an average prevalence of over 40%. Matebeleland North and Masvingo are stable, while the rest of the provinces have moderate and stable food security risks,” WFP said in its report.

The WFP country director for Zimbabwe Francesca Erdelmann said while climate change and the EL Nino phenomenon are real factors that are affecting the agricultural activities of most nations across the globe, some countries are much more resilient and hence can withstand them. However, this isn't the case with Zimbabwe which is highly vulnerable due to its low adaptive capacity. Erdelmann thus called upon development partners that work with countries such as Zimbabwe to capacitate them to adapt to the changing climate hence being able to feed their nations without requesting much help from the international community.

While commenting on the looming hunger in Zimbabwe, the WFP country director lamented the anti-poor policies that were enacted by the Zimbabwean government. Erdelmann pinpointed the rescission of duty-free status of basic commodities saying this has a negative effect of increasing the prices of these commodities hence putting them out of reach for most Zimbabweans.

In light of the unfortunate situation Zimbabwe finds itself in, the WFP country director said her organization will keep doing the work it has been doing to help the worst-hit areas and those in desperate need of help. She said her organization has always wanted “every person in Zimbabwe to have access to and consume sufficient, diverse and nutritious food at all times” and as such, the WFP will provide “immediate food assistance” and collaborate “with communities in chronically food-insecure districts to build their resilience through weir dam construction, nutrition gardening, livestock production, and other income-generating activities.”

Adding its voice to what needs to be done is the National Consumer

Rights Association (NACORA) which calls upon the Minister of Finance, Economic Development, and Investment Promotion Professor Mthuli Ncube to reverse the rescission of the duty-free status of basic commodities. Through its national coordinator Effie Ncube, NACORA said, "This development will inevitably lead to price hikes as businesses price in the duty. This comes at a time when consumers are already struggling under the unbearable and debilitating burden of unaffordable prices."

The El Nino-induced drought and the looming hunger the country faces make the earlier pronouncements by Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa that Zimbabwe has attained food security to be nothing but just hot air. An excerpt from a Zimbabwean local newspaper the NewsHawks quotes an expert saying, "El Nino is exposing government propaganda. Zimbabwe has not yet attained sustainable food security.



WFP country director for Zimbabwe Francesca Erdelmann says climate change and the EL Nino phenomenon are real factors.

Cabinet recently revealed that Zimbabwe has 10 months' supply of grain left... So, what happened to the so-called bumper harvest that Mnangagwa and his ministers have been gloating about? The lived reality of most citizens is that people are failing to afford two- or three-square meals per day. Zimbabwe had the highest food-price inflation in the world in 2023, meaning food is unaffordable." Demonstrating how impactful albeit in a negative way the El Nino-induced drought is, the country's Finance

Minister Prof Mthuli Ncube projected that the country's 2024 economic growth rate will slow to 3.5 percent, down from 5.3 percent in 2023 largely in part to the El Nino impact.

To salvage something from the wilting crops, farmers around the country were urged to produce fodder to feed livestock. The advice came from commercial farmer Mr Obert Chinhamo of Biano Simmentals in Esigodini who said by producing fodder, farmers can cushion themselves from buying huge stock of stock feed.

"A lot of crops are wilting around the country and we have a lot of livestock that may die because of the drought that we are facing. So, as farmers, we may have to make a quick decision, instead of looking at the crop wilting and going to waste, we will rather turn it into silage so that later on during the year, farmers can open their silage and feed their livestock," Mr Chinhamo said.

Wakeup Call From Subsea Cable Failures Induced Internet Blackout

By Prince Kurupati

The month of March saw several African countries experience constant internet outages. While the outages affected different countries at different rates, almost all countries had to grapple with the challenge at some point. Telecommunications experts attributed the internet challenges to multiple subsea cable failures off the coast of Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire.

The Chief Marketing Officer of artificial intelligence company Armada, John Zissimos said the internet disruptions were caused by failures of subsea cables which include "the West Africa Cable System (WACS), South Atlantic-3 (SAT-3), MainOne, and the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE)." Zissimos said the disruptions impaired connectivity for a myriad of nations including Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Burkina Faso and extending to various Southern African countries.



The infrastructural fragility exposed by the subsea cable failures has prompted discussions to emerge about embracing alternative connectivity solutions. Of course, the main alternative being proposed is Space X's Starlink satellite internet service. What has propelled Starlink to the forefront of all alternative connectivity solutions options is its immunity to setbacks faced by traditional terrestrial infrastructure.

As reported by Henry Nzekwe writing for WeeTracker, Starlink is “driven by a constellation of thousands of Low-Earth Orbit satellites positioned just 550 kilometres above the earth’s surface, Starlink offers broadband internet access with competitive speed and reliability. This constellation architecture allows Starlink to bypass the limitations of traditional geostationary satellites, resulting in faster data transmission and lower latency”.

Two of Africa’s biggest telecommunication giants MTN Group and Vodacom Group advised their customers that they are experiencing connectivity issues owing to the subsea cable failures but stated they are implementing stopgap measures to keep connectivity up at least for some time. The two giants did not however specify what type of stopgap measures they are implementing. MTN Group and Vodacom Group operate in many countries where Starlink has not yet been permitted to operate including two African economic giants in South Africa and Ghana.

Following the internet challenges, most Africans in the little time that they were able to connect to the internet took to social media platforms to urge and in some ways force their responsible authorities to license Starlink. Some key figures also joined in the discussions imploring

their governments to take proactive steps to ensure that such connectivity problems won’t be experienced again in the future.

The Senior Vice President of policy think tank IMANI Africa Koffi Benti called upon Ghana to loosen its regulatory stance which has barred Starlink from being licensed. “Internet services are being gradually restored. I hope the authorities will not wait for another crippling problem. Please be proactive about getting Starlink into Ghana so we have options and never have to be crippled when a sea cable breaks,” Benti wrote on his Facebook page.

The concerns raised by Koffi Benti and thousands of other Ghanaians were responded to almost instantly as Ghana’s minister for communications and digitisation Ursula Owusu-Ekuful announced plans to license Starlink. “We have licensed satellite gateway air stations, landing rights, and satellite air station networks... OneWeb has already been licensed. Starlink is in the process of being licensed and other operators are being encouraged to land in Ghana,” she said.

The announcement by Minister Owusu-Ekuful marks a U-turn in the government’s stance towards Starlink. Just this past year, Ghana’s National Communications Authority, warned sellers of Starlink equipment to cease operations as the service was

not licensed and urged the public to “desist from patronizing any equipment or service purported to be from Starlink.”

While the issue of Starlink’s rather expensive upfront costs came to the fore, most people are convinced that Starlink is cost-effective long term and that its reliability and performance justify the initial investment, especially in regions where internet downtime can have significant economic repercussions. In Ghana, Minister Owusu-Ekuful acknowledged “that Starlink was expensive for Ghanaians but pledged that further investment would be plowed into rural broadband provision, and more economically viable satellite services”.

In Zimbabwe, calls for the country to license Starlink in light of the subsea cable failure-induced internet challenges were met with a rather bizarre response. The pro-state daily newspaper Herald said, “In an era where digital connectivity is increasingly synonymous with power and progress, the concept of digital sovereignty has emerged as a crucial concern for nations worldwide.” The paper said the adoption of Starlink should be carefully considered as the right balance is needed to “harness the benefits of digital innovation while safeguarding its autonomy against external influences”.

While acknowledging that

Starlink thanks to its ambitious goal of providing high-speed internet access to remote and underserved areas globally, appears as a beacon of technological advancement, the pro-state paper said there is a risk of “relinquishing control over its (Zimbabwe) digital infrastructure to a foreign entity”. In justifying the need to prioritize ‘digital sovereignty’ over ‘digital innovation’, the paper juxtaposes its stance with that of the position taken by the U.S. in its current TikTok entanglement with the Chinese.

“There is no point for pressure to be piled on the Zimbabwean Government and POTRAZ to allow free leeway to Starlink without being regulated. In an interesting turn of events, the U.S. recently threatened to ban TikTok which is of Chinese origin, claiming the platform is harvesting data that could be used to manipulate upcoming U.S. elections. It’s a clear indication of how digital sovereignty is crucial in managing national interests and growing threats emanating from cyberspace,” reported the Herald.

In countries that have licensed Starlink such as Nigeria and Rwanda, the internet challenges weren’t felt as much as internet users had an alternative to switch to.



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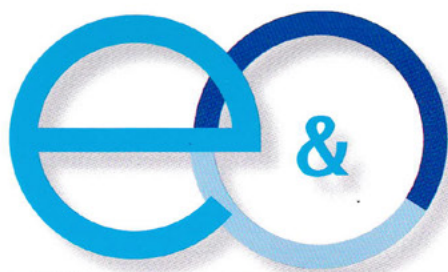
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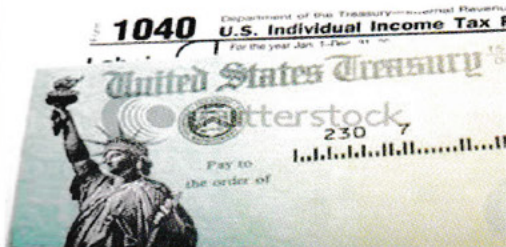
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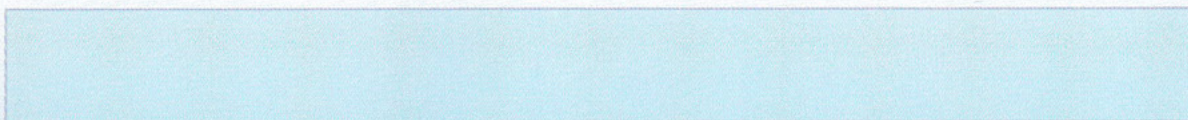
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Cameroon: FA & Sports Ministry At Daggers Drawn Over New Lions Coach

FA President Samuel Eto'o says he won't sign off on the new coach Marc Brys if his demands are not taken into account

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

A tug-of-war has now been launched once again between the Ministry of Sport and Physical Education and the Cameroon Football Federation, FECAFOOT after the former appointed a new coach for the senior national team, the Indomitable Lions, against the wish of the country's FA.

61-year-old Marc Brys, who was most recently at OH Leuven, has been chosen to replace former Liverpool and West Ham defender Rigobert Song after the latter's contract was not renewed. Brys is the third Belgian to take charge of Cameroon. The last was Hugo Broos, who led the country to its fifth AFCON title in 2017.

The Ministry of Sports said Brys would be assisted by Joachim Mununga and Giannis Xilouris but did not disclose the length of their contracts. Former Cameroon striker Francois Omam-Biyik, who featured at three World Cups, was among the extended technical, medical and administrative staff appointed.



Marc Brys, new Indomitable Lions coach speaks to the press shortly touching down in Cameroon.

FECAFOOT rejects appointment

FECAFOOT is threatening not to recognize the new coach and his team if its demands are not taken into account and terms the appointment of the new coach as illegal. «The national federation cannot recognise these appointments made outside any legal and regulatory framework,» FECAFOOT President Samuel Eto'o, who is Cameroon's all-time leading goalscorer, said in a letter made public.

According to FECAFOOT, the Sports Ministry's actions directly contravene Decree No. 2014/384, which outlines the organization and operation of national football teams, thereby undermining the federation's authority and processes.

«This unilateral decision coincides with FECAFOOT's commitment to follow the very high directives of the

President of the Republic by offering full cooperation to ensure a beneficial reconciliation for the future of our beloved Indomitable Lions,» the statement further stated.

The federation said it had not received a response to its list of proposed candidates, expressing its «great surprise» at what it called a «unilateral» decision by the sports ministry to appoint the Belgian.

Cautious Optimism

The appointment of the Belgian received mixed reactions from the Cameroonian football milieu. While many were expecting a big name to take over the five-time African champion, the appointment of Marc Brys came as a surprise, as this will be his first exposure to a national team.

«In all honesty, I don't think Marc Brys is the right choice to take over

the Lions structure. Every head coach is judged on his results and this makes it easier to see why the arrival of Brys has more question marks than certainties,» Beng Emmanuel, a sports journalist based in Yaounde told Pan African Visions.

«What we need at this moment is a coach who is obsessed with winning, a coach who has an eye for finding results, a coach who has made winning culture and can boast of a trophy-laden career. We have indeed seen some newbies greatly impressed with the Cameroon national team like Hugo Broos, but this does not make it clear for us to continue in this trend.»

Eyong Macdella, a sports journalist based in Douala said: «Most of the coaches we have had, who were renowned did not have a good time with the Indomitable Lions. Instead, we have managed to do well with

lesser-known coaches, like Pierre Lechantre (who won the AFCON in 2000). If this coach has what it takes to bring us back to glory days, and then let us accept it, wait and see.»

«The appointment (from MINSEP) is more harm than good as some persons who worked with Antonio Conceicao and others fired by FECAFOOT have been brought back to the national setup. At the end of the day, my prayer is that this does not inquire the wrath of CAF and cause us dearly. If it does, the football-loving population of Cameroon will suffer for it.»

«I have my doubts about this coach, but I think he can surprise us as coach Hugo Broos did at the 2017 African Cup of Nations,» said Christian, a resident of Douala.

«The coach who can hold Cameroon is a coach who must have a good CV.



The next encounters for Cameroon at the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers will be against Angola and Cape Verde.

whose rating must be above many things about match results. Some coaches have come here and brought us results, but this will be his first time coaching a national team, so it won't be an easy task» Franck Otis, another resident of Douala said.

Colbert Yomvang, publishing director at Diaspora News believes coordination between both

associations was lacking. He said: «It must be said that it is the Cameroon Football Federation that is the guarantor before CAF and FIFA, but the Cameroon Football Federation must also respect the State, which is the financier of the team.»

«The conditions are right for him to do well. He'll be challenged at the start because there's no agreement

between the Ministry and the Federation, and many Federation supporters will criticize him, but once he's won one or two or three games I think he'll put everyone on the same page.»

Newbie in African football

Born on May 10, 1962, Marc Brys is a former Belgian Player. His 26-year

professional career saw him play for clubs like Merksem, and Willebroek. Transitioning into coaching, March Brys began at Londerzeel, before moving to Berchem Sport. He took Berchem to the championship of the Belgian 4th and 3rd Division.

During his 119 games with the club, Marc Brys won 40 games, drew 32 and lost 47, scoring 183 goals and conceding 201 with a 33,61 per cent win rate. Altogether, he has coached 15 clubs in Belgium, the Netherlands and Saudi Arabia.

In 2010, Marc Brys joined KV Mechelen, signing a 2-year contract. He then moved on to manage Al Faisaly FC and succeeded in winning the Gulf Cup, his only major trophy in his ongoing 25-year coaching career. In 2020, he joined Leuven who plays in the Belgian First Division A.

The baptism of fire for the new tactician will be coming in the FIFA World Cup qualifiers. Cameroon resumes its 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign in June. They are currently top of Group D, following a win over Mauritius and an away draw with Libya. The next encounters will see Cameroon face Angola and Cape Verde.



Cameroon's president Samuel Eto'o and MINSEP boss Prof Narcisse.



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