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A Salute To Issa Hayatou

By Ajong Mbapndah L

For Issa Hayatou who passed away as we were going to press for the August 2024 issue of PAV Magazine, it was a lifetime of service to Africa. From a royal family in the Northern Region of Cameroon, Hayatou who led the Confederation of African Football-CAF from 1988 to 2017 put Africa vigorously defended and fostered Africa's interests on the global soccer space to outstanding results. He was unapologetic in his gallant fight to ensure that Africa was fairly represented and respected on the global stage. On every count, his achievements paint the portrait of a man with a towering legacy.

At the time he took the reigns of CAF in 1988, the African nations cup, now known as TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations, was a tournament with 8 teams. For a continent of close to fifty countries at the time, earning a spot amongst the eight teams was a herculean task for the leading continental soccer countries. At the level of the world cup, Africa had two spots. With a continent the size of Africa having just two places at the FIFA world cup, Hayatou like others knew things had to change for Africa to dream of winning the trophy or even coming close.

By the time he left office in 2017 after his long stay in office, CAF was one of the most respected football structures in the world. Hayatou's voice was respected globally, and Africa was respected. The CAF Nations Cup had expanded to 16, and then 24 teams giving more countries a chance to participate. Thanks to that, countries like Equatorial Guinea, Cape Verde, and others have shown the depth of talent that Africa has.

From the historic performance of Cameroon at the 1990 world cup, the first time an African country reached the quarterfinals, the world saw the absurdity of the United Kingdom have more slots than the entire African continent. Hayatou's push initially led the number of African slots increased to three, and then five. For the 2026 world cup in Canada, Mexico



Ajong Mbapndah L, Managing Editor

and the USA, Africa will have ten representatives!

It is under Hayatou's stewardship that Africa hosted the world cup for the first time in 2010. While many may have fond memories of the fun, many may also forget the painstaking efforts it took Hayatou and his team at CAF to make the case and convince the world governing body FIFA of merits of an African country hosting the tournament. The world probably thought Africa could not, but South Africa did not only do it, but did it in a big way that brought honor to the continent.

The ambitious man that Hayatou was had unsuccessful runs to lead the world football governing body FIFA. There was a time he was even endorsed by European countries to challenge Sepp Blatter -a European, but he fell short. A major undoing of his was the inability of African countries to rally behind him when he ran for the FIFA leadership. Not sure if it was the complex, the interests, colonial affiliations, or what, but Hayatou never seemed to quite get the Africa bloc behind him in his ambitions and had to remain content with a high-profile seat at the FIFA table. That on its own was no mean feat.

Talk about leaders been bullish on Africa and Issa Hayatou stands out. In 2015 Morocco reneged on hosting the African Cup of Nations. Considering the intense competition that goes in to get the hosting rights, Hayatou did

not find it funny that the Northern African country will back out at the last minute using the Ebola outbreak, largely contained in a few West African countries as a ruse. With the well-known penchant of Northern African countries to put themselves first before the continent, Hayatou knew what the cancellation of such a major tournament will have on the image of Africa. Morocco was suspended and the tournament took place on schedule in Equatorial Guinea and saving the dignity of the continent.

For all the accusations of high handedness, and the desire for more openness and transparency in the management of CAF, the institution under Hayatou produced results, it forged stronger bonds of unity amongst African countries through soccer and boosted the image of the continent globally. Unfortunately, like most African leaders, Hayatou did not know when to leave the stage, or maybe his exit plans where not in sync with the changing realities in the continent.

In 2017, his 29-year-old stay at the helm of CAF was brought to a dramatic halt when little known Ahmad Ahmad of Madagascar produced an election upset. For a man with the experience, legacy and pride of Hayatou, it was not the kind of glorious exit deserved or envisaged. While Hayatou did accept the results with heroic sportsmanship, the calamitous stint of his predecessor and the waning influence on the global football stage are also shortcomings of his for a checkered transition. For all the goodwill, his predecessor was simply clueless on how to manage such a complex institution in complex times with complex global stakes. Little doubt that he could not even complete half a term before been forced out.

On hindsight, Hayatou may have prepared his succession better, he may have prepared better for the generational shift that was bound to come. Still, his is a legacy worthy of respect and on a continent where the record of respecting its own prophets

is abysmal, it remains to be seen what honors he will get. In his native Cameroon, one is not so sure if there is any edifice named after him. If charity were to begin at home, one of the stadium constructed for the 2021 AfCON could have carried his name... after all, it is common knowledge that without him, Cameroon may not have had the hosting rights to that tournament.

At the AfCON 2021 tournament itself, it was equally mind boggling that the CAF leadership of Patrice Motsepe did not think of honoring the legacy of Hayatou. He was missing in action and there was little or no mention of him at a tournament held in his home country. Perhaps now that he is gone, the CAF leadership will measure the depth of his work and consider some post humous recognition of his legacy-maybe instead of just the Total Energies AfCON-, name it the Total Energies Issa Hayatou Afcon. How dignifying that could be, considering that the next edition will take place in Morocco-the country where he was first elected as CAF President in 1988.

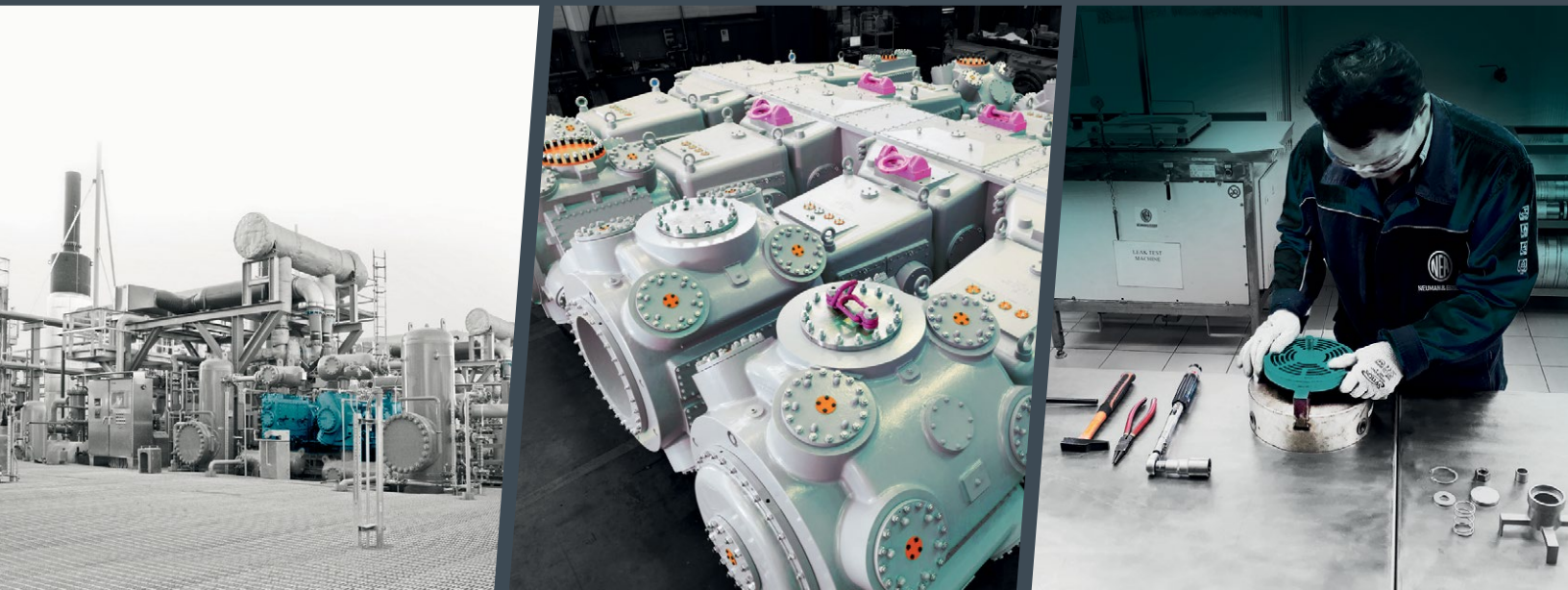
The leadership issues that CAF had post Hayatou are symptomatic of Africa. The continent literally has the youngest population group in the world, and paradoxically led by the oldest leaders. Africa could better serve its interests if the leaderships are in sync with the realities and evolving global perspectives. It is imperative for aging leaders to pass the torch to a younger generation. Doing so is not a mark of weakness but rather leadership, patriotism and continuity.

This issue of PAV dwells on the second edition of the Central African Think Tank Forum CATTf, taking place in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Dr Denis Foretia, Co-Chair of the Foretia Foundation, sheds light on the struggle to give independent voices a stronger role in Central Africa. The issue also looks at the re-election of President Kagame in Rwanda, insights on the Sahel confederation, the protests in Nigeria, Odinga's vision for integration in Africa and more. Happy reading!!



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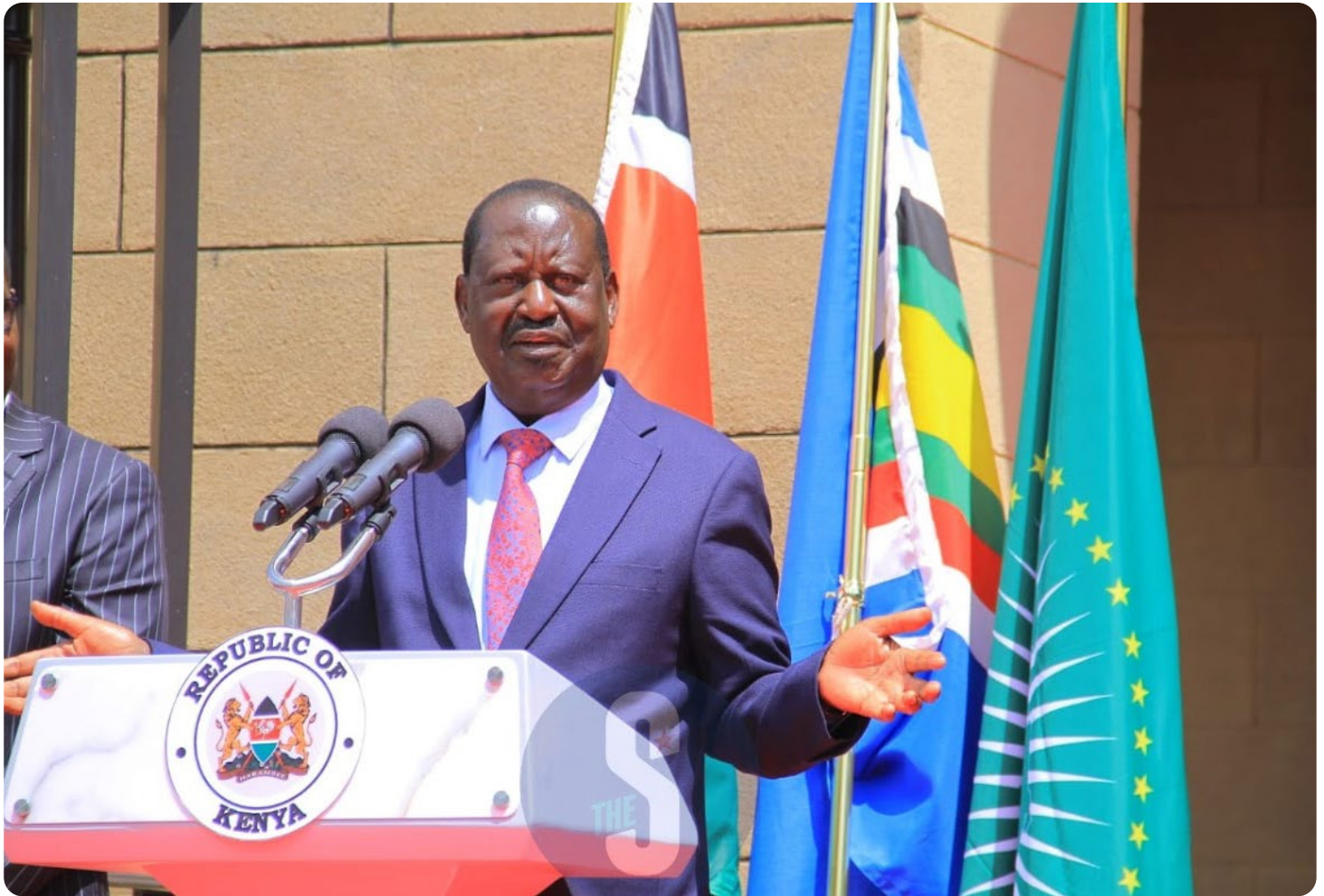
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Deepening The African Integration

By Rt .Hon .Raila Odinga Candidage for AUC Chairmanship



Raila Odinga is the leading Candidate For the AUC Chairmanship.

The desire and enthusiasm for integration in Africa has never waned as a rationale for the enhancement of our economic growth and development as well as achieve Agenda 2063 of the African Union. However, despite many efforts across different regional political and economic groupings around the continent much still remains to be achieved.

Africa is considered to have the highest concentration of sub-regional economic organizations that promote the aims of integration but today, the continent has remained the least integrated among the globe's key regions. The stark truth is that Africa is yet to reap the full benefits of economic integration and a lot more effort needs to be galvanized to mobilize the necessary political

goodwill to hasten it.

The colonial history of Africa has for decades defined the form and shape the journey towards Continental Integration has taken. Nearly all economic blocs were founded on regionalism and similarity of colonial background; from the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to the Community of Sahelian Countries (CENSAD) and the Arab Maghreb Union.

While the regional blocs have over years promoted good relations among African countries, the integration process in the continent has been hindered largely by; Inadequate infrastructure both within and among countries, political instability

in some cases, lack of requisite support institutions and disruptions in regions where member states sometimes experience wars.

At the formation of the African Union (AU) from the Organization of African Union (OAU) in 2002, the 8 main regional economic blocs at the time were originally envisaged to form the building blocs of an ultimate Union Government and the United States of Africa. This ambition has remained a mirage perhaps attributed to the fact that most African countries are still comparatively young. For most, having acquired independence in the 1960's, the concept of sovereignty is still closely associated with the preservation of national identity.

For Africa to stay the course of her political and economic integration,

and with the recent diminishing appetite for multilateralism especially in international Trade and other Geo-political tensions around the world, there are two critical areas that are work in progress but in my view are hanging fruits that merit more focused attention.

One, there is evidence that deepened trade and economic integration is a strong building block for a monetary and an eventual political integration. The European Union for example is built upon that premise. Africa must push hard on the boundaries of her internal trade by bringing down both tariff and non-tariff barriers. The AfCFTA was birthed at a crucial time when the continent was characterized by endemic poverty levels and socioeconomic hardships arising from the COVID pandemic,

and its related financial, climatic and food crisis. We have little choice but to double our energies and get the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) working relentlessly towards enhancing intra-Africa and hasten the journey towards a single African market and the world's largest free trade area. This would mean a single market of over a billion consumers with a combined GDP of over 3 trillion USD.

There are studies that show the full implementation of the AfCFTA would increase intra-African trade by 52% or by \$450 billion by 2035 according to a World Bank study. To achieve this will require implementation of coherent and efficient policies at all levels of national, regional and continental that are specifically focused towards promotion of intra-African trade.

Secondly, the people of Africa have handled multiple currencies for all the classical four functions of money for at least a thousand years. Africa is replete with as many currencies as they number, and most are characterized by their illiquid and barely tradable status in the global market place. More than 80% of the continents cross-border payment transactions through our African Banks have to be routed abroad for clearing and settlement and thereby leading to an annual 5 billion USD hemorrhage on transaction costs alone. In addition, we have witnessed recently dollar shortages in some African countries which makes trading for such countries very difficult and unpredictable.

The efforts by the Afreximbank



President Paul Kagame of Rwanda is among the African leaders who have endorsed Raila Odinga for the AU job.

and the AfCFTA to establish the Pan African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) is a commendable step towards not just reducing transaction costs and delays but more importantly laying the foundation bricks for an African Monetary Union. The PAPSS facilitates instant cross-border payments in local currencies between countries. More importantly the platform eliminates the burden of sourcing hard currencies to

support transactions and enhances the role of African currencies. This is a complimentary effort as Africa pursues a single currency to facilitate trade within the continent.

Finally, the realization of a fully implemented AfCFTA with an intra-African trade at over 50% and a Pan African Payment Settlement System that fully facilitates ease of payment for goods and services across the continent is within reach. However,

this will only be possible if member states can be persuaded to cede commensurate loyalty to the ideals of supra-national authority and the long-term benefits of integration. For integration to deepen, this should be a matter of serious conversation among the member states if our safari remains influenced by the pan-African desires for collective self-reliance, solidarity, development, peace and unity.

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Rwanda: Kagame Secures Fourth Term In Landslide Victor

By Adonis Byemelwa



Rwandans have placed their trust in a president who promises to deliver. Photo courtesy.

Paul Kagame has achieved a resounding victory in Rwanda's presidential election, securing an extraordinary 99% of the vote in the July 15 poll. This landslide result, as confirmed by the National Electoral Commission, not only solidifies Kagame's dominance in Rwandan politics but also highlights the unyielding grip he holds on power.

With voter turnout soaring to 98%, Kagame's near-unanimous support underlined the level of political consolidation and public endorsement he commands. As Kagame embarks on his fourth term, the political landscape in Rwanda stands as a testament to his enduring

influence and the complex interplay between his leadership and the nation's evolving aspirations.

The preliminary results showed Kagame, representing the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), with an unprecedented margin, while his challengers—Frank Habineza of the Democratic Green Party and independent Philippe Mpayimana—collectively garnered less than 1% of the vote.

Voter turnout was notably high at 98%, with around 9.5 million eligible voters participating. Final results are anticipated by July 27.

Kagame's path to power has been shaped by Rwanda's tumultuous history and his personal experiences.

Born a Tutsi refugee in Uganda, Kagame's early life was marked by displacement due to the 1959-1962 revolution in Rwanda that led to the Tutsi minority being expelled by the Hutu majority.

His formative years in Uganda were influenced by his exposure to political and military dynamics, eventually leading him to join President Yoweri Museveni's rebel forces. Kagame's role as a key intelligence officer in Museveni's army was instrumental in the 1986 victory that brought Museveni to power.

Kagame's ascent in Rwanda's political sphere began amid the aftermath of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, a catastrophic event

that resulted in the death of around one million individuals.

As leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), Kagame was pivotal in halting the genocide and stabilizing the country. Following the genocide, Kagame's RPF took control of Rwanda, and he initially served as vice president and defense minister before becoming president in 2000.

His presidency has been marked by significant economic growth and infrastructural development, positioning Rwanda as one of Africa's fastest-growing economies with a growth rate averaging 7.2% from 2012 to 2022. The country aims to attain middle-income status by 2035, a vision Kagame is committed to



Rwanda has seen tremendous economic growth, improved infrastructure, and poverty reduction under Kagame.

achieving.

Under Kagame's leadership, Rwanda has seen impressive advancements, including infrastructural projects like the planned \$2 billion international airport south of Kigali. Thierry Kevin Gatete, a Rwandan political commentator, anticipates that Kagame will focus on completing such major projects and potentially initiating high-tech medical research and treatment programs in his new term.

Kagame's commitment to continued socio-economic development was echoed in his pre-election statements, where he emphasized the need for ongoing investment and progress in security, stability, and economic development.

However, Kagame's presidency has also been marked by criticism regarding his authoritarian style of governance. Critics argue that his administration has stifled political opposition, curtailed media freedom, and restricted civil society.

The 2015 constitutional amendment that allowed Kagame to extend his tenure through additional terms has been a point of contention, raising questions about the democratic process in Rwanda.

This amendment enabled Kagame to seek re-election and potentially remain in power until 2035, sparking debates about the concentration of power and political repression in the country.

The election occurred against a backdrop of regional tensions with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Rwanda has faced accusations of supporting the M23 rebels fighting in the DRC's eastern region—allegations Kigali denies.

As Kagame embarks on his new term, addressing these diplomatic tensions and fostering reconciliation with the DRC is expected to be a priority. Thierry Kevin Gatete suggests that Kagame's next term will involve efforts to ease these conflicts and seek a peaceful resolution to the strained relationship between Rwanda and its neighbor.

On the international stage, Rwanda's involvement in a controversial asylum seeker deportation plan with the United Kingdom has also been a notable issue. The previous British government's initiative to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda was scrapped by the Labour administration under Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

The plan, which aimed to address

illegal immigration by sending asylum seekers to Rwanda, had faced significant legal and ethical challenges. The UK Supreme Court deemed the plan illegal, citing concerns about Rwanda's safety for asylum seekers.

The scrapped plan, which had already cost British taxpayers £700 million, was criticized by Home Secretary Yvette Cooper for its wastefulness.

Despite his authoritarian reputation, Kagame's leadership is also characterized by a strong sense of idealism and pragmatism. His efforts to rebuild Rwanda from the ruins of the genocide reflect his vision for a stable and prosperous nation.

Kagame's approach has been described as a blend of idealism and realism, where his idealistic goals of development and stability are pursued through pragmatic and sometimes controversial methods.

His focus on modernization and economic progress, while significant, has been accompanied by a careful management of Rwanda's internal dynamics and regional relationships.

Kagame's policies have had a profound impact on Rwanda's development trajectory, but they have also sparked debate about the nature

of his rule. While Rwanda's economic achievements are noteworthy, there are concerns about the social and political implications of Kagame's governance.

Critics argue that the focus on economic growth has not been equally beneficial for all Rwandans and that ethnic favoritism persists despite legal prohibitions. The official renaming of the 1994 genocide as the «Genocide Against the Tutsi» has been criticized for emphasizing the suffering of Tutsis while potentially marginalizing the experiences of Hutu victims.

As Kagame begins his fourth term, his leadership will be closely scrutinized both domestically and internationally. His administration's ability to balance continued economic development with political reform, regional diplomacy, and social cohesion will be critical in shaping Rwanda's future.

Kagame's vision for Rwanda—a secure and thriving nation—remains central to his political agenda, even as his methods and motivations continue to be a subject of intense debate. His legacy will be defined by how effectively he navigates these challenges while striving to fulfill his long-term goals for the country. _____

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Nigeria's Boiling Point: A Nation in Protest

By Aminu Adamu

The streets of Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, have ignited in a fiery display of discontent. Hundreds, if not thousands, have taken to the streets in recent days, their voices echoing a growing chorus of frustration against the soaring cost of living, exacerbated by government reforms. The once-resilient spirit of the nation is now tested by economic pressures that have pushed many to the brink.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's economic reforms, introduced a year ago with the removal of the fuel subsidy and the promise of revitalizing the nation, have instead triggered a perfect storm. Inflation has spiraled, eroding the purchasing power of ordinary Nigerians. The naira, the nation's currency, has plummeted in value, making imports more expensive and further driving up prices. The ripple effects have been devastating, with essential commodities like food and fuel becoming increasingly unattainable luxuries for many.

The protests, which are expected to last for ten days, are a stark reflection of the deepening crisis. In cities like



The once-resilient spirit of the nation is now tested by economic pressures that have pushed many to the brink.

Lagos, the economic heart of Nigeria, and the capital, Abuja, demonstrators have clashed with security forces as

they demand accountability and an immediate reversal of the policies they blame for their plight. The

atmosphere is tense, with the military and police deployed to quell potential unrest.



The protests have also highlighted the deep-seated social and political divisions within Nigeria.

The grievances of the protesters are multifaceted. They accuse the government of mismanagement, corruption, and a callous disregard for the welfare of its citizens. The removal of fuel subsidies, a key component of Tinubu's reforms, has sent shockwaves through the nation. While the government argues that the subsidy was unsustainable and drained public funds, the reality for ordinary Nigerians is a drastic increase in transportation costs, which has cascaded into higher prices for goods and services.

The protests have brought together Nigerians from all walks of life. Here are some glimpses into the experiences of those directly impacted:

Aisha, a market vendor: «Since the price of tomatoes doubled, I've seen a sharp decline in customers. People

are just buying what they absolutely need. I'm worried I won't be able to afford to send my children to school next semester.»

Emeka, a taxi driver: «The fuel price hike has crippled my business. I barely make enough to cover the cost of gas, let alone put food on the table for my family. The government needs to find a solution, or things are going to get very ugly.»

Bolanle, a student: «Education is supposed to be the key to a better future, but now it feels out of reach. The rising cost of tuition fees is forcing many of my friends to drop out of school. This is not the future we were promised.»

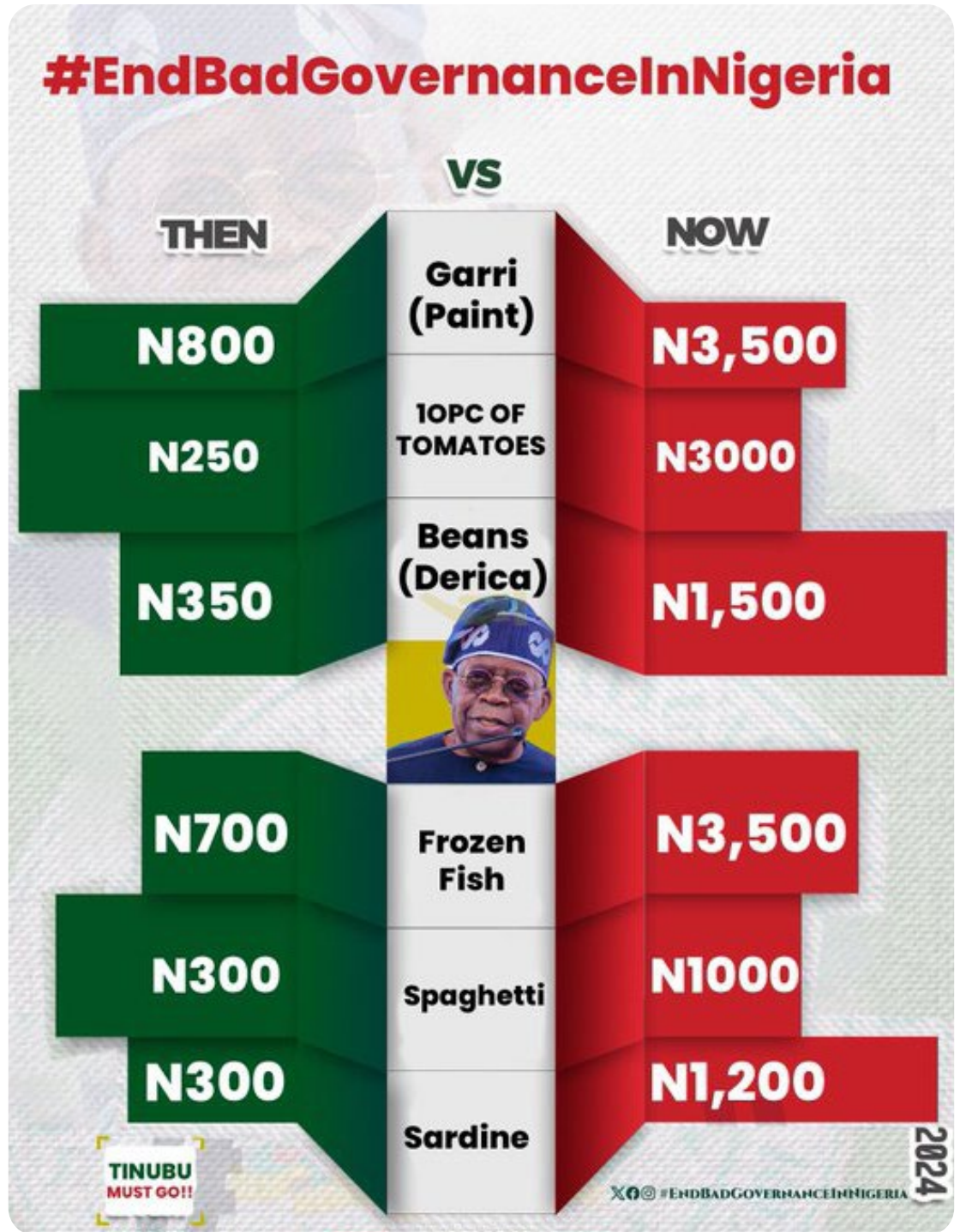
The economic hardship has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable. The price of food has skyrocketed, making it increasingly difficult for families to put meals on the table. The cost of education and healthcare has also soared, pushing many out of reach for those living on the margins. The anger and desperation are palpable, as people who were once hopeful about the future now find themselves struggling to survive.

The protests have also highlighted the deep-seated social and political divisions within Nigeria. While the demonstrations have been largely peaceful, there have been incidents of violence, with protesters clashing with security forces and damaging property. The government's response has been met with criticism, with accusations of heavy-handed tactics and human rights abuses.

No fewer than 17 persons were feared killed in Abuja, Kano, Niger, Borno, Kaduna and Jigawa during the #Endbadgovernance protest which was held across the country on Thursday.

One person was shot dead in Abuja and Kano, two killed in Jigawa, six others were reportedly gunned down by security forces in Niger, while four died in Borno and three in Kaduna.

What began as a peaceful demonstration of discontent has spiraled into a crisis, leaving at least 17 people dead across the country.



These figures are deeply concerning and underscore the gravity of the situation.

As the protests continue, the pressure on the government to address the crisis is mounting. The international community is watching closely, with concerns about the potential for further instability in a region already grappling with numerous challenges. While the government insists that the reforms

are necessary for long-term economic growth, it is clear that the short-term pain is immense.

The road ahead is fraught with challenges. The government must find a way to balance the need for economic reforms with the urgent need to alleviate the suffering of its people. This will require a delicate balancing act, as well as a willingness to listen to the concerns of the people.

The protests in Nigeria are a wake-

up call for the government and a stark reminder of the power of the people. They are a testament to the resilience of the Nigerian spirit, and a demand for a better future. As the nation grapples with this crisis, it is imperative that the government takes decisive action to address the root causes of the problem and to restore hope to its people.



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African Energy Chamber

Alliance of Sahel States: Beginner's Guide

By Professor Maurice Okoli*



The AES is anti-French and anti-ECOWAS in outlook.

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the three Francophone West African countries under military government have established an Alliance of Sahel States (AES, or Alliance des États du Sahel in French), which is a confederation formed between the above-mentioned three countries. It originated as a mutual defense pact and was created by the three countries on September 16, 2023. The confederation was officially established on July 6, 2024.

The AES is anti-French and anti-ECOWAS in outlook. All three member states of AES have had their pro-Western governments overthrown by their militaries and each is currently ruled by a military junta as part of the coup belt. In 2002 Mali withdrew from the internationally backed G5 Sahel alliance, and Niger and Burkina Faso followed suit in 2023. This led to the dissolution of the G5 framework by its last two members, Chad and Mauritania.

The AES has finally exited the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In

addition to their enthusiasm to ensure long-term political power, the three have generally joined a growing list of African countries turning their economy into a better environment for the millions of impoverished citizens.

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, in early July 2024, finally withdrew from the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and have further taken the next collective step to create their own sub-regional bloc referred to as the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). The treaty underscores a «step towards greater integration» between the signatory countries. The pact is open to new members in the case that the candidate accepts all provisions and the 'trio' unanimously agree on the decision.

In practical terms, the trio have repeatedly explained the primary reasons for the joint action as follows: (i) the AU and the ECOWAS's significant failure to provide adequate support against fighting the jihadists, (ii) the imposition of 'illegal sanctions' that are harming the people and (iii)

that the bloc has fallen under the influence of and indiscriminately manipulated by foreign governments, particularly France. (iv) ECOWAS threat to intervene to restore civilian rule in Niger.

The Alliance further seeks new members whose politico-philosophy tallies with the current development challenges. The new confederation's document outlines various directions on its agenda, including establishing a regional bank and stabilization fund. It has also issued an executive order to facilitate foreign investment in their territorial space. The document clip circulated widely on social media, racking up thousands of views and introducing fresh debate around the fact that the former political system was stacked with bureaucracy and conservative policy.

A curious look inside the creation of Alliance of Sahel States have been making resonating waves. The architects of this Alliance, both online and offline, have accordingly been pushing the agenda. The Blueprint Document is open to the public and foreign organizations, the regional

bloc ECOWAS, and the continental organization AU. Reports have indicated that the inaugural meeting was held on July 6, in Niamey – the capital of Niger, and was attended by President of Burkina Faso Ibrahim Traoré, Transitional President of the Republic of Mali Assimi Goita, and President of Niger's National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland Abdourahamane Tchiani.

The Niamey Declaration, in which the 'trio' formally announced the establishment of the new confederation. Its primary multifaceted goals include consolidating joint efforts to ensure security and address the socioeconomic problems of the participating states. The alliance will also pursue and undertake joint development projects as well as address questions relating to trade, industry, and agriculture. The document holds the promise to facilitate the free movement of people, goods, and services.

The Alliance of Sahel States is resonating across the sub-region, across Africa, and beyond. Critics

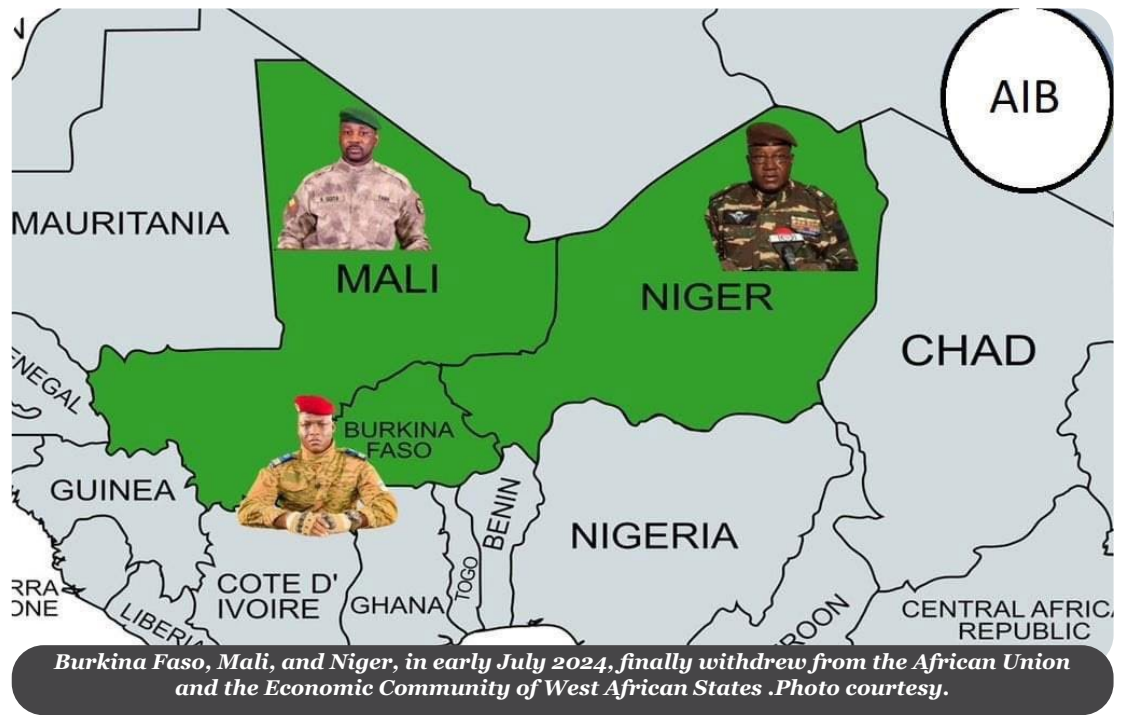
have labeled it as a real 'threat to democracy' and a step to assert 'an authoritarian' takeover of political power and administration, while supporters call it a strategic plan to establish power as one 'of the people, by the people, and for the people, and probably the irreversible beginning of an end of epoch, 500 years of colonialism.

The Alliance of Sahel States came under the spotlight after their July declaration. As expected in the context of the geopolitical situation and analyzing the background of the complexities of the evolving political situation, especially in West Africa, it is very noticeable that the United States, Europe, and a few other external powers have stood on the opposite side.

On the other side, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in its weekly media briefing that while consistently advocating for 'African solutions to African problems', the initiative by the leaders of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger fully meets the interests of the people of those countries. «We are confident that the Alliance of Sahel States will facilitate the formation of a new regional security architecture. Russia reaffirms its intention to continue to provide the necessary support to the countries of the Alliance of Sahel States,» the report said.

In another related development, Mali's military leader Assimi Goita had spoken by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin about political developments and approach to settling the crisis in the region as a whole. Putin stressed «the importance of a peaceful resolution of the situation for a more stable Sahel,» according to the transcript posted to the Kremlin's website.

Most probably, ECOWAS is now crumbling due to institutional weaknesses combined with being manipulated by external forces. There has been rising anti-western sentiment in the former French colonies. It is also due to the long-standing discontent with and the inability to support effectively in the fight against growing insecurity in



the region. Reports say ECOWAS has been working to set up a standing regional force of between 1,500 and 5,000 soldiers, which reports estimate would cost about \$2.6bn (£2bn) annually.

But for political observers, their split from ECOWAS comes with many potential ramifications, ranging from economics to security. Buchanan Ismael, a politics professor at the University of Rwanda, believes it «may increase the risk of insecurity» in an already volatile region infested with militant groups.

– Hassan Isilow, a political analyst says in his report that Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have cemented their split from ECOWAS and formed their own Alliance of Sahel States.

– West Africa region could be headed for 'foreign-imposed instability,' warns University of South Africa's Ahmed Jazbhay.

– More countries could 'separate themselves from ECOWAS, if not through coups, then with anti-Western populists,' says Rwanda-based analyst Buchanan Ismael.

The fact is that the common theme in their statements was greater integration between their countries – the majority of African states that have slowly but surely been drifting away from traditional regional and

Western allies.

Research reports published by The Conversation, Agence France Press, British Broadcasting, and many other reputable media, indicated that the unilateral withdrawal of three West African countries would be hit by trade regulations and restrictions, thus impacting the population and the economy. The three are landlocked and among the poorest in the world, - this already illustrates their major disadvantage and limited position. Several narratives further pointed to the fundamental facts that the crisis has the potential to escalate into either a conflict across West Africa or the final disintegration of ECOWAS.

In July 2024, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger signed a confederation security pact and formalized their final exit from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the regional bloc that imposed sanctions on them after the coups in Mali in 2020, Burkina Faso in 2022, and Niger in 2023. «This summit marks a decisive step for the future of our common space. Together, we will consolidate the foundations of our true independence, a guarantee of true peace and sustainable development through the creation of the 'Alliance of Sahel States' Confederation,» Traore said in a

statement posted on X.

By creating their own Alliance of Sahel States, it exposes the regional bloc ECOWAS and the continental organization AU's powerlessness, multitude of weaknesses, and long-term inability and incompetency to deal with regional problems through mediation. In the ECOWAS guidelines, Article 91 of the bloc's treaty stipulates that member countries remain bound by their obligations for a period of one year after notification of their withdrawal. For better or for worse, these interim military governments have adopted a hardline stance, consistently delayed in fixing concrete dates to hold democratic elections.

The AU Commission chief, Moussa Faki Mahamat, repainted the 'bleak picture' with a 'litany of difficulties' confronting many African countries during the 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) summit held, from 14th to 15th February, at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. AUC chief Moussa Faki Mahamat assertively spoke of 'worrying trends' in North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and also in West Africa.

Moussa Faki Mahamat blasted the failure to counter multiple

“unconstitutional changes of government” following a string of coups in West Africa and warned the scourge of “terrorism” was diverting money away from vital social needs to military spending. In practical reality, the summit was now concerned about looking inward, closely protecting their sovereign prerogatives rather than investing in collective security, somehow to fund most of its budget rather than foreign donors. Gabon and Niger were absent from the summit following their suspension over coups last year — joining Mali, Guinea, Sudan and Burkina Faso, which are also barred for similar reasons.

As an expert in the geopolitics and regional economic integration, it is important to take a close look at the possible obvious implications. Despite undertaking this innovative step, there are still obstacles and explicit challenges in the areas of coordination and cooperation. For instance, the fact that the three are geographically landlocked stipulates the questions of access to the coastline, problems of logistics and delivery of goods through seaports. The next question which cannot be overemphasized is Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are members of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, which uses the CFA franc as its common currency. The trio has to create their own currency if they are expelled from the West African Economic and Monetary Union.

Usually referred to as the West African Sahel, it is the vast semi-arid region where Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger other countries are located. This West African Sahel region has been plagued by security challenges including terrorism and organized crime. Terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, Islamic State, and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb(AQIM) have operated in the Sahel exacerbating violence, extremism, and instability in the region.

According to the latest issue of the Global Terrorism Index, there is a strong link between organized crime and terrorism in this region. Terrorism is on the rise, and the Sahel accounts for almost half of



ECOWAS continues looking for appropriate mechanisms to resolve the ongoing crisis.

all deaths from terrorism globally. This is further exacerbated by cross-border operations of armed groups and rising violent extremism. That combines with widespread and growing desertification contribute additional strain to the region's development. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have a combined population of approximately 80 million people and have some of the fastest population growth rates in the world. But development has been assessed as poor, far below to guarantee a normal living standard.

In addition to insecurity and instability, these countries are engulfed with various socio-economic problems combined with traditional cultural practices that have lessened development. The system of governance and poor policies largely hinder sustainable development.

In light of the above, ECOWAS will have to adapt its strategy to this new geopolitical reality. The AES could seek to establish or strengthen its partnerships with other international actors such as Russia or China of the multipolar BRICS Alliance, which have shown growing interest in Africa.

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger together comprise some 72 million people, almost a fifth of the regional

bloc's population. It remains one of the least developed countries in the world, with a GDP of \$16.23 billion in 2022. Geography and environment contribute to Burkina Faso's food insecurity.

Mali's key industry is agriculture. Cotton is the country's largest crop export and is exported west throughout Senegal and Ivory Coast. Gold is mined in the southern region and Mali has the third-highest gold production in Africa (after South Africa and Ghana).

Niger is the second largest landlocked nation in Africa behind Chad. Over 80% of its land area lies in the Sahara. In 2021, Niger was the main supplier of uranium to the EU, followed by Kazakhstan and Russia. Despite its large deposit of uranium, Niger has a multidimensional underdevelopment and 80% of its citizens consistently wallow in abject poverty.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) continues looking for appropriate mechanisms to resolve the ongoing crisis. The regional bloc has come under persistent criticisms, it slackened on its primary responsibilities while some have called for drastic reforms and personnel changes (overhauling or restructuring) attributing to the complete inefficiency of the

organization.

Consisting of 15 member states, ECOWAS facilitates peacekeeping through systematic collaboration with civil society, cooperation with development policies, and other activities to meet sub-regional security challenges. Established on 28 May 1975, the bloc's reputation has been at stake, and most probably, needs new dynamic faces at the Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria.

* Professor Maurice Okoli is a fellow at the Institute for African Studies and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences. He is also a fellow at the North-Eastern Federal University of Russia. He is an expert at the Roscongress Foundation and the Valdai Discussion Club.

As an academic researcher and economist with a keen interest in current geopolitical changes and the emerging world order, Maurice Okoli frequently contributes articles for publication in reputable media portals on different aspects of the interconnection between developing and developed countries, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Europe. With comments and suggestions, he can be reached via

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Critical For Independent Voices To Be Expanded Across Central Africa-Dr Denis Foretia

Dr Denis Foretia On The Central African Think Tank Challenge

By Ajong Mbapndah L



From weak institutions, closing civic space, limited interregional trade to poor economic performance, the challenges in Central Africa are enormous, says Dr Foretia.

The Central African sub region could benefit from the expansion of independent voices, says Dr Denis Foretia, Co-Chair of the Foretia Foundation in Cameroon. Sharing insights on the work of the Foretia Foundation and the second edition of the Central African Think Tank Forum which runs from August 21-22, 2024, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, Dr Foretia says it is imperative to amplify Central African voices in policy discussions.

“This year, we will convene over 150 stakeholders from the think tank ecosystem and provide an unparalleled platform for networking, experience sharing, and learning best practices. Our team has worked tirelessly to secure active participation from think tanks and researchers across the region, who are the primary focus of this forum,” Dr Foretia affirmed.

In bringing together think tanks from across the region, we’re fostering an environment where ideas can be shared, best practices can be exchanged, and collaborative projects can be initiated, says Dr Denis Foretia in an exclusive interview with PAV.

“The forum tackles one of the most pressing issues facing think tanks in our region: funding. According to the On Think Tank 2023 report, 86% of African think tanks believed that the funding context was either worsening or not improving between 2022 and 2023. By bringing together think tanks and potential funders, including international organizations, we’re creating opportunities for new partnerships and funding streams,” Dr Foretia, says.

By showcasing the work of regional think tanks and researchers, we’re challenging the perception that quality policy research can’t come

from our region. This visibility is crucial for influencing both national and international policy agendas, Dr Foretia says in the interview which also covers the ground breaking work of the Foretia Foundation across Cameroon and the Central African Sub Region.

May we start by introducing the Foretia Foundation and its core programs for us?

Thank you so much for this opportunity to talk about our work. As you know, the Foundation was established over a decade ago, in 2012, with the mission to catalyze economic transformation by providing independent, in-depth, and insightful policy recommendations through evidence-based research. We focus on social entrepreneurship, science and technology, innovation, and public health to directly touch the

lives of the population. We also tackle the crucial issues of governance, democracy, peace, and security in the Central Africa region. These different areas of our work are addressed through well-structured programs and projects, all implemented by our team of skilled professionals from various backgrounds.

Over the years, we’ve been leveraging both in-country and international expertise to conduct high-quality research which forms the basis of our advocacy, allowing us to push for policy changes. Our ultimate aim is to promote the implementation of progressive policies that create economic opportunities for all Africans.

In the 12 years of the Foretia Foundation, what are some of the signature achievements you can share and what



We believe strongly that Cameroonians, and Africans, are perfectly capable of owning their destinies and driving the agenda that is best for their economic transformation, says Dr Foretia.

impact would you say the work of the Foundation has had on the socio-economic landscape of Cameroon?

Where do I start? I mean, over the past 12 years, the Foundation has had many significant achievements that have positively impacted Cameroon's socio-economic landscape. At the very basic level, we are very happy every time our team is able to directly change the life of one citizen. The young leaders we have empowered through our Emerging Leaders program is a good example. I think of young students who have been part of our STEM Prize competition, directly promoting investments in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math in the country.

Another key achievement has been the establishment of the Small Business Entrepreneurship Center (SBEC) which has become a vital player in the business incubation landscape, helping numerous small businesses, especially those owned by women and youths, transition into formal, sustainable entities. The impact of SBEC on local

entrepreneurship and job creation has been substantial.

We are not even talking about the transformative work that the Nkafu Policy Institute has done in conducting research and advocating for evidence-informed policy making across a broad spectrum of issue areas. We're proud to say that Nkafu is changing perceptions about think tanks in the Central Africa region. Through high-quality research and evidence-based recommendations, we're demonstrating the crucial role think tanks can play in shaping policies and improving lives. Our regular convening of stakeholders from decision-making spheres to discuss critical issues has enhanced our advocacy efforts.

As an organization, we've grown into a robust institution with over 40 permanent staff members across four technical and operational departments. Our programs and projects cover a wide range of areas including entrepreneurship, leadership, and innovative technologies.

The foundation is also known for the quality of its publications

including policy briefs, op-eds, articles, and diverse thematic reports which are available on the Nkafu website on www.nkafu.org and the On Policy Africa monthly magazine available on www.onpolicy.org.

What were some of the serious challenges you and your team have faced in building the Foretia Foundation to the formidable machine that it is today?

Building the Foundation in general and setting up the Nkafu Policy Institute in particular is a dream come true. We looked at the landscape of civil society organizations in Cameroon at the time and wanted to implement an independent organization, a think tank to be precise, that would work to catalyze economic transformation across Africa. As you know, a lot of policies implemented in our country are somewhat externally generated and we don't like that. We believe strongly that Cameroonians, and Africans, are perfectly capable of owning their destinies and driving the agenda that is best for their economic

transformation. That's what we set out to do. It hasn't been easy, but we have made significant progress.

Some of the challenges we faced included a policymaking environment that was, and in fact, is somewhat hostile to in-country generated ideas and policy options. There is obviously a deficit of talent at the highest level, as public policy making is not something that is readily thought in our universities. And there was, and still is, the issue of capital, of funding, to maintain independence. But we have made progress in overcoming many of these by collaborating widely with various stakeholders and ensuring that whatever we do is done at the highest quality level. This has become an area of real pride for all of us at the Foundation.

We noticed social entrepreneurship was only fairly developed within the civil society space or geared toward political activism. We wanted to change this narrative because we believed and still do, that the much-expected change could be achieved otherwise, precisely by informing decision-making through evidence-based research. So, the Nkafu Policy Institute stands as an innovative response to a long-standing issue: the need for change in all its ramifications.

Of course, there were challenges, there still are. Salient among these is the repressive nature of the civil society space in Cameroon, which makes it difficult to maintain independence and hence neutrality. But this is something we cannot barter with because our independence is what determines our neutrality and shapes the quality and impact of our work, without which we lose credibility in the face of our funders.

You may want to know that On Think Tank's 'Think Tank State of the Sector 2023' reports that 33% of think tanks in Africa say it is harder to operate, while 41% complain of a worsening political context. Another challenge that is still very vivid today is instilling the culture of think tanks as a force of proposition in the African policy-making ecosystem. Some regions like Southern and Eastern Africa are quite advanced,

while Central Africa lags. Last but not least of the challenges is the deeply rooted perception within some State institutions, the media, and general citizens, that civil society organizations in general and think tanks in particular are the visible hand of invisible Western States or organizations trying to destabilize political regimes.

Despite these hurdles, we've persevered because we believe deeply in our mission. We're proud of what we've built, but we're also acutely aware that our work - and the challenges that come with it - is ongoing.

Could you share insights on the state of preparation of the second edition of the Central Africa Think Tank Forum that the Foretia Foundation will be hosting?

Preparations for the second edition of the Central Africa Think Tank Forum (CATTf) are in full swing, and we're excited about the progress we've made. As you know, the Central Africa region is undoubtedly the most challenged region on the continent. From weak institutions, closing civic space, limited interregional trade to poor economic performance.

Last year, we established the Central Africa Think Tank Forum to bring together policy makers, researchers, think tankers, and funders from around the region to a common platform with the goal to deepen understanding of common challenges, and to empower independent voices in the Central African Region. Building on last year's success, we've been working diligently to ensure this year's forum is even more impactful.

This year, we will convene over 150 stakeholders from the think tank ecosystem and provide an unparalleled platform for networking, experience sharing, and learning best practices. Our team has worked tirelessly to secure active participation from think tanks and researchers across the region, who are the primary focus of this forum. Also participating will be policymakers



The Central Africa Think Tank Forum looks to build a platform for continued exchange of knowledge, experiences and opportunities amongst key stakeholders.

from government agencies, civil society organizations, international donors, and diplomatic missions.

Based on lessons from the first edition that took place last year, what are some of the changes that participants should expect from the 2024 edition?

One of the very exciting things about this year's program is that attendees will meet, get to know and interact with our 2024 class of Emerging Leaders. These 20 dynamic young leaders are a force to be reckoned with, and we cannot wait to see the learning and friendships that come from the Forum.

Also, we have improved the participant experience this year, and have rolled out a user-friendly event app providing participants with every information they will need about the forum. We've engaged resource persons from within the region to provide keynote speeches and share civil society perspectives on how CSOs can contribute to solving development challenges. There will also be many breakout sessions for participants to

engage deeply with specific themes and actively collaborate.

In terms of participation, may we know some of the partners expected in Yaoundé for the 2024 CATTf?

We've brought together many organizations and their leaders. These include Institute for Security Studies (ISS), REDHAC, African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), IDRC, Canadian High Commission, GIZ, and many others.

Compared to the rest of Africa, there is a perception that Central Africa scores low on issues from democracy, civil society, business, entrepreneurship, and more, how do you think initiatives like the CATTf can turn things around for the sub region?

You're right to point this out, and it's one of the key reasons why initiatives like the Central Africa Think Tank Forum are so crucial for our region.

To give you some context, the 2020 Global Think Tank Index ranking didn't feature a single think tank from

Central Africa among the world's top institutions. The statistics are quite telling: Central Africa has only 63 classified think tanks, compared to 102 in South Africa alone, 64 in Kenya, and 52 in Nigeria. These numbers reflect the challenges our region faces in terms of research capacity and policy influence.

The CATTf aims to address these issues head-on. First and foremost, it provides a platform for networking and collaboration. By bringing together think tanks from across the region, we're fostering an environment where ideas can be shared, best practices can be exchanged, and collaborative projects can be initiated.

Secondly, the forum tackles one of the most pressing issues facing think tanks in our region: funding. According to the On Think Tank 2023 report, 86% of African think tanks believed that the funding context was either worsening or not improving between 2022 and 2023. By bringing together think tanks and potential funders, including international organizations, we're creating



The Central Africa Think Tank Forum offers a unique and valuable opportunity for all stakeholders in the region's development, says Dr Foretia

opportunities for new partnerships and funding streams.

Moreover, the forum serves as an amplifier for Central African voices in policy discussions. By showcasing the work of regional think tanks and researchers, we're challenging the perception that quality policy research can't come from our region. This visibility is crucial for influencing both national and international policy agendas.

While we don't expect to solve all these issues overnight, we believe that initiatives like the CATTF are vital for gradually shifting the narrative and improving the capacity of Central African think tanks.

What post event mechanisms do you have in place to monitor the success and impact of the CATTF as it enters its second year, is there confirmation that the Forum is here to stay and will be held annually?

Yes, we have every intention to have this as an annual forum. This

is critical for expanding independent voices across the entire Central Africa region and to ensure that think tanks and civil society organizations become stronger and stronger. This is absolutely important if we are to stimulate and sustain the type of economic development we've seen in other regions of the world. So, our key metric from this Forum, is how much collaboration from participating institutions can we generate that will be mutually reinforcing. Because the real goal of this forum is to push for institutional collaboration, knowledge-sharing and strategic partnerships. We already have initiatives for mutual capacity-building both on the technical side and on the organizational side. I would be remiss if I do not thank our key supporters most notably, OSF-Africa, IDRC, Templeton World Charity Foundation, the Atlas Network and GIZ.

Post forum, the key concerns or questions should be: how many policy formulations are we able to effect in terms of policy change? One

of the evaluations will be to assess how think tanks can effectively contribute to policy formulation in the Central African region and across the African ecosystem. What percentage of women or young people are increasingly involved in decision-making spaces or represented in the political space? These are all issues trending in the Central African region which we want to thematize in the course of this forum. We will be monitoring to see how many of our recommendations post the forum will be taken into consideration by policymakers as well as funders. Bear in mind that many areas are still not funded, perhaps because donors don't see an interest in these areas. So, we hope to bring these areas into the limelight and highlight the pressing societal challenges in these areas while raising awareness for funding.

Any last sales pitch you may want to make to governments within the sub region, to potential participants, and international and local

partners on the merits of joining and taking the CATTF seriously?

The Central Africa Think Tank Forum offers a unique and valuable opportunity for all stakeholders in the region's development. For governments, it's an opportunity to engage with their countrymen and women on policy solutions on Central Africa's challenges. For researchers and policy professionals, it's an unparalleled platform for networking, learning, and amplifying their work. Our international partners can gain fresh perspectives on regional issues and identify new collaborators, while local partners can contribute to building a more robust civil society.

Ultimately, this forum is about harnessing our collective expertise to address the complex challenges facing Central Africa. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, each with unique insights, we're fostering an environment where evidence-based policy-making can thrive and independent voices can drive positive change. We invite you all to be part of this important initiative and help shape the future of our region.

Back to the Foretia Foundation where we started, how do you envision the future, any broad outlines on what should be expected in the years to come?

Despite the challenges facing think tanks and independent voices in Central Africa, we want to remain optimistic about the expected change in the narrative that CSOs are a vital development vehicle in any society and deserve an enabling space to work towards achieving this noble mission. We look forward to a time when the policy and decision-makers in Central Africa will stop considering independent voices as threats but as strategic development partners. This is our dream, and we are devoted to working towards achieving it. Of course, our goal is to sustain strategic initiatives like this. We definitely need everyone's hand on deck.



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Nkafu Policy Institute: Shaping Central Africa's Future Through Independent Research

By Bruno Ittia

Founded in 2012, the Nkafu Policy Institute has rapidly emerged as a leading independent think tank in Central Africa. Based in Cameroon, Nkafu operates under the umbrella of the Denis and Lenora Foretia Foundation, with a clear mission to provide independent, in-depth, and insightful policy recommendations that enable all Africans to prosper in free, fair, democratic, and sustainable economies.

Dr. Denis Foretia, the visionary behind Nkafu and co-chair of the Foundation, serves as the institute's Executive Chairman. His leadership has been instrumental in shaping Nkafu's direction and impact. Under his guidance, Nkafu has focused its work on five key areas that reflect the most pressing challenges in Central Africa: Economic Affairs; Governance and Democracy; Peace and Security; Education and Public Health; and Science and Technology. These focus areas allow Nkafu to address a wide range of issues crucial to the region's development.

The institute's approach is guided by its core values: Integrity, Innovation, Leadership, Thinking Big, and Diversity. These principles not only shape Nkafu's research methodology but also influence its organizational culture and interactions with stakeholders. By adhering to these values, Nkafu has established itself as a trusted source of policy insights and recommendations.

Since its inception, Nkafu has undertaken several high-impact projects demonstrating its commitment to effecting real change, such as the «Doing Business» project, funded by Atlas Network, which aimed to improve Cameroon's business environment. Building on this

economic focus, Nkafu expanded its reach through the «Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa» initiative, collaborating with partners in Burkina Faso and Ghana. This project, funded by the International Development Research Center (IDRC), explored innovative incubation practices to foster entrepreneurship. Addressing critical social and governance issues, the institute launched the RASIG Project, promoting women's rights and integrated governance in the ECCAS region.

The institute is also tackling monetary policy challenges through the MAFA Initiative. Supported

by the Templeton World Charity Foundation, this project aims to contribute to the monetary and fiscal policy autonomy of Francophone African countries in the Franc CFA zone.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of Nkafu's approach. The institute has cultivated partnerships with key funders such as Atlas Network, IDRC, Rising Tide Foundation, and the John Templeton Foundation, while maintaining strong ties with fellow think tanks such as Institut Concorde, CERAPE, IDEC, the Okweliens, and CRAD among others. These relationships have facilitated knowledge exchange,

joint research initiatives, and a more comprehensive approach to regional policy challenges, enhancing Nkafu's capacity to engage in impactful research and advocacy.

While fostering these collaborative relationships, Nkafu remains steadfast in maintaining its independence and credibility. The institute achieves this delicate balance by clearly articulating its values, mission, and work orientation from the outset of any partnership. Notably, Nkafu does not accept funding from public governments, ensuring its ability to provide unbiased, evidence-based policy recommendations. This unwavering commitment to independence has solidified Nkafu's position as a trusted voice in policy debates throughout the region.

Looking to the future, Nkafu has set ambitious goals. The institute aims to strengthen the capacity of think tanks in the ECCAS region and contribute to making the area more attractive to funders. Recognizing the importance of fostering strong leadership in the think tank

sector, Nkafu has launched the Executive and Strategic Leadership Program.

This initiative aims to strengthen the strategic management capacity of think tanks, enhance the leadership and research capacity of think tank researchers (with a particular focus on women), and expand the visibility and reach of think tanks in Central Africa.

Through these forward-looking efforts, Nkafu is not only working to enhance its impact but also to elevate the entire ecosystem of policy research and advocacy in the region. As Central Africa continues to navigate complex social, economic,



Lenora Ebule is co-Chair of the Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation



While fostering these collaborative relationships, Nkafu remains steadfast in maintaining its independence and credibility

and political challenges, the Nkafu Policy Institute stands as a beacon of independent thought and research-driven policy advocacy.

By providing rigorous analysis,

fostering collaboration, and nurturing future leaders, Nkafu is playing a crucial role in shaping a more prosperous and equitable future for the entire region. Through its

ongoing commitment to excellence and innovation in policy research, Nkafu is well-positioned to continue its vital work in catalyzing positive change across Central Africa.

*Bruno Ittia is the Director of Communications at the Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation

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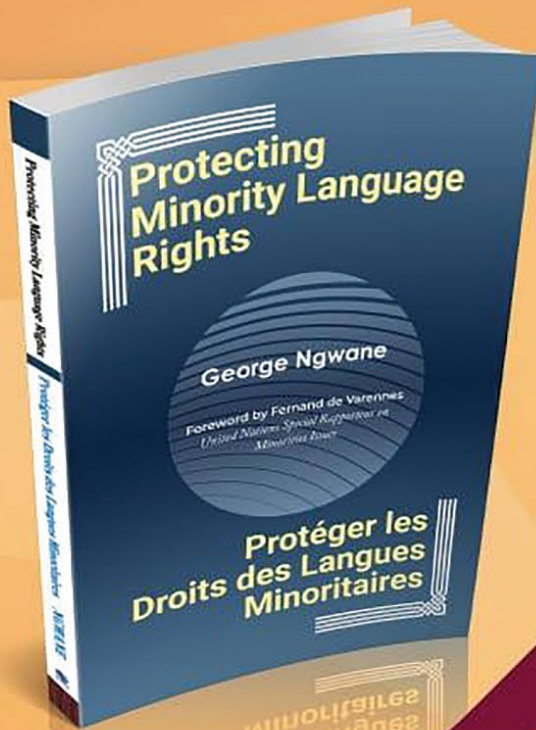
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Collaborative Impact: Strengthening Policy Influence Through Partnerships in Central Africa

By Bruno Ittia*

In the evolving landscape of policy research in Central Africa, think tanks are increasingly recognizing the power of collaboration to amplify their impact. A prime example of this collaborative spirit is the partnership between Institut Concorde, a Gabonese think tank, and the Nkafu Policy Institute, think tank of the Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation in Cameroon.

Founded in 2021, Institut Concorde has quickly established itself as a significant voice in Gabon's public discourse. «Our primary objective is to think about Gabon differently, aiming to impact public debate alongside other actors,» explains Dr. Charlene Ongotha, President of Institut Concorde. With a broad focus encompassing all major societal issues affecting Gabon, Institut Concorde has chosen a generalist approach, believing that all sectors of activity deserve attention.

The Genesis of a Powerful Partnership

The partnership between Institut Concorde and the Nkafu Policy Institute began in 2022 when Nkafu selected the Gabonese think tank for the project on “Promoting Women’s Rights, Accountability, Security, and Integrated Governance in the ECCAS Region”. The project aims to enhance ECCAS think tanks’ policy influence at all levels, develop leadership and research capabilities, particularly among women researchers, and increase their visibility and impact both continentally and globally. This selection was based on Institut Concorde’s reputation as “a serious and active think tank capable of representing Gabon in a cohort of 10 think tanks from the sub-region”, Dr. Ongotha recounts. This recognition not only validated Institut Concorde’s work but also opened doors to new



Charlène Ongotha, President of Institut Concorde

opportunities for collaboration and growth.

Collaborative Successes and Capacity Building

One of the most beneficial aspects of this partnership has been Institut Concorde’s participation in the Central Africa Think Tank Forum (CATTF) last year. Dr. Ongotha describes it as «a commendable initiative and a real opportunity for the Institute to develop.» However, she emphasizes that the collaboration’s true hallmark has been the opportunity to write a report on integrated governance and public accountability. «The possibility of writing a report on integrated

governance and public accountability remains notably the angle of our collaboration that will remain a real marker,» Dr. Ongotha states. This project not only showcased the expertise of both institutes, but also contributed valuable insights to the field of governance in Central Africa.

The partnership has brought tangible benefits to Institut Concorde. It has mobilized the think tank’s members around interesting and practical themes and allowed them to call upon external experts who have made relevant contributions. Notably, this included an opinion piece on the role of the constitutional judge during transition periods, a topic of particular relevance in the

region’s political context.

Importantly, the collaboration has also provided crucial financial support. Dr. Ongotha highlights this aspect, saying, «We were also able to benefit from funding that helped us as a young think tank. This is not negligible.» For a newly established organization like Institut Concorde, such financial support is crucial in building capacity, expanding research capabilities, and ensuring the sustainability of their work.

Building Bridges: The Central Africa Think Tank Forum (CATTF)

While bilateral partnerships like the one between Institut Concorde and the Nkafu Policy Institute are important, the landscape of think tank collaboration in Central Africa is further enriched by broader initiatives. Chief among these is the CATTF, an annual event that has become a cornerstone for policy research networking in the region.

The CATTF serves as a platform where think tanks from across Central Africa can come together, share ideas, and forge new partnerships. For Institut Concorde, participation in this forum has been a game-changer, complementing and amplifying the benefits of its individual collaborations.

Reflecting on their experience at the 2023 edition of the CATTF, Dr. Charlene Ongotha shares, «During the first edition of the CATTF, we were pleasantly surprised by the quality of the exchanges», a sentiment that underscores the forum’s role in facilitating high-level discussions and knowledge sharing among policy researchers and think tank leaders.

The Impact of the Central Africa Think Tank Forum

The CATTF has been playing a

significant role in enhancing Institut Concorde's work and partnerships beyond its collaboration with the Nkafu Policy Institute. The forum has provided a unique opportunity for Institut Concorde to gauge the importance of regional collaborations on a larger scale. «We especially measured the interest of collaborations of this type with other think tanks, which allows for pooling strengths and developing internal research skills,» Dr. Ongotha explains. This realization has been pivotal in shaping Institut Concorde's approach to partnerships and capacity building.

The forum's impact extends beyond just networking. It has opened doors for potential research collaborations, helped identify common challenges faced by think tanks in the region, and provided a platform for showcasing innovative approaches to policy research and advocacy.

However, Dr. Ongotha also notes a challenge that emerged from their last CATTf experience: maintaining sufficient links to make the effectiveness of the work carried out more practical and tangible. This insight highlights the need for sustained effort in nurturing relationships formed at such events, ensuring that the momentum generated translates into concrete, long-term collaborations.

The Future of Think Tank Collaborations

Looking ahead, Dr. Ongotha sees the CATTf playing a crucial role in fostering think tank collaborations in the region. «The Forum is a unique opportunity for networking and discovering other think tanks,» she explains. «The exchanges that mark these meetings are essential for working on our advocacy and legitimacy with the authorities of our respective countries.»

Dr. Ongotha emphasizes the importance of maintaining this event in the future, noting its significance in raising awareness about the role of think tanks. «It is therefore very important that it continues in the future. It is also an important event to



Henri Mokambi, Head of Communications at Institut Concorde

make known the role of think tanks,» she asserts.

The future of think tank collaborations in Central Africa looks promising, with events like the CATTf serving as catalysts for partnership and knowledge exchange. Dr. Ongotha envisions a landscape where think tanks regularly collaborate on research projects, policy recommendations, and advocacy efforts. This increased cooperation could lead to more comprehensive and nuanced policy analyses, taking into account diverse perspectives from across the region.

Moreover, these collaborations have the potential to enhance the credibility and influence of think tanks in the eyes of policymakers. By presenting united fronts on key issues, think tanks can more effectively advocate for evidence-based policy changes. Dr. Ongotha believes that as these partnerships mature, think tanks will be better positioned to address complex, cross-border challenges that require coordinated responses.

However, realizing this vision

will require ongoing effort and commitment from all parties involved, Dr. Ongotha suggests that future collaborations could include joint research projects, staff exchange, and shared resources. She also emphasizes the need for regular communication channels between think tanks to maintain momentum between major events like the CATTf. «The key to successful future collaborations,» Dr. Ongotha notes, «lies in our ability to translate the connections made at forums into lasting, productive partnerships. We need to keep the dialogue going and find ways to work together on a day-to-day basis.»

As think tanks in Central Africa continue to evolve and adapt to changing political and social landscapes, these collaborations will likely play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of policy research and advocacy in the region.

The partnership between Institut Concorde and the Nkafu Policy Institute, facilitated by events like the Central Africa Think Tank Forum, exemplifies the power of collaboration

in the policy research landscape of Central Africa. As these think tanks continue to work together, sharing knowledge, resources, and platforms, they are not just strengthening their individual capacities but are collectively enhancing the quality and impact of policy research in the region.

Through initiatives like the CATTf, Institut Concorde and its partners are paving the way for a more interconnected and influential think tank community in Central Africa. As Dr. Ongotha and her colleagues continue to “think about Central Africa differently”, their collaborative approach promises to play a crucial role in addressing the complex challenges facing the region and in shaping more effective, evidence-based policies for the future. The evolving landscape of think tank partnerships in Central Africa offers a glimpse into a future where policy research is increasingly collaborative, inclusive, and impactful.

*Bruno Ittia is Director of Communications Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation

Charting the Path for Cameroon's Future Vanguards with 2024 Emerging Leaders Program

By Bruno Ittia

In a nation brimming with youthful energy and boundless potential, investing in the next generation of leaders is not just a priority – it's a necessity. Cameroon stands at a crossroads, where the choices made today will shape the trajectory of its development for decades to come. It is with this profound understanding that the Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation is organizing the 2024 Emerging Leaders Program.

This initiative serves as a beacon of hope, identifying and nurturing the brightest young minds poised to steer Cameroon toward a future defined by good governance, respect for human rights, and sustainable economic prosperity. Since its inception in 2019, the Emerging Leaders program has been a driving force, empowering a new guard of changemakers armed with the skills, knowledge, and determination to positively impact their communities.

The program's ethos is rooted in the belief that true transformation begins with investing in human capital. By equipping these emerging leaders with comprehensive training, mentorship, and hands-on



The 2024 edition of the Emerging Leaders Program will run from August 18 to 20, 2024 at Djeuga Hotel, Yaounde – Cameroon.

experience, the program cultivates a cadre of visionaries capable of tackling complex challenges head-on, while championing the values of democracy, transparency, and inclusive growth.

The Emerging Leaders of this year

will embark on an immersive journey, following a tailored curriculum that will hone their leadership acumen, policy analysis skills, and ability to navigate the complexities of governance. They will not merely be students; but also, frontline

ambassadors, tasked with translating their knowledge into tangible solutions that resonate within the communities they serve.

One of the program's hallmarks is its emphasis on experiential learning. Participants will receive funding and guidance to conceive and implement community projects that address pressing issues such as economic empowerment, human rights advocacy, and fostering a culture of democratic engagement.

The future of Cameroon lies in the hands of its youth, and the Emerging Leaders program stands as a testament to the Foundation's unwavering belief in their potential. By investing in these dynamic changemakers today, the Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation is paving the way for a tomorrow where good governance, human rights, and economic empowerment are not merely aspirations, but enduring realities.

Bruno Ittia is the Director of Communications at the Denis & Lenora Foretia Foundation



This initiative serves as a beacon of hope, identifying and nurturing the brightest young minds poised to steer Cameroon toward a future defined by good governance

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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.

Interswitch and ACI Worldwide: A Renewed Partnership Powering Africa's Real-Time Payment Revolution



As digital technology and innovation continue to push the frontiers of the financial landscape, Africa is witnessing a surge in digital payments, becoming a formidable force in the sector. Fintechs, banks, and other financial institutions are leading the adoption of digital transaction solutions, providing various payment methods to their customers while driving financial inclusion and enhancing customer experiences for business owners and consumers.

According to the 2024 Prime Time for Real-Time report published by ACI Worldwide in partnership with GlobalData, Africa had the highest real-time share of electronic payments in 2023, accounting for 40% with 8.2 billion real-time payment transactions. This figure is projected to reach 21.7 billion by 2028, with a CAGR of 21.2% from 2023 to 2028.

Despite these significant advancements, there remains a need for more digital infrastructure solutions to address the challenges of modern real-time payments. Enhanced infrastructure will reduce

reliance on cash, build trust and confidence, and foster cross-border payments across the continent. As the payment ecosystem evolves, industry players must find ways to collaborate and leverage each other's strengths to better serve customers and stay ahead of the curve.

A prime example of such collaboration is the partnership between Interswitch Group, one of Africa's leading digital payment and commerce companies, and ACI Worldwide, a global leader in real-time payments software. For over 20 years, Interswitch and ACI Worldwide have joined forces to deploy innovative technology solutions to meet the urgent demands for digital payments in Africa. To mark a new frontier of their long-term partnership, Interswitch and ACI Worldwide recently renewed their collaboration with a signing ceremony in Miami, USA, which consolidates Interswitch's relationship with ACI from reseller to strategic partner status across multiple markets in the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

The core of this partnership lies in integrating ACI's real-time

payment solutions into Interswitch's technology, establishing the core infrastructure for electronic transactions in Nigeria. This integration has paved the way for safe and efficient digital payments, including instant transactions and a drastic reduction in cash reliance, thereby improving payment experiences in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

Nigeria is the leading real-time payments market in Africa, with 7.9 billion of the 8.2 billion real-time transactions recorded in the region in 2023. Real-time payments accounted for an impressive 82.1% of all electronic payments in Nigeria, demonstrating the positive impact of the partnership between Interswitch and ACI Worldwide.

Interswitch and ACI Worldwide recently held key stakeholder engagement events in Nigeria and Kenya. Themed "Modernizing Digital Payment Infrastructure for Innovation, Growth & Commercial Advantage" the events highlighted the transformative role of both companies in the future development of Africa's digital payments landscape.

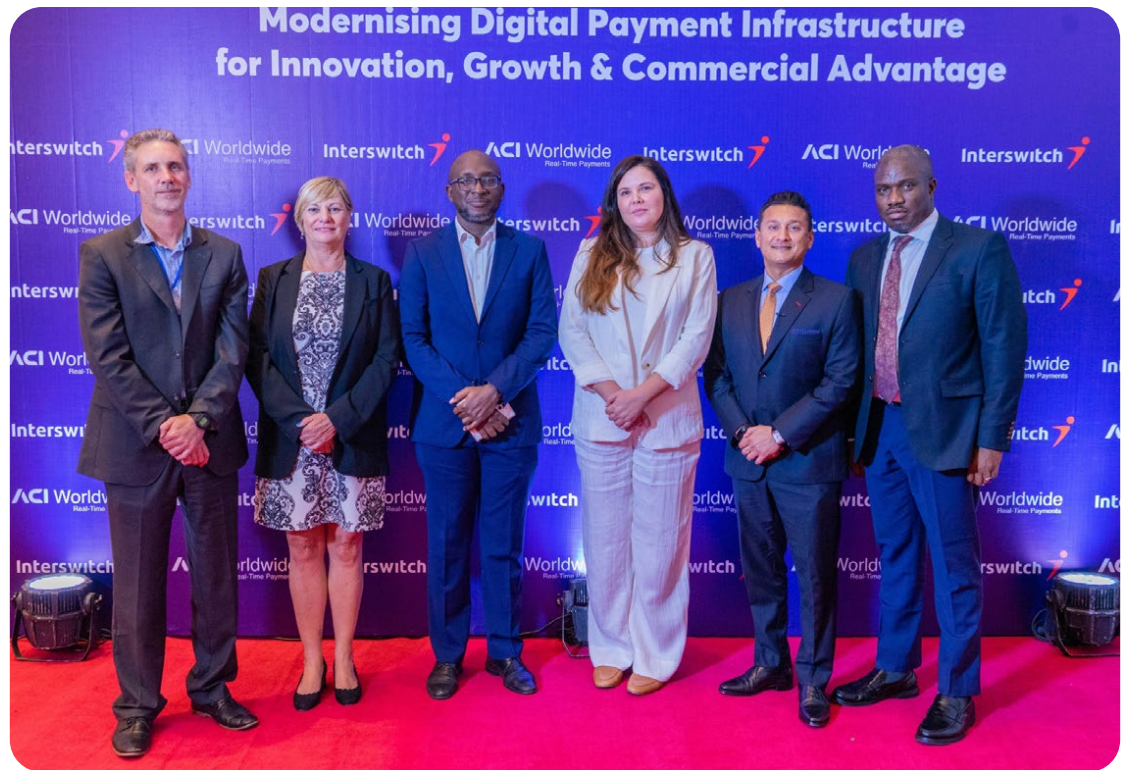
Mitchell Elegbe, Founder and Group Managing Director, Interswitch Group, emphasized the significant advancements gained through the partnership. "Interswitch's long-standing partnership with ACI Worldwide has been instrumental in advancing Africa's digital payment ecosystem. This collaboration has driven significant advancements in payment technology, streamlining processes, enhancing security, and fostering economic growth while promoting financial inclusion across the continent," said Elegbe.

Santhosh Rao, Senior Vice President of MEASA at ACI Worldwide, highlighted ACI's vision for the African financial services industry. "As a global leader in mission-critical, real-time payments software, ACI is dedicated to driving transformative change and sustainable growth within the African financial sector. Our vision is to empower institutions with innovative technologies that enhance operational efficiency, deepen financial inclusion, and elevate customer experiences. Through strategic partnerships and cutting-edge solutions, ACI aims

to catalyze digital transformation and advance the financial landscape across Africa,” said Rao.

Jonah Adams, Managing Director of Digital Infrastructure and Managed Services (Interswitch Systegra) stressed the importance of collaboration to unlock the pan-African payments ecosystem and foster commerce and economic growth. “It is imperative for financial players to recognize the transformative potential of key partnerships and collaboration in boosting commerce and driving economic growth across Africa. Through value co-creation and collaboration, businesses can unlock new opportunities and facilitate seamless transactions that transcend borders,” said Adams.

The event also featured industry experts who discussed insights, case studies, and opportunities in real-time payment adoption, trends, and modern-day strategies to address concerns such as cross-border payments, modernization of core



payment infrastructure for banks, Interswitch and ACI collaboration promoting financial inclusion, open banking, and securing digital will continue to revolutionize Africa’s optimizing business efficiency, and payment ecosystem with emerging boosting economic development technologies and innovation, across the African continent.

Botswana: Vegetables Import Ban Threatens to Derail AfCFTA Objectives

By Prince Kurupati

In December 2021, Botswana passed a temporary act which banned the importation of vegetables from neighbouring South Africa. Though meant to be a temporary ban, through successive extensions, the ban has now stretched for 4 years as it is set to end in 2025. The raft of extensions spearheaded by the country’s president Dr Mokgweetsi Masisi means another extension beyond 2025 is very much possible.

Over the years, President Masisi has vehemently defended the ban saying it gives advantages and incentives the local farmers to fill in the gap and increase their vegetables production. In a recent post, the President justified the ban saying «Our ban on imported vegetables was a powerful move to boost our local farmers & economy. This initiative empowers Batswana



by promoting self-sufficiency & improving livelihoods.”

On the same post, President Masihi attached a short video which showcased Botswana’s improvement in vegetable production since the country banned the imports of vegetables from South Africa. The celebratory mood of President Masihi persists as it was the same tone he had when he addressed the nation last year on the issue saying the restriction ban is bearing fruit as it has led to a reduction in Botswana’s fresh produce import bill from P634 million in 2018 to P182 million in 2023.

Following in the footsteps of Botswana is Namibia which also enacted a ban on vegetables imports from South Africa. Justifying its decision, Namibia also cited the need to protect and incentivize its local farmers to increase their vegetables production. Both Namibia and Botswana in enacting the bans targeted the same produce namely tomatoes, carrots, potatoes, cabbage, lettuce, garlic, onions, ginger and fresh herbs.

While both Botswana and Namibia cite noble reasons for persisting with the bans, the effects of the bans are having a huge impact on the livelihoods of South African fresh produce farmers. As their usual markets close, they have to market their produce in an ever-competitive South African market something which is threatening their livelihoods.

South Africa, which produces about 5.4 million tons of vegetables a year and nearly 78 percent of that made up of potatoes, tomatoes, onions, carrots and cabbages in its earlier response to the import ban said that it is not in spirit of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which seeks to promote intra-Africa trade.

Many ordinary citizens who commented on the issue on various social media platforms supported this stance. One ‘X’ user by the name M-Jay said, “Protectionism is against



SA’s farmers will be pushed to plant less because of Botswana, Namibia vegetable import bans

the spirit of the AfCFTA president Masihi. Rather let Botswana farmers compete for the market by producing better quality and more affordable fresh produce. They could even export to South Africa.”

Agricultural economists especially those from South Africa are also condemning the move saying it goes against the spirit of brotherhood. Wandile Sihlobo, an agricultural economist said his «source of frustration (on the bans) arises from the appreciation that these countries are members of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), a bloc encouraging free trade and economic integration.»

Sihlobo did add saying there isn’t much that can be done as Botswana and Namibia are exploiting loopholes contained in the founding agreement of SACU. An excerpt from an article he wrote states that, «the Sacu agreement has a loophole allowing such restrictions. An article by researchers at South Africa’s Department of Trade and Industry citing the Sacu Agreement states that

‘Article 18 (2) ... notes that Member States have the right to impose restrictions on imports or exports for the protection of health of humans, animals or plants, the environment, treasures of artistic, historic or archaeological value, public morals, intellectual property rights, national security and exhaustible natural resources’.

Sihlobo said there is a need for South Africa to respond to the bans considering the plight of local farmers who have lost ready markets for their produce. Citing the celebratory tone of Botswana’s president in his latest post on X, Sihlobo said South Africa’s response should be firm but sensitive.

«The response will need to be neither antagonistic nor arrogant but rather to understand Botswana and Namibia’s aspirations and to formulate pathways of coexistence and better communication of policy approaches within the region.

Having hostile neighbours will not benefit any of these countries’ citizens. The people primarily want affordable, accessible and safe

food. Therefore, Botswana and Namibia could close the market in specific windows to boost domestic production and communicate clearly about this with South Africa. The South African producers would then fill specific windows when there are gaps in these markets,» Sihlobo said.

For the long term, Sihlobo said, «These southern African countries should revive the regional spirit and formulate agricultural policies and programmes from that perspective. Hostility between neighbours and offensive communication is not a path to southern Africa’s agricultural prosperity.

Yes, South Africa has dominance, but the goal should not be to overtake South Africa but to leverage its technologies and increase regional agricultural production. Such an approach is what the Botswanan and Namibian authorities should follow — regional cooperation and shared prosperity in agriculture.»

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Natural Gas, the Right Transition Fuel for South Africa

By NJ Ayuk*



South Africa’s ongoing power shortages highlight the urgent need to tap into its natural gas resources, a cleaner-burning fuel that can bridge the energy gap while facilitating a transition to renewables and a lower-carbon future

A recent policy brief, “Natural Gas as a Transition Fuel in South Africa,” produced by Eye for Business, minced no words concerning the need to access and use that plentiful underground resource.

As stated up front, “Among alternatives, there is a compelling case for investing in natural gas as the most prudent steppingstone to a low-carbon future of power generation.”

In their brief, commissioned by The EnerGeo Alliance — a global trade alliance for the energy geoscience industry — Eye for Business makes a good point.

South Africa’s continuing power deficits make the case anew each day for expanded extraction and use of the country’s natural gas. A significantly lower-carbon alternative to coal and diesel, this fuel can provide electricity for growing needs while paving the way for renewables and an increasingly lower-carbon future.

The Current Energy Picture

The brief highlights the growth

forces that are now at work and expected to push South Africa’s demand for energy to a projected three times current demand by 2040. These forces include a growing population and a trend toward migration into cities.

South Africa’s current energy sources — coal, diesel, renewables, and unpredictable natural gas imports from Mozambique — are inadequate to prevent the daily 6- to 10-hour outages that now hinder business, education, medicine, industry, and more.

Residentially, these intermittencies impact poorer households the most. Likewise, the frequent failures of old coal-fired plants and associated maintenance costs result in higher tariffs that hit low-income families hardest.

These stark realities make it imperative that South Africa use its own clean natural gas to transition toward renewables, at a pace that allows its economy to benefit. Moving in that direction will draw more needed outside interest and investment in the country’s natural gas deposits.

As a real-time example, Namibia is wisely using its offshore discoveries in this way, helping that nation move

toward prosperity.

For South Africa to likewise gain the economic health needed to increase development of renewables, it must first stabilize its energy supply to reverse disturbing trends in business closures and increased unemployment due to intermittencies. Energy sources such as wind and solar, which are by nature intermittent, cannot provide immediate solutions to these economic and human problems.

With substantial in-country natural gas discoveries such as Brulpadda, prospects like the Karoo shale reserves, and potential offshore discoveries on the horizon, it just makes sense to put those resources to work to achieve energy stability.

Natural Gas, the Natural Solution

“Countries using gas as a source for power generation have seen their electricity supply grow about three times faster in the past 10 years than those not able to use gas,” states Eye for Business’ brief.

As is well known, the wealthy countries around the globe have long made tactical use of their vital natural gas resources for building economic soundness. Once their people and businesses were supported by a reliable supply of electricity, these nations could begin to develop

renewables on a large scale.

Importantly, for South Africa’s industrial sector to grow, it needs increased feedstocks, such as those used to make fertilizers and petrochemicals. These vital chemicals are produced from natural gas, which can also supply the heat energy needed by the cement, steel, and other industries to make their products.

Less Cost, Less Emissions

Putting South Africa’s natural gas resources to work during transition will cost less than most alternatives. Comparing the price tag for various types of electric power plants, the costs per kilowatt hour to build solar, biomass, nuclear, wind, and coal plants are all more than twice as high as the cost to build natural gas plants.

This difference is largely due to modular construction methods used for natural gas plants, which makes them easier to scale and suit to their locations, thus avoiding the cost overruns typical on larger facility projects.

Another cost-efficient build method for natural gas plants is converting inactive existing coal-fired power plants. These conversions can be done at lower costs than new construction. This is a win-win proposition that utilizes unused plants for producing

cleaner energy while avoiding unnecessary expense.

As the brief highlights, natural gas emits 50% to 60% less CO2 than coal. This makes it an ideal transition fuel for South Africa that will contribute only a very miniscule amount to global emissions. And even that could be decreased with the use of carbon capture and storage.

To keep a realistic perspective on emissions, it is important to bear in mind that Africa as a whole, with about 17% of the world's population, contributes only a tiny 4% of global carbon emissions at 1.45 billion tonnes.

Potential Employment and Exports Increased investment in and use

of natural gas could pay off for South Africa in two very important areas – job creation and the opportunity to achieve net exporter status.

Growing new jobs is crucial, as South Africa's unemployment rate is currently hovering around 30%. Jobs will come with the territory as the country's gas infrastructure is enlarged for drilling, transport, and electricity production.

Young managers and workers will need to be trained in the necessary skills to run and maintain these operations. In short, revving up the natural gas sector will breathe new energy into the job market as young people see and take advantage of these new opportunities.

On the export front, a sizeable opportunity for boosting the country's economy has appeared on its northern horizon. Because of Europe's recent reduction in imports of Russian gas, the vast European market presents an opportunity South Africa could pursue, along with other markets, after its own energy needs are met.

The Way Forward

To diversify South Africa's energy mix, government policy support in accordance with the country's draft Gas Master Plan (GMP2024) and the National Development Plan (NDP) will be needed.

The Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) aligns with those documents'

goals, supporting, as Eye for Business' brief puts it, "a significant shift in the energy mix, projecting an additional 29,500MW to the electricity capacity by 2030, with 3,000MW expected from gas."

With all the benefits they can bring, South Africa must not leave its valuable natural gas deposits stranded while lacking reliable green energy sources. Making steady progress toward a lower-carbon energy mix while transitioning toward renewables makes sense for South Africa and its people.

*NJ Ayuk is Executive Chairman of The African Energy Chamber

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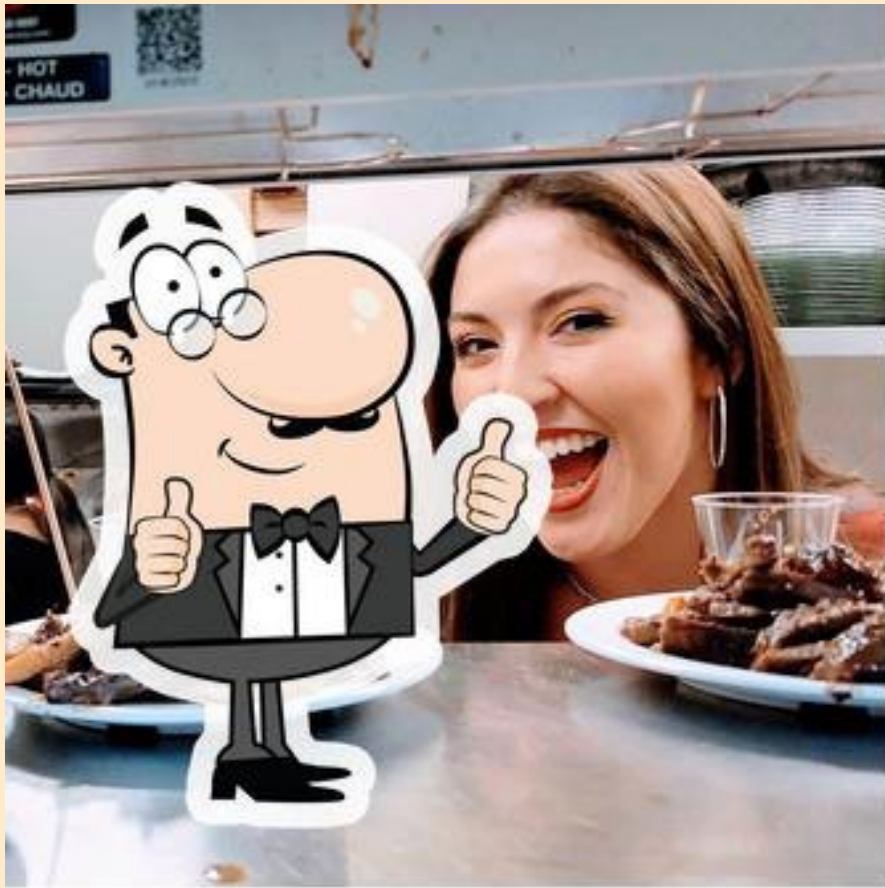
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To Stem Investment Elsewhere, Nigeria's Oil Sector Requires Change

By NJ Ayuk*

With two-thirds or more of its revenue coming from oil, investor flight is a serious problem for Nigeria

Nigeria, a previous bright spot on big oil and gas investors' radar screens, has dimmed substantially as investor attention is increasingly drawn to new and emerging developments in Namibia, Ivory Coast, Angola, and the Republic of Congo.

With two-thirds or more of its revenue coming from oil, investor flight is a serious problem for Nigeria.

Divestments: The Reasons and the Buyers

Big foreign players, including TotalEnergies and Shell, are exiting or shifting their priorities in Nigeria, rattled by a variety of deleterious forces: an uninviting regulatory environment, lack of transparency, safety issues, vandalism, and theft, among other factors.

For a country whose economy is dependent on fossil fuels, this divestment by majors, totaling around £17 billion since 2006, is catastrophic. Nigeria's 37 trillion barrels of reserves can do the country no good underground.

Among those looking to pull out of the country, at least in part, is France's TotalEnergies. The company is seeking to sell its share of Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, Limited (SPDC), although it will continue to have 18% of its investments in Nigeria.

TotalEnergies CEO Patrick Pouyanne says his company hasn't explored for oil in Nigeria for 12 years, explaining, "There is always a new legislature in Nigeria about a new petroleum law. When you have such permanent debates, it's difficult for investors looking for long-term structure to know what direction to go."

TotalEnergies' stance highlights the obvious — investors want predictable environments and simple, trustworthy systems of regulation. A dearth of these factors seems to have trumped



the fact that Nigeria yet contains large reserves that could be tapped.

Five global oil companies are still working in the country, but three of those — Shell, Eni, and ExxonMobil — are selling in-country assets valued at £1.8 billion, £4 billion, and £11.9 billion, respectively.

Both Shell and Eni have stated an intent to continue operating in Nigeria's offshore sector, and ExxonMobil has expressed a commitment to continued investment in Nigeria.

Nigerian companies such as Seplat, Aiteo, and Eroton have moved quickly to buy divested assets. So has the Nigerian government, which has been named top bidder for 57 oilfields and granted licenses to 130 firms for development.

I am pleased to see indigenous companies seizing these opportunities created by divestments. I also urge them to take serious measures to control emissions and limit flaring, as large international firms have. In doing so, they will be taking care of their own families, neighbors, friends, and fellow citizens, while building top-notch reputations.

Large or small companies — Nigeria must never choose one or the other. International oil companies, national oil companies, independents, and indigenous companies all have

important roles to play in Nigeria's economic growth.

Where the Investments Are Going

As I said, Ivory Coast, Namibia, the Republic of Congo, and Angola are drawing investors' attention away from Nigeria.

Shell is pursuing deepwater blocks in Ivory Coast for exploration, while large Italian firm Eni has just added offshore Block CI-205 to its vast Murene Bailene discovery of 2021. Production from the Baleine discovery has shot Ivory Coast's production to 30,000 barrels per day (bpd), a number that is expected to rise an astonishing 556% to 200,000 bpd by 2027.

All of this is happening while Ivory Coast is successfully emphasizing carbon-reducing technologies and natural gas as a transition fuel.

Overseas investment has also spurred significant recent discoveries in Namibia, earning the country the nickname, "new Guyana." (That South American country's crude oil production soared by a yearly average of 98,000 bpd from 2020 to 2023, making Guyana the third-fastest growing non-OPEC oil-producing country.)

Notable among recent Namibian discoveries is TotalEnergies' Venus Discovery, for which the French major is seeking approval to move ahead by

the close of 2025. Venus is expected to produce up to 180,000 bpd of oil.

TotalEnergies is also looking to invest \$600 million in exploration and production in the Republic of Congo's Moho Nord deep offshore field this year. As I have said before, this kind of investment is evidence that the company is in the Republic of Congo to stay.

Angola, too, has become a major investment site for TotalEnergies. The firm's CEO has said it will invest \$6 billion in energy in Angola, as "a country with a more stable policy framework."

Nigerian Reforms and Rules Changes

March 2024 brought some much-needed federal policy reforms to Nigeria's petroleum industry in the form of presidential executive orders and policy directives. The reforms are aimed at improving the country's investment environment and reinvigorating growth in its petroleum industry.

The changes include investor tax credits, an investment allowance, simplifying contracting procedures, and easing local content rules.

The tax credits apply to non-associated gas greenfields — that is, new ventures — both onshore and in shallow water and vary according to

hydrocarbon liquids (HCL) content. The credit becomes an allowance after 10 years, making it an ongoing investment incentive.

A 25% investment allowance has also been added for qualified capital expenditures (QCEs) on plants and equipment, cutting down on large capital outlays and thus encouraging industry growth and improvement.

Changes in third-party contracting aim to decrease both contracting costs and the time it takes for companies to get to production. The new rules encompass financial approval thresholds, consent timelines, and contract duration. The requirements call for only one level of approval at each contract stage and establish time limits for completion of approvals.

Local content requirements have also been modified to take local capacity into account, enabling investors to keep their projects cost

competitive.

Overall, the executive orders help clear up the regulatory fog that has been discouraging major investment and will hopefully help the country regain its status among investors.

The Economy and the New Licensing Round

It's been estimated that Nigeria requires USD 25 billion of investment per year to keep its production at 2 million bpd — a level that will sustain the nation's economy. Historically, 2014 marked the peak of investment in Nigerian oil at USD 22.1 billion.

The federal government is strategizing for increased oil production to meet this fiscal need in an environment where vandals have attacked pipelines and stolen oil — factors the government has claimed as reasons it has fallen short of its 1.5 million bpd OPEC quota. (Though not

by much: for example, production in March 2024 declined from 1.47 million bpd to 1.45 million bpd, according to S&P Global Commodity Insights.)

Looking to improve those figures in the remainder of 2024, the government's target is 1.78 million bpd. Although recent problems on the Trans Niger Pipeline and maintenance by oil companies have dropped output, President Bola Tinubu expects a return to target levels.

By using every available well to increase production and revenue, the government aspires to increase crude production to 2.6 million bpd by 2027.

In April 2024, Nigeria began a new oil and gas licensing round, with an attached promise to investors that the process would be transparent. The new round is intended to help stem the flow of investments to African competitors like Angola and Namibia by easing the process of acquiring oil blocks.

The new licensing round offers 19 onshore and deepwater oil blocks, plus an additional 17 deep offshore blocks. These were chosen for their attractiveness to foreign investors who have both the necessary finances and technical savvy to develop the areas.

Successful bidders will be held to precise exploration timelines.

Bidding had begun on seven offshore blocks in 2022 but was delayed for the installation of a new government — just the sort of shaky situation large foreign investors like to avoid.

With that experience in mind, Nigeria must work tirelessly to mitigate not only government instability, but other factors that discourage investment, be they regulatory hurdles, lack of transparency, or safety and security issues.

*NJ Ayuk is Executive Chairman of the African Energy Chamber

SGR Train Launch Sparks Transformation in Tanzania's Transport Landscape

By Adonis Byemelwa

The launch of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) between Dar es Salaam and Dodoma marks a transformative milestone for Tanzania's transportation sector. This development introduces new opportunities for improved connectivity and economic growth while challenging existing modes of transport to innovate and adapt.

The SGR train promises to revolutionize travel between Dar es Salaam and Dodoma. Covering the distance in just about three hours, it offers a significant reduction in travel time compared to buses, which take between eight and ten hours.

This efficiency benefits personal and business travelers, providing flexibility, better use of time, and facilitating the movement of people, thereby boosting business activities. Faster travel times can expand business reach, improve supply chain efficiency, and open new markets.

Increased tourist footfall can boost local businesses and hospitality services, while the operation and



The SGR train necessitates adaptation for bus operators to remain relevant. Photo courtesy.

maintenance of the SGR train create job opportunities, contributing to the local economy.

The aviation sector, which offers the fastest travel option between Dar es Salaam and Dodoma (45 minutes

to one hour), now faces competition from the SGR train. However, this competition can drive improvement and growth within the sector.

Air Tanzania Company Limited (ATCL) CEO, Ladislaus Matindi,

believes the new transportation channel brings positive competition. "We still believe our air travelers will remain loyal. Yes, it's a new competitor close to our service, especially in terms of time; but it cannot match us

because our flights take 45 minutes to one hour, providing our customers with a faster option.”

Experts suggest airlines might reconsider pricing strategies to remain competitive, enhance customer experiences, and offer better services. There is potential for intermodal collaboration, such as integrated ticketing systems, providing seamless travel options for passengers connecting to flights after their train journey.

Matindi noted the opportunity for discussion with their Tanzania Railway Corporation (TRC) counterparts to make it easier for customers. “If they come from Dodoma by train en route to Mwanza, they can just proceed with the same ticket without being bothered.”

Aviation expert Upendo Gabby, “I believe those who might be affected are luxury bus owners, as their customers may opt for the train. But for air travel, I believe its customers will continue to be very loyal due to its prestige.”

Buses have long been the preferred mode of transport for many travelers between Dar es Salaam Dodoma and other regions. However, the SGR train necessitates adaptation for bus operators to remain relevant. The Tanzania Bus Owners Association (Taboa) Secretary General, Priscus John, highlighted, “The impact is massive; it is greatly affecting us already.”

He lamented, “We need to be looked at in terms of taxes because we also provide employment and contribute significantly to our country’s development.” According to him, over 200 buses have already been affected, risking the jobs of 400 drivers and conductors. Fuel stations servicing these buses are also feeling the impact.

Ticket agents for popular buses (Shabiby, ABC, and BM) in Dodoma have reported a significant drop in customers. “Indeed, the number of



Passengers aboard the Tanzania electric train for its test drive from Dar es Salaam to Dodoma on April 22, 2024. Photo courtesy.

passengers has suddenly decreased, although not drastically,” says one of the Shabiby bus agents. “For the first time, we are allowing buses to leave the station without enough passengers,” she said. A Kimbinyiko agent mentioned, “We are already feeling the pinch of this train. Previously, tickets were always in high demand, but now they remain unsold, and customers can get a bus ticket at any time, unlike before.”

Transportation expert Gilbert Kateisaki suggested that bus operators might target budget-conscious travelers who prioritize cost over time, offering lower fares compared to the train and flights. “They can also diversify their services, such as luxury buses with added amenities or focusing on routes not covered by the SGR.

Improving services, like offering free Wi-Fi, more comfortable seating, and better customer service, is another strategy,” she suggested. Additionally, she noted, that there is potential for partnerships with SGR

services for last-mile connectivity to passengers traveling to areas not directly served by the train.

Kateisaki said collaborations between the railway and aviation sectors can enhance intermodal transport, offering seamless travel experiences, while bus operators can explore niche markets and improve service quality to stay competitive.

“It’s a good moment that all stakeholders should work together to create a robust and competitive transportation ecosystem, ultimately benefiting the people and the economy of Tanzania.” She said, that with strategic adaptations and collaborations, the transportation sector can evolve to provide better services and ensure sustainable growth for all stakeholders involved.

Looking at other countries, there are examples of how transportation niches have managed to coexist and thrive. In Japan, the Shinkansen (bullet train) runs in harmony with an extensive network of buses and flights, providing comprehensive

travel options for passengers.

The integration of these services through unified ticketing systems and coordinated schedules ensures that passengers have a seamless travel experience, enhancing overall connectivity. Similarly, in Europe, high-speed trains coexist with low-cost airlines and bus services, each catering to different segments of the market. This balance ensures that travelers have multiple options depending on their preferences for cost, speed, and convenience.

With strategic adaptations and collaborations, Tanzania’s transportation sector is set for evolution and sustainable growth. The construction of the SGR, a key flagship project of the Third Five-Year National Development Plan 2021/22 – 2025/26 (FYDP III), is set to enhance regional connectivity, linking Tanzania with its landlocked neighbors and transforming the nation’s transport landscape.



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Journalist, Alain Foka Embarks On a New Journey - Strives to Change African Narrative

By Prince Kurupati

Nearly one year after leaving Radio France Internationale (RFI) where he had worked, for three decades, Alain Foka has embarked on a new journey. Cameroonian Alain Foka, one of Africa's celebrated journalists announced that he is launching his own television channel AFO Media and a consultancy company Manssah Groupe. The announcement was made on his 'X' (formerly Twitter) handle.

The main objective of AFO Media according to Foka is to shape the African narrative and tell the positive stories from the continent. The channel will be an independent platform whose stories echo the real Africa, and it will stand for the truth and integrity. Essentially, it will be TV «by and for Africans».

«This channel will offer a unique, captivating and totally disruptive experience. Viewers can expect a variety of programming that will showcase African perspectives,» Foka stated. He further went on to say that «On AFO Media, you will find all new programmes: Reports and investigations that explore Africa through in-depth reports; debates and interviews with enlightening discussions on subjects that affect Africa; culture, economy, history with the discovery of the richness and diversity of Africa through its arts, economy and history.»

Foka said the team working in the background to ensure that AFO Media achieves its core objective consists of young African talents, trained, passionate and offering credible and professional content.

During his 30 years at RFI, Foka hosted several programmes which all enjoyed great success and popularity such as "Afrique Media," "Le Débat Africain," "Afrique+," and "Archives d'Afrique.". The popularity of the programmes he hosted together with his massive followers on various digital media platforms gives Foka



Veteran journalist Alain Foka is changing the narrative on Africa with his new projects .Photo courtesy.

and AFO Media a great starting point.

When he announced his decision to leave RFI last year, Foka promised that the move wouldn't signal an end to his foray into the media industry but rather, signalled a new beginning. «Rest assured, this is only a farewell, I would even say a new beginning, as I will continue to offer you African storytelling on my digital platform, where several millions of you already follow me, and where I hope to see even more of you... Archives d'Afrique is also continuing more than ever in video form on the Alain Foka Official (AFO) digital platforms, with reports, documentaries, interviews, columns, and much other African content,» Foka said. The announcement of the new TV station, therefore, doesn't

come as a surprise.

Foka also assured his followers of a rebirth saying, «This is a new beginning for a more extensive dissemination of African thought, projects and visions in a rapidly changing world. There will be a great surprise in the coming months, a rebirth.» In light of his recent announcement, the rebirth refers to the Manssah Groupe consultancy company which he formed together with close friends. The company will operate from Lome, Togo where Foka has decided to relocate to.

As reported by afreepress, the consultancy company which is already registered «will provide consulting services, strategy consulting, lobbying, support, event

and conference organization, study publication, production, realization, and the provision of audiovisual services, article writing, sound or silent video for various media formats such as television, the Internet, DVD, and the press. It will also offer marketing and communication consulting services to businesses, local authorities, and public organizations, along with training services related to its field of expertise.»

The company's share capital amounts to fourteen million (14,000,000) CFA francs, representing 1400 shares with a nominal value of 10,000 CFA francs each, of which a quarter has been paid by the associates. _____

Mali: Seydou Keita Opens Agro-Industrial Complex Set to Employ Thousands

By Prince Kurupati

Former Barcelona footballer who hails from Mali recently launched his agro-industrial complex which is set to employ thousands directly and indirectly. Named the Seydou Diogo Awa Agro-industrial Complex, the complex will act as a value addition and beneficiation plant that processes produce from the locals.

Located in the Mali town of Sanankorobha, the complex sits on a 7-hectare area and brings together six industrial production units, including a production unit for edible vegetable oil, oil cake, and livestock feed; a shea butter production unit; a soap production unit; and a plastic can manufacturing unit.

Directly, the complex will employ 400 people. Owing to the fact that it's bankrolled by produce from local farmers, it will directly employ thousands of farmers, packaging staff and drivers.

Speaking at the official opening of the complex where he was the guest of honour, Mali's interim leader, Colonel Assimi Goita praised the former captain of the Mali national team Seydou Keita for ushering in a milestone development «in Keita's career and Mali's socio-economic development.»

The official opening ceremony was attended by the Prime Minister, Presidents of Institutions, several members of the Government, diplomats accredited to the Republic of Mali and many other personalities, especially from the industrial and commercial sectors.

In his address to the press after touring the complex, Mali's interim leader reinforced the strategic importance of the industrial complex to Mali's economic development. He also highlighted the many benefits that this complex will bring to the rural commune of Sanankorobha which include job creation, skills training and stimulation of the local



The work done by Keita is highly welcome considering that Mali is a low-income country whose rate of extreme poverty has accelerated with security crisis. Photo credit Invest-Time.

economy. Colonel Goita also called for increased collaboration between private and public sectors. He also lauded Seydou Keita for his patriotic act which he said must be emulated by Malian youth.

Writing for Invest-Time, Aissatou Amirah said the agro-industrial complex is «the fruit of an ambitious vision to transform local resources into quality finished products while creating added value for the national economy. The focus on the production of livestock feed and edible vegetable oil is particularly relevant for Mali, a country where agriculture plays a central role in the livelihood of its population. What's more, the shea butter production unit is a nod to one of West Africa's most emblematic products, known for its beneficial properties and potential on the international market.»

According to various reports, Seydou Keita invested 14 billion CFA (USD 23 million) to complete

the complex. The work done by Keita is highly welcome considering that Mali is a low-income country whose rate of extreme poverty was accelerated under the combined impact of the security crises and the pandemic as reported by the World Bank. The tumultuous situation that prevailed in the country since the military coup of 2012 has led many to lose their source of livelihoods hence the emergence of a plant that employs thousands comes as a major welcome development.

Statistically, despite all that has been going on in the country, the World Bank reports that the Mali economy has proved resilient as its year-on-year growth rate keeps going up. The rebound in cereal production and the resilience of the mining sector have buttressed all the negative effects of the coup, ECOWAS sanctions as well as the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

Moreover, the Malian junta's

increased cooperation with Russia to boost its gold, oil, gas, lithium, and uranium production bolstered its energy independence and boosted state revenue. The move ensured that despite the sanctions the country faced, it racked in impressive revenue.

Adding to the long list of strategic economic wins that Mali has recorded in recent times is the deal that the Colonel Goita junta government entered with mining major, Barrick Gold. The deal will see Barrick Gold expand its exploration activities in the country to bolster the long-term sustainability of the Loulo-Gounkoto operation.

Seydou Keita's agro-industrial complex, therefore, comes in a long list of positive stories for Mali. Not only is it an income-generating project for both Keita and the country at large, but it also provides refuge and livelihood to thousands who are desperately in need of help.

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Cameroon: Healthcare Boost With Donation From TFC & Colors Of Roses Foundation

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

BUEA, Cameroon – The Friendship Circle, TFC, in collaboration with the Colors of Roses Foundation, have donated some medical supplies to some hospitals across the South West Region of Cameroon, in a bid to strengthen healthcare delivery across the troubled region.

The donations worth 399 million FCFA were distributed to 30 hospitals from the North West, South West, Littoral and Far North on Thursday, July 25 at the premise of the Buea Regional Hospital in the South West.

“The message that we have is simple. It’s time for us to take responsibility as individuals, responsibility as young people, and responsibility as professionals, to share what we have. We have a responsibility to build this nation together, »Njukang Asong, President of The Friendship Circle, TFC told Pan African Visions.

“Whether it’s in healthcare, farming, agriculture, business, or legal, all of us have that responsibility, and today, we just show that by example. We, you may see three TFC members here, but we are 25 strong. 25 members are watching.”

Free items for the community

This donation comes some months after TFC successfully shipped twenty containers of state-of-the-art hospital beds to multiple hospitals across the country. It continues its unwavering dedication to improving healthcare in Cameroon.

Njukang Asong added: “These items are for the community. It’s free for the community, and it’s a partnership that we are starting to make sure that we can keep growing every day and see how we can provide more services to provide person-centred care to improve the healthcare system in Cameroon. And as far as TFC is concerned, we are going to do our part to build this nation.”

“We have vitamins for kids, for pregnant women and lactation.



The donation from TFC and Colors of Roses Foundation is expected to elevate health care in Cameroon. Photo credit Boris Esono Nwenfor ,PAV.

We have lenses for males, and for females, unisex lenses. We have surgical gowns that protect professionals during surgery. We have face shields and face masks that protect our healthcare professionals during surgery as well. We have medications for hypothyroidism. We have medication for sores.”

“We have different sorts of medications for skincare just to make sure that our healthcare system improves. And this is one event out of many. One of our previous events, which was monumental as well, that just happened in January, was that TFC did supply hospital beds to more than five hospitals in Cameroon across the southwest and northwest regions,” Njukang Asong added.

Dr Sylvia Dassi, Founder of Colors of Roses Foundation said: “There are bigger things that we are going to do, extend this effort to other parts of the region. And also, what we intend to do is continue to equip, because what we are getting, equip medical facilities. What we are getting, the

needs that we are getting right now is medical equipment. There is medical equipment that is very essential, especially the vein finder.”

“Our goal is to continue to carry out these assessments because with these activities when we go back to our donors and we give reports, they can trust us with even bigger opportunities.”

A well-appreciated gesture

Asongna Beatrice, a Nurse in Alou subdivisional hospital, Lebialem said: «During the crisis, our health centre was highly affected. Those our children in the bush destroyed the hospital and carried nearly all the equipment away.»

“We are just opening the hospital now and we are grateful for these gifts our children have given to us. It will go a long way to help our patients. They have given us drugs and other items that will help the patients, especially pregnant women.”

«We are pleading that they should continue and next time, they should

give us more. In our health centre, we lack so many things like beds and mattresses. This will go a long way to help the community.»

Folefac Godlove, Chairman of Mile 16 Health Center said: «I am happy to see us chosen amongst the thousands of hospitals across the country. We have glasses and medical equipment and it is going to help Mile 16, which was looked upon as a place where people could not stay. The donation will see patient turnout increase, and it is going to make more departments in the health centre develop.

We had a low patient turnout because of the crisis. Patients would rather leave Mile 16 to the Buea Regional Hospital. We also had a lack of equipment, our labs were empty and we had limited materials. These materials will help the patients too because it is free and we appreciate TFC and its partners for such a donation.»

About the Friendship Circle

The Friendship Circle was

established in 2015 by a group of friends from Cameroon with diverse backgrounds and professions. We are a registered 501(c) (3) non-profit organization in the State of Maryland, to raise funds in compliance with the law and offer tax-exempt benefits for donations.

TFC's community outreach primarily focuses on empowering young people through executive conferences, skill-building, and competitions, and finding investment opportunities. TFC's charity efforts include donating clothing, shoes, food, home and hospital equipment, and merchandise to orphanages and other needy centres in Cameroon and across Africa.



Medical supplies worth some 399 million FCFA were distributed to 30 hospitals from the North West, South West, Littoral and Far North Regions. Photo credit Boris Esono Nwenfor

Cameroon: A Commitment To Sustainable Development For The Friendship Circle- Njukang Asong

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

In a nation where healthcare challenges are significant and resources often scarce, a beacon of hope has emerged, promising to transform the landscape of medical care. The Friendship Circle, TFC, a non-profit organization that has a vision to uplift healthcare systems, is making significant strides in Cameroon.

Founded in 2015 by twenty-five young men, TFC is quickly garnering a reputation for its comprehensive approach in not just tackling the gaps in the health sector in Cameroon, but in the entrepreneurial, and charity sectors in the U.S. as well.

“Our objective of try to elevate the healthcare system in Cameroon in our little way. Personal responsibility of what we should do as individuals, as young people in this country, and not depend on government all the time,” Njukang Asong, President of the Friendship Circle told Pan African Visions after carrying out a medical supply donation to hospitals in Cameroon on July 25 in Buea.

“Just an idea to be able to share the little that we have. It is something that we thought was very important. And that was just in January. Fast



There is a strong commitment from the Friendship Circle to play a leading role in more health related and other sustainable development initiatives across Cameroon, says Njukang Asong.

forward seven months later, we are here today, to supply medical supplies to 30 hospitals.

In an interview with Pan African Visions, the TFC president unveiled what necessitated such a donation

and the prospects of TFC elevating the healthcare system across the country.

Could you start by presenting to us what the Friendship Circle is all about and how did it come

into existence?

Njukang Asong: The Friendship Circle is a not-for-profit organization made up of 25 guys all based in the U.S. even though we alter between the U.S. and Cameroon for a large

part. It started in 2015 and the idea in 2015 was just to come together as brothers in America who had travelled, struggling to make it, really had nothing but our dream, just our belief that we could survive.

And as things began to happen, even when things were not good, we just kept supporting each other. It was more of a social group. We're there for football games. So that is what we did right up to like 2018. When one of our members (Charles Bissong) passed away, succumbing to pancreatic cancer, which is something that can happen to any of us, it kind of hit us hard. It struck the core of our organization and let us take stock of everything.

We decided to take a different turn, which is to be more meaningful and more intentional in the things we do. We registered our organization, became a registered not-for-profit organization, and we decided to focus on healthcare and entrepreneurship. One of our second events actually was an entrepreneurship fair at Mountain Hotel, which brought together about 300 plus students from the University of Buea, the Catholic University, entrepreneurs, startups, and just people who wanted to learn,

We had a very rich panel of business people, folks in the technology world, journalists, and diplomats, just a well-rounded team. And, we had a good conversation, gave out some awards, gave out some donations to startup companies, and just kind of encouraged them. That was one side of what we did.

The other thing is just charity work that we focused on. We went to an orphanage in Tiko, fed almost 100 plus people, and gave them rice and beans, just the necessities. And then even back in the U.S., we did a food drive where we fed and provided meals and breakfast for about 150 plus homeless people.

We engaged in healthcare activities too, running, and doing some exercise, just to make sure that, as they say, health is wealth. No matter what you have, if you're not healthy, it means nothing. So, we encourage that as well. And that all led us to



TFC's community outreach primarily focuses on empowering young people through executive conferences, skill-building, competitions, and finding investment opportunities

this moment today, to be able to use the activities that we did, raise some money from our community and decide to do something even bolder.

We started with hospital beds. We brought about 50 hospital beds and supplied them to hospitals. These were state-of-the-art hospital beds, very advanced in terms of how it was built. There were hospitals with empty wards. Patients were sleeping on floors. Pregnant women did not have a place to sleep. But we did that and that went a long way. Just the happiness on their faces, the feedback that we had, you just cannot put money on that.

But then again, it fell into our objective of trying to elevate the healthcare system in Cameroon in our little way. A personal responsibility of what we should do as individuals, as young people in this country, and not depend on government all the time. Just an idea to be able to share the little that we have. It is something that we thought was very important. And that was just in January. Fast forward seven months later, we are here today, to supply medical supplies to 30 hospitals.

Can you tell us more about the types of medical equipment donated by TFC and its partners?

Njukang Asong: The medical supplies cost approximately \$650,000, which is about 350 to 400 million francs. It involves lenses, male-female unisex, protective gowns during surgery for doctors and nurses, protective gear for their faces during surgery, medications like Denavir that are used for sores and blisters, vitamins for women for pregnancy and lactation to kids. So that was very important for us. And just different kinds of medications in there, just to improve the healthcare system in Cameroon, make sure patients have better care. That was very important for us. And one thing that we insisted on is that these things are for free.

It's for patients. It's supposed to be used for the purpose intended. We gave it to hospitals in the North West, in the South West, in Littoral and the Far North. It's just the beginning, resources are limited. If we had our way, we'd give it to all 10. But that's our goal. And we're sure that the God that gave us the strength is going to

continue to empower us again.

What motivated TFC Community and Colors of Roses Foundation to make this donation?

Njukang Asong: The drive is a personal responsibility. It's an idea that, like I said, the government is responsible for taking care of us and advancing us, to provide schools and provide a public system that is helpful to us to provide, make sure that we can get out of poverty, have jobs and opportunities to advance our selves.

If you travel across the country, there's something called volunteer work. It's a huge part of any advanced country. The truth is that no country is built on government only. You build on individual contributions and contributions from small and medium-sized companies. In these regards, it is that kind of a mindset to say, you know what? We've been blessed in a little way. One person cannot do it. Ten people cannot. But 25 can make a difference.

And then we put resources together. We find partners. One of our partners, the Color of Roses, is led

by Dr. Sylvia Dasi. The organization helped us to find partners in New York and New Jersey to be able to, acquire the supplies. So, the drive has always been a need to come back home and elevate our healthcare system. A need that we are responsible for our future in Cameroon. Nobody's going to do it for us. And the idea that the government can only do so much.

We should hold them accountable to do as much as we can. But what are you doing? What are you doing to the little kid in your neighbourhood that has no slippers? You want to tell me you don't have 300 francs or 500 francs to buy slippers for that little kid? What are you doing for the orphan that cannot go to school? You want to tell me you don't have 15,000 francs in a year to make them go to school and study and get out of poverty? Or the lady that goes to the farm that needs a home, needs a cutlass or needs products to spray the grass. Do you think you cannot provide 10,000, 15,000, or even 20,000 to that lady?

That's something that some people spend on drinks. So, it's that kind of collective responsibility that drives us. And this is just the beginning. We told the various hospitals that it's a partnership we're striking. A partnership means we're going to keep working together as much as we can. It's just that drive to make sure that we have a responsibility as Cameroonians, as individuals to build this nation.

You talked about certain equipment that have been given, gowns, lenses and others. Is there any reason for selecting that particular equipment?

Njukang Asong: First of all, it is because those were the ones, we could get access to. But also, that it is needed. What we brought were first-grade lenses for males, and females, unisex lenses, beautiful looking lenses, with different ranges of power. And people need that stuff. Talk about vitamins for pregnant women. Even in developed countries, they need vitamins.



Dr Sylvia Dasi, Founder of Colors of Roses Foundation, one of TFC's partners.

have to nourish the body as it carries a different human being in it. Everybody needs vitamins, no matter how healthy you are. So, these are just things that cut across our healthcare system. If we had our way to buy an ambulance, we will. If we had our way to buy a dialysis machine, we should be able to do that. If we had our way to buy surgical machines to perform surgery here and elevate the health care system of our people, we would. What we have shown is that our hearts are in the right place. We are responsible enough to do these things with our resources.

We hope that we can partner even with the government. We can partner with different organizations and regional, state, and even local governments to say let's work with this organization. Let's see. You guys have the passion, you have the mobilization and the contacts. Working with the government to secure even more specific resources for it is something that we welcome. But at the end of the day, we're going to keep doing needs assessment to see what the people need more. And we're going to be able to purchase them within our resources.

Let's talk about partnership.

As you talked about, this donation is done in collaboration with the Colors of Roses Foundation. But there are a lot of people backstage who don't see the faces. How important is this partnership?

Njukang Asong: The partnership in itself, number one is TFC. These are 25 guys and we are partners in this. You just cannot beat that. And I look at what we're able to build as an organization and I'm just incredibly grateful. TFC is something else. But again, the effort in terms of what we're able to accomplish today, there are so many things across the way.

It started with a partner, Colors of Roses Foundation, which became like a sister organization. Through their help, we're able to have approval from our New York partners to be able to secure these products. They are our supply partners. And that's just wonderful. It's a gigantic organization. And we are grateful to be part of them. And I think, I don't know which other organization is a partner to them from Cameroon, but I know TFC is one.

But again, once you secure those things, to be able to transport a container here clearly is an enormous

cost. We had to go to our local government here, the state, and tell the state that we are a registered organization and we need your help. It started with our in-country liaison, which is the Honorable Prudencia from Momo. She's been instrumental in assisting us. Whatever document we needed, whatever signatures we needed, she's just been instrumental. And that is crucial for us, to have someone who is that reliable, whose heart is in the right place, to make sure that we can deliver these products.

The Ministry of Public Health was just exemplary. They were fast. They treated our files with dignity swiftness and respect. So, the Ministry of Public Health, I appreciate you guys and I'm so grateful. And then we have the Ministry of Finance as well. The Ministry of Finance was extremely helpful in making sure that our container could be cleared in record time, in collaboration with the Director General of Customs. So, this is, I've never seen the government collaborate this much. I think, as a country, I'm so proud to be a Cameroonian and see what is happening now and see cross-collaboration within our government institutions.

I think that's the way government

should work. Having somebody like Honorable Prudencia with such a big heart to actually work for the people and elevate the people and find partnerships all across, is just wonderful, and I appreciate it.

And also, we have our partners at the hospitals here too. The various hospitals and DMOs that came here ready to attend this event, brought their transportation ready to carry them. That is something which is, we're internally grateful for it. So, it is a partnership across the board. We have demonstrated the ability to be able to collaborate, with honesty, with integrity, and to make sure that we can deliver for the people.

How does this donation align with the broader goals and missions of The Friendship Circle?

Njukang Asong: The mission of TFC is to elevate our healthcare system in Cameroon, to fight against poverty, but also to assist in entrepreneurship and skills development right here. This fits right into it, is what we are put together to do, which is again to provide resources within our limits to be able to elevate the healthcare system. So, I think in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, I think we're on the right footing.

With supplying our hospital with beds that we did five months ago; I think we have found our niche. We have found a space where we are comfortable with. We are building partnerships and resources to be able to foster that mission, and I think we're going to continue doing it.

What role do you see public-private partnerships playing in improving healthcare infrastructure in Cameroon?

Njukang Asong: It is important because we just cannot work without it. I mean, how else are we supposed to clear that container from the airport? It would have been too expensive without the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Public Health intervening and the Director of Customs saying, you know what, you guys are bringing these products for us, let's give you guys a little help



TFC President Njukang Asong in a chat with PAV Cameroon reporter Boris Esono.

on this.

Our message to different organizations is that the government is here to work with you. Forget about the stereotypes you heard about the government. There are people in power now that are doing a great job. If you have a good purpose, you put your resources together, and of course, you're organized and you're clear on your mission, they're going to help you. This is the government of Cameroon helping TFCs in less than six months apart.

They have promised us that no matter what we want to do, in as much as it aligns with the Ministry of Public Health's mission overall to deliver a healthcare system in Cameroon they are going to support us. Every other not-for-profit organization should take that, and if they don't have one, they should get in on it, because every community needs a TFC.

While donating this equipment, you were smiling, especially in respect to Alou, Lebialelem Subdivision, where you are from. We know the trouble that the region has been going through. How vital is such equipment to the community?

Njukang Asong: I'm a son of many

regions. I was born in Nkwen, and I grew up in Bamenda, and Mbengwi as well. So, it's Momo Division and Nkwen, that is in my childhood. At the age of 10, I came to the South West region of Buea, and I schooled in St. Joseph's College, Sasse. I'm still a child of Buea as well. I lived in Mile 16, my family house in Mile 16, but I'm also a Bangwa man from Lebialelem.

That is my tribal region. But then again, to me, it's just Cameroon and there's a lot of pain out there. There's a lot of lack of resources out there. Every region must have a TFC that can elevate their region because we need it. The government cannot do all. The government cannot get into the hinterlands and rural areas.

We have to do it ourselves and do it till the Lord takes us away from it. So, for me to be able to see the joy from people from my region, Alou, it meant everything to me. For me to see the people in my area, Mile 16, that came here to take it, that means everything to me. For me to see the people in Nkwen, in the PMI Nkwen hospital where I was born, meant everything to me.

How did they know a child, you know, 38 years ago would support them today? And even Momo Division, where I grew up You cannot

beat that. That meant a lot to me as well. So again, it is something which I think every Cameroonian should be able to tell that story. And all of us should join to elevate health care.

Are there plans for future donations or continued support to hospitals across the country?

Njukang Asong: We are going to do a needs assessment with hospitals across the board. And with that needs assessment, we are going to make an informed decision. Again, the project is a function of resources. We may need all the good things here, but if we don't have the money to do it, we'll not be able to do it.

But that shouldn't stop any person from doing it. You should do what you can, where you can. And hopefully, through the work that you do, you're able to raise the money to do the things that you want to do.

So, are we going to have future projects? Absolutely, yes. Do I know what it's going to be? No. Do I know it's going to be in health care? Absolutely. Do I think it's going to be in entrepreneurship to elevate and teach kids how to grow and become business owners? Absolutely. But until then, we're hoping for the best.

AFRICA'S BUSINESS HEROES

Who We Are

Africa's Business Heroes (ABH) is the Jack Ma Foundation's flagship philanthropic program in Africa to support entrepreneurs. Launched in 2019, ABH aims to enable 100 African business Heroes to inspire millions more through our Competition, Show and Community.

What We Do

The Competition

- Every year, we call on entrepreneurs from every sector and across Africa to apply to Africa's largest and most-inclusive pitch competition.
- We award \$1.5 million in grant funding every year to ten finalists who also gain access to mentorship, training and the ABH community.

The Community

- We provide training, mentorship, networking and investment opportunities
- We support our finalists collaborate, engage in peer-to-peer learning and provide mutual support through offline gatherings, the ABH Summit and our local lead initiative

The Show

- We produce **the annual Africa's Business Heroes TV show**. The ABH show is an entertaining and educational video series detailing the inspiring background stories of the ABH finalists and their journey to the grand finale.
- The show is broadcasted on CNBC Africa, StarTimes, DSTV, numerous country TV stations and online. The ABH Documentary has **won over 9 international awards**.

Our Values



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We are open to Candidates from all 54 African Countries



INCLUSIVE

Entrepreneurs of all ages and genders are encouraged to apply



SECTOR-AGNOSTIC

Entrepreneurs from all industries are eligible to apply



GRASSROOTS-ORIENTED

We are looking for entrepreneurs from all levels of society

Key Figures

70K



Applicants Since 2019

54



Representing Every Country

~30%



Female Participation

~15%



Francophone Participation

300mil



PR Reach

50mil



Google Search Results

~2,000



Impacted By ABH Training

\$80mil



Debt And Equity Raised

100K



Community Members

Zimbabwe: Financial Constraints Pushing Thousands Out of School

By Prince Kurupati

The number of pupils dropping out of public school has reached alarming levels. During the COVID era, a reported 840,000 pupils dropped out of school. Subsequent years following the end of the Covid era have seen at least 30,000 pupils dropping out of school every year. Worryingly, a huge proportion of these figures are primary school dropouts. All this information was released in the latest (2024) Zimbabwe Livelihoods Assessment Committee (ZimLAC) report.

To come up with plausible findings, ZimLAC which consists of a committee chaired by the Office of the President, government departments, UNICEF and other development agencies, engaged various data collection approaches to enhance ground-truthing of contextual issues. Thanks to this, the findings, most of which are shocking paints a gory picture of the challenges that Zimbabwean families are going through.

Covering the year 2024, ZimLAC said that at the time of its survey, 22.3% of school-going children were not in school, nationally. All the country's provinces are affected by this worrying trend with Mashonaland Central being the hardest hit while Masvingo province is the least affected.

The ZimLAC report outlined the major reasons behind the trend. In all provinces, the main causative factor relates to financial challenges. Tuition fees are now out of reach for most people in the public schooling system. Other factors also highlighted include early pregnancies which affect even school children who are in primary school, illness, children providing help in their households and in the process missing out on school, children providing care to sick family members, those who live far from schools hence prefer to drop out and those who simply aren't interested in pursuing academic education.

The ZimLAC report demonstrates a worrying trend which has been going



on unabated for several years now. Last year, a parliamentary committee reported that the number of secondary school dropouts rose from 32,700 in 2001 to 50,744 in 2022. This worrying trend is now evident on the ground as hordes of young children are now a common feature in the artisanal mining field.

Commenting on this issue, communications expert Ranga Mberi said authorities are taking their time to resolve this issue as they "see hordes of illiterate youths as an economic or security risk. They see it as an opportunity. Youths are good fodder, for digging gold pits for 'sponsors', or for politics." He however cautioned that things may instantly flip and if they do, they may follow the path taken by Gen Z youths in Kenya in calling for regime change. On the front, Mberi quoted the later former Zimbabwean vice president Joshua Nkomo who said, "You do not teach young people to be contemptuous of human life, and expect them to respect yours."

The government-funded Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) which is the largest form of education assistance in the country has failed to adequately cover the educational financial needs of most pupils as it's not appropriately funded. In the recent

past, the country's finance minister Mthuli Ncube was quoted saying that there are over 1.5 million pupils on the BEAM program but many aren't getting the assistance they need as the government owes the equivalent of US\$57 million to schools.

Many citizens who aired their opinions regarding the issue solely placed the blame on the Emmerson Mnangagwa-led administration. In the 2023 and 2018 elections, one of Mnangagwa's key election promises was that of free education to everyone enrolled in public schools for both primary and secondary school. However, that promise hasn't been fulfilled thus inconveniencing nearly a million children.

Many called upon churches, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to chip in by providing financial assistance to the vulnerable. Zimbabwe currently has a few actors who provide scholarships and other forms of assistance to school-going children. However, most of these only target the academically talented meaning all others who fail to get good grades owing to one reason or the other find themselves without much help.

The statistics from the ZimLAC report give weight to the sentiments echoed by the minister for primary

and secondary education, Dr Torerai Moyo who earlier on said that some 50 000 pupils dropped out of school between 2021 and 2023.

As one of the solutions to this challenge, Dr Moyo said his ministry together with its partners including UNICEF, CAMPFED and ECOZI have begun working towards piloting an early warning system for mitigating school drop-out.

Addressing District Schools Inspectors (DSI) and other senior officials from the primary and secondary education ministry, Dr Moyo said, "We are here to mark the beginning of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary's work towards piloting an early warning system for mitigating school dropout, an initiative being spearheaded by the Ministry working through its partners in the education sector. It is shocking to see that 50,000 students dropped out of school around 2021 and 2022... The future of Zimbabwe lies in our youths and action must be taken and it must be taken now not tomorrow. The Ministry on its own will not adequately address this challenge, that is why we are happy to be complemented by our partners in the name of UNICEF, CAMPFED ECOZI and others who may not be here."

Crackdown on Churches in Rwanda and Tanzania: Ensuring Safety During Rapid Growth

By Adonis Byemelwa

In a dramatic enforcement of health and safety regulations, over 4,000 churches have been shut down in Rwanda, highlighting a significant regulatory move that predominantly affects small Pentecostal churches and a few mosques.

This action, executed by local authorities and the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), is the first major crackdown since a law was enacted five years ago to regulate the proliferation of places of worship.

«This is not being done to prevent people from praying but to ensure the safety and tranquillity of worshippers,» stated Minister of Local Government Jean Claude Musabyimana. The recent enforcement targets churches that fail to meet health and safety standards, including those not properly soundproofed or operating in hazardous locations like caves and riverbanks.

The 2018 legislation mandates that religious institutions operate in an organized and safe manner, prohibiting the use of loud public address systems, and requiring preachers to have theological training before opening a church. When the law was first adopted, approximately 700 churches were closed.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who recently won a fourth term with 99% of the vote, remarked that the country did not need an excessive number of worship houses, suggesting that such a high number was more suited to developed economies capable of sustaining them.

«The government has taken a stance against the proliferation of houses of worship. We still see cases of dilapidated structures and unhygienic conditions,» noted RGB



Defendant Diana Bundala, known as Mfalme Zumaridi, confers with her lawyer, Erick Mutta, during the hearing of two appeals at the High Court in Mwanza on July 26th, 2023. Photo courtesy.

chief Usta Kayitesi. Among the 4,223 closed places of worship, 427 were operating in caves. Some of these establishments exposed worshippers to significant risks, such as those operating in tents.

The proliferation of small, independent churches in Africa can be attributed to several factors. Many charismatic preachers claim to perform miracles, drawing large congregations. This, combined with the lack of stringent regulatory frameworks in some regions, allows these basilicas to mushroom rapidly.

The promise of miracles and divine intervention appeals to many people facing economic hardship and social challenges, creating fertile ground for the rapid spread of such churches.

Parallel regulatory actions have been observed in Tanzania, where the government ordered the closure

of the Christian Life Church in Dar es Salaam.

The church, led by Pastor Dominique Kashoix Dibwe, also known as «Kiboko ya Wachawi» (The Witch-Hunter's Scourge), was closed for violating registration regulations.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, in a letter dated July 25, 2024, cited teachings that incite panic and promote harmful practices as reasons for the closure.

«The church's activities have been found to contravene Section 17 of the Civil Societies Act, and its teachings cause panic in the community and go against Tanzanian morals, customs, and culture,» stated the letter from the Registrar of Civil Societies, Emmanuel Kihampa.

The letter also highlighted a fee of Sh500,000 for prayer services as a violation of Christian beliefs and

church rules. The closure has led to increased security around the church, and many items have been removed following the shutting order.

Historical precedents of such closures in Tanzania include the Fahamu Kazi na Nguvu za Roho Church, which shut down in 2019 for spreading false prophecies, and the Kanisa la GRC Ministries, which closed the same year over financial misconduct.

In 2020, the Kanisa la EAGT Mito ya Baraka was shut down for non-compliance with health guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Mwanza, the government suspended the Mfalme Zumaridi's church activities in 2019 due to violations of traditions and religious teachings.

Diana Bundala, self-styled as «Mfalme Zumaridi» (God of the

world), faced multiple allegations, including human trafficking and illegal worship. Her followers, who adored her works, witnessed daily services where she claimed to heal ailments.

«I live near her church in Iseni; during prayer sessions, we on many occasions witnessed believers lying down on their face and then she would walk on their backs until she reached the altar,» says Rosemary Paul, a resident of Iseni Street in Mwanza.

Diana Bundala's arrest came after a video surfaced showing her followers harassing police officers, leading to her detention along with 149 church members.

The recent actions against these churches draw parallels to the year 2000 tragic case of Joseph Kibwetere in Uganda. Kibwetere led a doomsday cult that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of followers, underlining the need for stringent regulation of religious institutions to prevent such tragedies. These closures aim to safeguard the public while ensuring religious practices adhere to legal and ethical standards.

Rwanda's ongoing operation, which has seen the closure of thousands of places of worship, reflects a broader trend in Africa where governments are increasingly taking steps to



Twenty people died on Saturday, February 1, 2020, in a stampede while trying to receive anointing oil at Apostle Boniface Mwamposa's conference in Moshi, Kilimanjaro Region. Photo File.

regulate the rapid proliferation of churches. This trend is partly driven by the need to ensure the safety and well-being of worshippers, as well as to curb the spread of potentially harmful practices.

The closure of the Christian Life Church in Tanzania also points to the challenges posed by some religious leaders who exploit the faith of their followers for personal gain. Pastor Dibwe, known for his dramatic exorcisms and claims of supernatural powers, has faced accusations of inciting violence and charging exorbitant fees for prayer services.

«We have seen an increase in churches that operate without

proper regulation, often exploiting vulnerable people,» says Emmanuel Kihampa. «The government's actions are necessary to protect the public and maintain order.»

The rise of Pentecostal churches in Africa can be attributed to various socio-economic factors. Many people turn to these churches in search of hope and solutions to their problems, whether it be illness, poverty, or social issues.

The charismatic nature of Pentecostal preachers, who often claim to have direct communication with God and the ability to perform miracles, attracts large followers. However, the lack of oversight and

regulation in many regions has led to the emergence of churches that operate outside the bounds of legal and ethical standards.

In Rwanda, the government's crackdown is a response to concerns about the safety and structural integrity of many small churches. «We want to ensure that all places of worship meet the required standards to guarantee the safety of worshippers,» says Minister Musabyimana. The government's firm stance is a reminder to all religious institutions that they must comply with regulations or face closure.

Africa's rapid urbanization and social change underscore the significant role of religious institutions. Balancing freedom of worship with regulatory needs is crucial, as governments must ensure that religious practices do not compromise public safety or exploit vulnerable populations, noted Dr. Benjamin Simon, a former German lecturer at Tumaini University Makumira.

The closures in Rwanda and Tanzania highlight the complexities involved in regulating religious institutions. While the actions taken may be seen as necessary to protect the public, they also raise questions about religious freedom and the right to worship. It is a delicate balance that requires careful consideration and a commitment to upholding both safety and freedom.

To wrap up the discussion, one can say that, the recent closures of churches in Rwanda and Tanzania reflect a broader effort to regulate the proliferation of religious institutions and ensure the safety and well-being of worshippers. These actions underscore the need for stringent regulatory frameworks to prevent the exploitation of faith and to safeguard public safety. As governments in Africa navigate the challenges posed by the rapid growth of religious institutions, the balance between regulation and religious freedom remains a key consideration.



One of hundreds of churches closed by the Rwanda Governance Board for failing to meet required standards after an inspection on Thursday, August 1. Photo courtesy.



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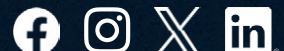
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Eunice Urio: Championing Honesty and Culture through A Tangled Web

By Adonis Byemelwa

Recently launched by Minister of Education, Science, and Technology, Prof. Adolf Mkenda, Eunice Urio's fictitious masterpiece, *A Tangled Web*, targets young readers with a barrage of life lessons. Eunice Urio, the celebrated author, revealed that her book delves into the consequences of lying, the allure of wealth and money obtained through illegitimate means, and the critical importance of morals and life discipline.

Urio doesn't just stop at storytelling; she passionately addresses the numerous challenges writers face, particularly the lack of financial resources. She urges the government to create a supportive environment for the entire value chain of book production, making it easier for authors to thrive.

«Books narrate our culture and preserve the memory of our lives and the eras we live in. If people do not write, there will come a time when they will ask what used to happen in the past. People must document these memories, as it is also a way to teach future generations and preserve our traditions and customs,» emphasized Eunice Urio in an exclusive interview with above mentioned senior reporter

Dive into this thrilling feature story to uncover the profound insights and relentless advocacy of Eunice Urio as she champions the power of literature and the necessity of preserving our cultural heritage through the written word.

What inspired you to write *The Tangled Web* and what key message do you want young readers to take away from it?

What inspired me to write *The Tangled Web* was my aversion to lies. In our communities, people often tell lies, but instead of addressing the root causes, we focus on the lie itself. In my book, a girl lies to her family about having a fiancé, even though they had broken up due to infidelity. This



Eunice Urio stands out as a beacon of integrity and a custodian of cultural heritage. Photo Courtesy.

reflects the pressure women face in African traditional societies to marry by a certain age. The story delves into the profound impact of deceit and the often-hidden hypocrisy that can exist within families.

Through engaging narratives, it underscores the value of truthfulness and the significance of empathy. By understanding the motivations behind people's actions, rather than hastily passing judgment, young readers are encouraged to cultivate a deeper sense of compassion and integrity. This tale serves as a poignant reminder that honesty is

not just a moral obligation but a pathway to stronger, more authentic relationships. The lessons learned here aim to inspire young minds to prioritize truth and understanding in their interactions.

How do you address the challenges of financial resources and support for writers in your book, and what solutions do you propose?

In *The Tangled Web*, I touch on the challenges of financial resources for writers. Many authors opt for self-publishing to access lucrative

markets, paying all costs themselves, while others work with publishers who provide royalties after sales. In developed countries, publishers often give authors a down payment to focus on writing. I propose creating more opportunities for grants, writing residencies, and workshops that offer financial support. As well, fostering collaborations between private sectors and government to create initiatives that support emerging writers can make a significant difference.

In what ways do you believe storytelling contributes to preserving

culture and documenting the history of future generations?

Storytelling is vital in preserving culture and documenting history. It captures the essence of a community's traditions, beliefs, and experiences, serving as a bridge between generations. For instance, in my book, I explore how traditional beliefs shape behaviors and decisions. By documenting these cultural narratives, literature helps future generations understand their heritage and the societal dynamics of their ancestors. It also dispels myths and provides context for cultural practices, ensuring that history is preserved accurately and meaningfully.

Can you describe a particularly impactful moment or lesson from your book that you feel will resonate with young readers?

A particularly impactful moment in *The Tangled Web* is when Miranda, who claims to have a fiancé, discovers her fiancé is marrying her cousin. This revelation happens during a heated confrontation at a wedding, highlighting the consequences of lies and the pressure to conform to societal expectations. The lesson here is the danger of dishonesty and the importance of being true to oneself. This moment teaches young readers that integrity and authenticity are crucial, even in the face of societal pressures.

What role do you think the government should play in supporting authors and promoting literature in Tanzania?

The government should play a significant role in supporting authors and promoting literature in Tanzania. This includes providing funding for



Adonis Byemehwa's exclusive interview with novelist Eunice Urrio at Hill Park View, Ubungo, Dar es Salaam - August 6, 2024 Photo courtesy.

literary programs, offering grants and subsidies for writers, and creating platforms for local authors to showcase their work. Additionally, integrating private authors' books into school curricula can boost both authors and publishers. Reducing taxes and publication costs can also make the literary market more accessible, allowing writers to focus on their craft and contribute to the cultural and educational landscape of the country.

How do you balance writing with the demands of the development sector and how has your professional experience influenced your work as an author?

Balancing writing with the demands of the development sector

requires effective time management and passion for both fields. My professional experience in social issues, human rights, and community dynamics enriches my storytelling, allowing me to create authentic characters and scenarios. I often work late into the night, using my flexible schedule as a private consultant to my advantage. My background in media management has also honed my communication skills, ensuring that my writing effectively conveys messages to my audience. This dual expertise enables me to write compelling stories that reflect real-world challenges and experiences.

What advice would you give to aspiring writers who are facing similar challenges and striving to make their mark in

the literary world?

To aspiring writers, I would say: stay persistent and passionate about your craft. Seek out writing communities and mentors for support and guidance. Start small, by submitting to local journals or online platforms, and continuously improve your skills through reading, writing, and workshops. Every writer faces setbacks, but perseverance and dedication will lead to success. Consider self-publishing if traditional routes are challenging, and draw inspiration from successful authors like J.K. Rowling, who persisted despite numerous rejections. Keep writing, never give up, and find a publishing system that works for you.

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Africans Rising's 6th Annual Activism Awards to Honor Africa's Leading Change-makers

This year's award ceremony will be held on August 31st at Hill View Guest Center in Accra, Ghana, during the All-Africans Movement Assembly (AAMA)

By Boris Esono Nwenfor

BUEA, Cameroon – Since its inception in 2019, the African Rising Activism Award has highlighted the crucial work being done to promote a united, just, peaceful, and dignified Africa. It showcases activism as a worthy cause in African society and highlights the great work of African activists and movements that bring positive change in African communities.

This year marks the sixth anniversary of the Africans Rising Activism Award, an initiative dedicated to recognizing and celebrating the tireless efforts of African activists and movements. Africans Rising acknowledges the enormous challenges faced by activists, their families, and their communities. These individuals brave numerous obstacles and remain steadfast in their mission, driven by a passion for justice and a desire to create lasting change.

“In an environment where civic space is shrinking and Activism is increasingly riskier, the bold efforts of activists must not go unnoticed. We acknowledge the enormous challenges activists go through, with their families and communities, they brave these challenges and refuse to relent,” Africans Rising said in a statement.

“Nobody pays activists except their passion and desire to push the boundaries in hopes of securing a prosperous Africa for all Africans. The award is a token of appreciation to all activists to encourage them to continue doing their work.”

An expanded Award showcasing the creative talents of African artists

Debuted in 2022, the awards are presented in three categories: Activist of the Year, Movement of the Year, and Artistic Activist of the Year. The latter category was introduced during the third edition to provide a platform for showcasing the creative talents of



African artists.

For each category (Activist of the Year, Movement of the Year and Artistic Activist of the Year) two final nominees are chosen to represent North Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, West Africa, Southern Africa, and the diaspora.

Prominent figures from the legal, human rights, and activist communities are expected to attend the ceremony, offering a chance to celebrate the achievements of Africa's leading change-makers and inspire others to join the cause.

Africans Rising looks to play a critical role on the continent pushing governments, businesses and even established global and national NGOs to focus on challenges Africans deem necessary, including demands for a fair international trading system,

concrete action to address the effects of climate change and the creation and strengthening of a representative coalition to protect our natural resources and the environment.

The organization has a footprint in over 40 different countries on the African continent, a network of over 350 organisations across the continent, and continues to build partnerships with various entities and institutions that stand for peace, justice, humanity, and dignity.

Previous winners

In the first edition of this Africa Rising award initiative, Jean-Marie Kalonji, an activist from the Democratic Republic of Congo was voted the 2019 Africans Rising Activist of the Year.

In 2020, Asha Jaffar Harun, an activist and journalist in Kenya, was

voted the Activist of the Year, and Tournons La Page, an international pro-democracy movement, was voted Movement of the Year. The awards were presented at the West Africa Good Governance Summit in Benin.

In 2021, Wilson Atumeyi (Nigeria) was voted Activist of the Year by Africans Rising members. Movement of the Year was awarded to Youth for Parliament (Zambia); Artistic Activist of the Year: Joice Zau (Angola).

During the year 2022, from a pool of 33 nominees, the victors in three distinct categories were revealed. Editar Ochieng from Kenya secured the title of Activist of the Year, Botswana Jobs for Graduates from Botswana scooped the Movement of the Year, and Afra Saad from Sudan was awarded the Artistic Activist of the Year.



The Africans Rising Activism Award highlights the great work of African activists and movements that bring positive change in African communities.

History of the award

In 2019, Africans Rising started the Africans Rising Activist of the Year award to recognize African grassroots activists working for justice, peace and dignity for African people. In 2020, the Africans Rising Activism Awards recognized both individual and collective activism, and in 2021 the Activism Awards expanded to become a platform for showcasing the creative talents of African artists.

Commencing in 2022, the Africans Rising Activism Awards initiative embarked on the journey of acknowledging African activism by bestowing three significant awards: Africans Rising Activist of the Year, Africans Rising Movement of the Year, and Africans Rising Artistic Activist of the Year.

The awards initiative is conducted in three phases: a public call for nominations, a vetting process by an appointed committee to select the final nominees for each category, and an online voting round, open only to Africans Rising members, to

determine the winners and runners-up for each award.

The Africans Rising Activism Awards serve the purpose of profiling and advancing African activists and movements and highlighting their engagement in activism as a means of positive change in African communities. Through the example of award nominees and recipients, this

award initiative showcases activism as a worthy cause in African society and aims to inspire similar actions among other civil society actors on the continent and in the diaspora.

As Africans Rising gears up for this significant event, the organization reaffirms its commitment to supporting and recognizing the courageous efforts of activists who

tirelessly work to build a united and just Africa. The 6th Annual Activism Awards will not only celebrate their achievements but also serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of activism in driving social change and promoting human rights across the continent.

AFRICANS RISING ACTIVISM AWARDS



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Tanganyika- From Election Heat to Renewed Leadership For Law Society

By Adonis Byemelwa

The Tanganyika Law Society (TLS), a cornerstone of Tanzania Mainland's Bar Association, has been a formidable force in shaping the legal landscape since its establishment by an act of parliament in 1954.

Over the decades, TLS has stood as a bastion of legal integrity and advocacy, influencing pivotal legal reforms and championing the rule of law. Its legacy of fostering legal excellence and upholding justice has made it an indispensable pillar in Tanzanian society, continually driving progress and ensuring the protection of fundamental rights for all.

According to the TLS website, its mission is to create a conducive environment for the legal fraternity, facilitate the acquisition of legal knowledge, represent, promote, and protect members, support state organs in legislation and administration of the rule of law, and assist the public in accessing justice sustainably.

Unlike other professional associations, TLS has recently stood out for its unique community engagement, especially during its annual election season. This year, however, saw a slight decline in election fervor as Professor Edward Hosea successfully defended his presidency, easing some of the usual tensions.

Professor Hosea, who campaigned on a platform of "Constructive Dialogue," won with 621 votes against his competitors, Harold Sungusia and Jeremiah Mtobesya, who garnered 380 and 145 votes, respectively.

TLS elections have historically been dynamic, not just within the society but also externally, due to the association's significant advisory role to the government and its institutions.

Established by legislation in 1954 as a professional association for lawyers in the country, TLS's primary responsibilities are outlined in section 4 of the Tanganyika Law Society Ordinance.

These duties include uniting, defending, and supporting the welfare



Senior Counsel Dr. Mkunga Humphrey Mtingele Swears in Lawyer Boniface Mwabukusi on August 3rd, 2024. Photo courtesy

of lawyers in Tanzania, advising the government and its organs such as the Parliament and the Judiciary, and safeguarding the interests and welfare of Tanzanians.

Over the years, TLS has experienced varied leadership styles. Notably, in 2017, Tundu Lissu, now the vice chairman of Chadema, was elected TLS president. His tenure was marked by intense friction between TLS and the government, which accused the society of political interference rather than focusing on its foundational goals, escalating conflicts between the two entities.

In March 2017, then-Minister of Constitution and Legal Affairs, Dr. Harrison Mwakyembe, threatened to dissolve the society if it continued to engage in political activities.

The following year, Fatma Karume, a prominent activist, was elected president. Her tenure continued the tradition of tension between TLS and the government, especially as the society was perceived to adopt an activist stance.

On September 20, 2019, Fatma was suspended from her legal practice by the High Court for allegedly attacking

the Office of the Attorney General. Although she was disbarred by the lawyers' ethics committee, her license was reinstated on June 21, 2021.

With this year's TLS elections, attorneys Julius Mtatiro and Ally Kileo conducted a thorough analysis of the six candidates: Boniface Mwabukusi, Ibrahim Bendera, Emmanuel Muga, Revocatus Kuuli, Paul Revocatus Kaunda, and Sweetbert Nkuba.

Mtatiro, in his July 31, 2024 statement, emphasized the diverse leadership qualities and experiences of the candidates, each capable of bringing unique changes or challenges to the TLS presidency.

Reflecting on the future of TLS, Mtatiro questioned what type of president the society needs in the current national context. He pondered the expectations of lawyers, particularly young lawyers, from the next TLS president, and what lessons TLS could learn from organizations like the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) and the Black Lawyers Association (BLA).

He underlined the need for a president who would continue and emphasize the crucial foundations laid

by predecessors such as Professors Edward Hosea and Harold Sungusia while correcting areas that require improvement.

TLS, he noted, needs a president who is professional, calm, and persuasive, with a vision that can be realistically implemented without haste. This leader should unite all lawyers, serve as a vital link between TLS and the government, and avoid turning into a «rabble-rouser» spreading hatred based on political activism or party allegiance.

Young lawyers, according to Mtatiro, are like their peers worldwide, desiring rapid changes in key areas. They need good mentors and leaders who can foster stability and a broad understanding of issues, helping them become exceptional lawyers in the future.

He emphasized the importance of building a solid ethical foundation, as outlined in various laws and the 2022 Lawyers' Code of Ethics.

In terms of international best practices, Mtatiro suggested that TLS could learn from PALU and BLA, which strategically and professionally champion human rights

and work closely with governments and international legal bodies to influence legislation for justice and equality. These associations also offer significant legal support to underserved communities and provide training to lawyers to enhance their professional capabilities.

The recent election had seen Boniface Mwabukusi victorious, receiving 1,274 votes out of 2,218 cast, followed by Sweetbert Nkuba with 807 votes. Other candidates, Ibrahim Bendera, Paul Kaunda, Emmanuel Muga, and Revocatus Kuuli, received 58, 51, 18, and 7 votes, respectively. Upon his victory, Mwabukusi expressed his commitment to restoring TLS to its foundational principles as outlined in section 4 of the TLS Act.

“I will start with section 4 of the TLS Act to ensure the society fulfills its mandate,” Mwabukusi stated, emphasizing the goals of uniting, defending, and supporting lawyers, advising the government and its organs, and protecting the interests of Tanzanian society.

When questioned about his confrontational reputation, Mwabukusi assured adherence to



In a significant show of support, in July 2024, 29 lawyers rallied to defend Boniface Mwabukusi in the High Court. Photo courtesy.

legal principles, stating, “People say I am confrontational, but I am guided by rules, laws, and the Constitution. I speak the truth, whether good or bad, without bias.”

Mwabukusi cited his legal battles as examples of his commitment to the rule of law, including his 2020 parliamentary run in Busokelo, where he sought legal recourse after alleging electoral malpractice. “I went to court rather than inciting people. I was the only Tanzanian candidate to do so,” he noted.

He promises to uphold TLS’s strategic plan from 2021 to 2025, ensuring accountability to its members and service to the community. He highlighted his 14-year legal career, during which he has defended citizens in various disputes, including land and human rights issues. “TLS must align with the needs of the people, especially in matters of the Constitution, good governance, human rights, and just laws.”

Regarding constitutional reforms, Mwabukusi pledged to advocate for a

new constitution, stating, “TLS must ensure we get a new constitution and uphold the law. We will stand with the people in all our responsibilities.”

Lugano Mkisi, a newly graduated member of the TLS and a tax management expert, praised Mwabukusi’s commitment to legal principles and his strategic vision for society. “Mwabukusi’s approach reflects a deep understanding of TLS’s role and its critical relationship with the government and judiciary,” Mkisi remarked.

Mwabukusi’s presidency marks a pivotal moment, with the legal fraternity and broader Tanzanian society keenly observing how his leadership will shape the future of TLS and its impact on the rule of law and justice in the country.

Tanzanian human rights activist and renowned journalist Ansbert Ngurumo commends Mwabukusi’s win, dismissing all challenges posed by Sweetbert Nkuba, who threatens court action. Chadema Vice Chair for Tanzania Mainland, Tundu Lissu, also praises Mwabukusi’s victory, highlighting his potential to bring significant positive changes. _____

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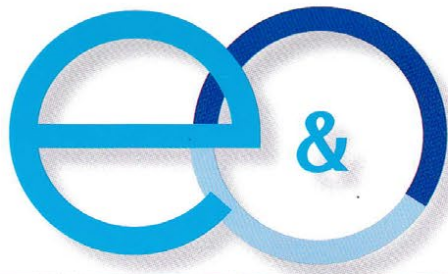
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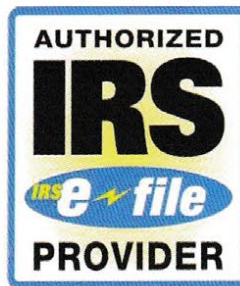
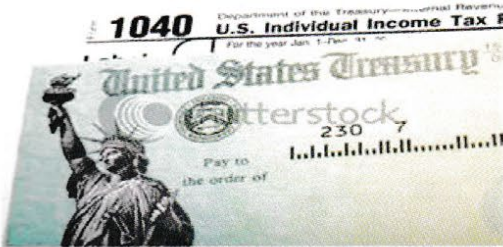
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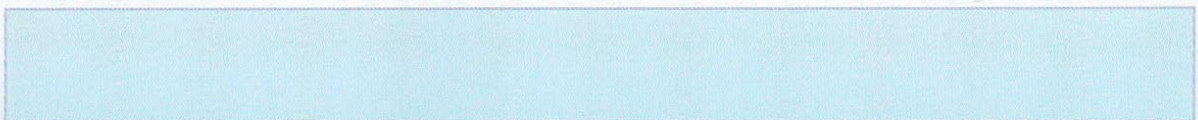
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How The Bright Stars Changed The Global Image Of South Sudan

By Akol Dok*

The South Sudan national basketball team, known as the “Bright Stars,” made a significant impact on the global image of South Sudan when they came within seconds of defeating the United States national basketball team in an exhibition game in London. The world immediately began to examine how the world’s youngest nation, which lacks an indoor basketball arena, nearly defeated the world’s number-one team. The Bright Stars’ performance not only changed the image of South Sudan but also shifted the narrative. South Sudan’s image was once associated with conflict and poverty, but now they are associated with talent and promise.

South Sudan, the world’s youngest nation, gained its independence from Sudan in 2011 after decades of civil war and armed struggle. It is in East Africa and has a population of around ten million. Despite the challenges, South Sudan has been associated with conflict and civil strife, which has displaced many South Sudanese around the world. Many players on the national team were refugees, including Peter Jok, Wenyen Gabriel, Nuni Omot, and the South Sudan Basketball Federation President and two-time NBA all-star Luol Deng. Their journey from refugees to national heroes is a testament to the South Sudanese people’s remarkable resilience and unwavering spirit.

The South Sudan national basketball team is the only African team at the Paris 2024 Olympics. They qualified after a brilliant performance at the 2023 FIBA World Cup in the Philippines. South Sudan defeated Puerto Rico in their Olympic debut. The Bright Stars’ exhibition and Olympic Games performance changed the narrative about South Sudan. International media channels discuss Bright Stars and South Sudan basketball’s future.

The global media landscape often brands African countries with corruption, war, hunger, and disaster.



President Salva Kiir met with the South Sudan Basketball National Team to congratulate them on their remarkable achievement of qualifying for the Olympics 2024.

Sports pundits like Paul Pierce and Gilbert Arenas reinforced this image by spouting negative stereotypes about South Sudanese and Africans in general. It is crucial to change this narrative and shift the focus to the positive aspects, such as the success of the Bright Stars and the immense potential of the African sports market, which is set to revolutionize the global sports industry.

The African sports market is a burgeoning industry worth USD 12 billion and is projected to reach over USD 20 billion in 2035. African sports possess enormous prospects for socioeconomic development and social unity. The Bright Stars have unified a divided nation. South Sudanese from all ethnic groups supported the Bright Stars. Peak Sports, a Chinese manufacturing company, and MTN, an African telecommunications conglomerate, sponsor the team. Stanbic Bank, the

Luol Deng Foundation, and NBA Africa have partnered to produce the Jr. NBA league in South Sudan’s capital Juba. This success story of the Bright Stars is just the beginning of the African sports market’s potential.

The recent success in Paris will attract more investment and partnership. The potential of the sports industry in South Sudan is immense. Sports investment will build the sports industry in South Sudan. Investors will build arenas, conduct camps, train players, coaches, and referees, and promote sports tourism in South Sudan. Sports tourism will be an entry into South Sudan. Tourists will overcome the negative stereotype and seek to promote basketball in South Sudan. Sports will contribute to South Sudan’s economy, create jobs for young people, and grow the sports industry in the country. The sports industry in South Sudan is excellent.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino’s visit to South Sudan to open a new football (soccer) stadium affirms this.

The power of sports transcends mere investment and economics. It has the transformative ability to create social bonds and heal broken social fabrics. The Bright Stars’ success is a testament to this, as it has brought together South Sudanese from all walks of life, uniting them under a common passion for basketball. This transformative power of sports is what makes the Bright Stars’ success not just a sports victory but a victory for the entire nation.

*Akol Dok is the Founder of Orus Consulting Limited, a business advisory and public relations firm based in East Africa. He is a writer and analyst featured on CNBC Africa, CGTN Africa, Radio Miraya, RT International, Yahoo News, Semafor, and The Nation. He hosts the South Sudan and the World podcast. _____

From Curiosity to Breakthrough: A Journey into Tackling Neglected Tropical Diseases

By Jessica Ahebor

Western Region, Ghana- In the quiet coastal village of Butri in Ghana's Western Region, a young student's curiosity sparked a journey that changed the world's understanding of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). "During a lymphatic filariasis (LF) project, I observed a puzzling phenomenon: almost everyone examined at the time harbored microfilaria—baby worms that cause elephantiasis and hydrocele in their blood—yet only a small percentage exhibited symptoms of elephantiasis or hydrocele, Alexander Debrah, Professor of parasitology at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, recounted.

The student, Debrah, asked his German mentor, Prof. Buttner, why so few people developed these symptoms despite widespread infection. Prof. Buttner responded, "Mr. Debrah, I don't know. When you become a Professor of Parasitology, you can then answer that question." This response ignited Debrah's lifelong quest to unravel the mystery.

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) affect about 1.3 billion people worldwide, primarily in poor tropical and subtropical regions. These diseases, including lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis) and onchocerciasis (river blindness), thrive in conditions of poverty, poor sanitation, and limited access to healthcare.

In Ghana, available literature shows elephantiasis was present in at least 98 out of the then 200 districts and river blindness alone affects about 2 million people in at least 100 districts; all of whom require some form of treatment or intervention.

To attain the Agenda 2030 target of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the



Alexander Debrah, Professor of parasitology at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.

World Health Assembly Agrees on a Roadmap for Ending Neglected Tropical Diseases. This includes a 90% reduction in the number of people needing treatment for neglected tropical diseases, and eliminating at least one NTD in 100 countries.

However, there are obstacles hampering this achievement. In Ghana, efforts to control and eliminate filarial diseases and hydrocele face significant challenges. Traditional treatments like ivermectin and albendazole used for treatment target only baby worms, leaving adult worms in the patients requiring prolonged medication for 10-15 years until the adult worms die naturally. This, experts say, complicates treatment strategies and hinders effective disease management.

A Breakthrough in Treatment

After two decades of searching for a drug that could kill this bacteria called *Wolbachia bancrofti* and *Onchocerca volvulus*, the bacteria that cause elephantiasis and river blindness, respectively,

Prof. Debrah's clinical trials with an affordable antibiotic known as doxycycline showed remarkable results. Doxycycline eradicated

Wolbachia, leading to the death of adult worms within a year. This breakthrough meant that both adult and baby worms could be eliminated with a short course of doxycycline.

"What this outcome means is that, now, an infected person takes doxycycline for 4-5 weeks and both the adult and the baby worms that cause river blindness, elephantiasis and hydrocele will die and the person will be free forever."

Atta Baido, a 65-year-old from Butri, has been battling elephantiasis for nearly 20 years. "I have had this condition for close to 20 years now, I can't work or do anything for a living. I have over the years depended on my family, and they're even fed up with me. But now the drug has helped me to recover, it's a new hope for me. I never thought this day would come while alive."

Hope for the Future

Prof. Debrah's research has made significant progress in the fight against NTDs. "As a Professor of Parasitology, I remain committed to answering the questions that sparked my journey and bringing hope to those affected by these neglected diseases".

Expanding Treatment and Research

With a €3.5 million grant from the German Ministry of Education and Research under the TAKEOFF project, Prof. Debrah's team scaled up treatment and incorporated simple foot hygiene practices recommended by the WHO. In addition, multi-country trials showed that in regions where elephantiasis transmission had ceased, simple foot hygiene alone was sufficient for managing the condition.

Innovative Reporting Solutions

To address the lack of effective tools for reporting elephantiasis morbidity, the team deployed the use of mobile technology to train Community Health Volunteers to use a web-based system via mobile phones to report available cases for treatment. This approach led to a significant increase in reported cases, enabling better management and policy decisions.

Policy Recommendations

In his inaugural professorial lecture, under the theme "Eliminating filarial diseases, a new hope for an old battle" Prof. Debrah is advocating for the inclusion of elephantiasis and hydrocele management in the National Health Insurance Scheme to enable NTD sufferers access to care. He called on the sector players to leverage digital technologies for case identification, promoting community engagement and education, and ensuring continuous monitoring and evaluation of control programs.

"Through dedicated research and innovative solutions, we're transforming the landscape of neglected tropical disease management, bringing hope and healing to those affected'.



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