The AfriFiles

Volume III - December, 2025

We Know Africa

EVALUATING THE OBAMA COMPLEX LEGACY IN AFRICA

PRESIDENT'S WIFE, SON SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS FOR CORRUPTION

THE CURSE OF AFRICA HIDDEN BILLIONS

Ibrahim TRAORÉ

A 'Junior Jesus' for Burkina Faso?

MEDIA POWER

NIGERIA CLOSE FACTORIES LINKED TO U.S. AUTO INDUSTRY AMID LEAD POISONING INQUIRY

TANZANIA

GROUNDBREAKING LANDMARK FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

■ USA ■ UK ■ India ■ South Africa ■ Kenya ■ Nigeria ■ Namibia ■ Tanzania ■ Zambia

Cover Story:

The AfriFiles puts this story on the cover to spotlight the noteworthy achievements of Burkina Faso President, Ibrahim Traoré for his youth-led leadership, seriously focus on national sovereignty, and efforts to combat terrorism. His approach symbolizes hope for stability and economic development.

Listen to an audio analysis- Page 6

The AfriFile Profile:

The AfriFiles is the continent's flagship monthly technology-powered magazine, driven by Africa's top editors and journalists. It is shared free through Email, Signal, LinkedIn, email, and social platforms. Here, Africa's leaders and citizens unite to tell the real stories - of victories, challenges, and futures being built. Bold, incisive, and unapologetically African. The AfriFiles delivers the insights and perspectives that shape tomorrow.

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The AfriFiles reaches a global audience of institutions and individuals seeking timely, accurate, and incisive analysis of Africa's history, challenges, and developments.

Its subscribers include elite individuals, government agencies, defense, intelligence, foreign affairs, and diplomatic corps - alongside multilateral bodies, business networks, universities and academic institutions.

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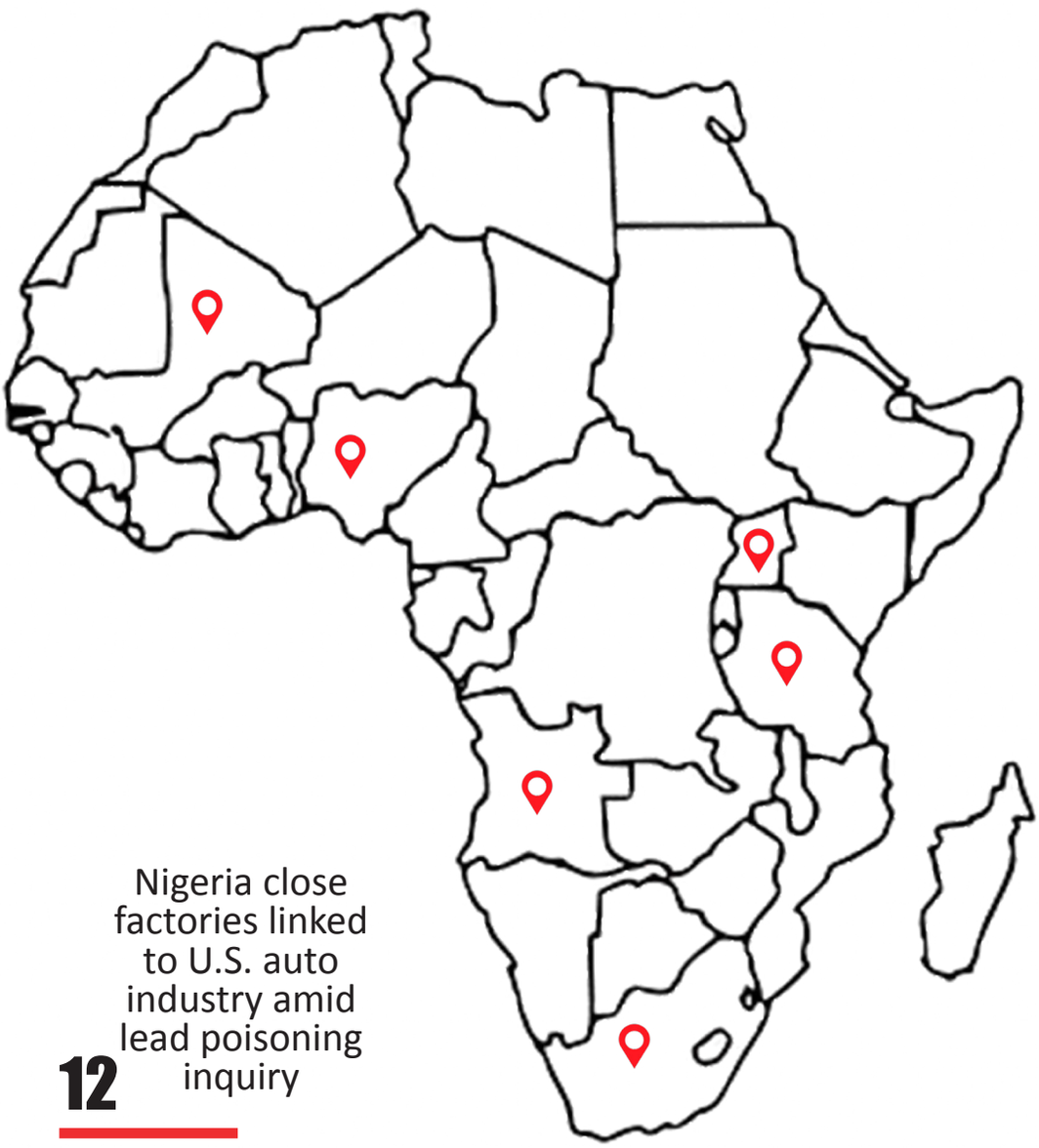

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1.2m

Africa's kilometres of paved roads out of a total road network of roughly 6.8 million kilometres.

30,000+

The number of Nigerian-trained doctors estimated to be practising abroad today, while the country needs them most.

Global Beats

Japanese kings of ocean's bounty

JAPAN became a leading fisheating nation through geography, history and culture. Surrounded by rich seas and short on arable land, it long relied on seafood as a primary protein source.

Over centuries, Japanese cuisine elevated fish into an art form; sushi, sashimi, grilled and simmered dishes made freshness and seasonality central to daily eating.

Buddhism's historical limits on meat further pushed households toward the ocean. Modern coldchain logistics, busy fish markets like Tokyo's Toyosu, and a dense network of sushi bars and izakaya keep demand high.

Health beliefs also matter, many Japanese see fish as cleaner and better for longevity than red meat. Though percapita seafood consumption is now declining, this deep culinary tradition still shapes national preferences.

Pope passionate sporting side

POPE Leo XIV's passion for sport is as striking as his path to the papacy.

A South Side Chicago native and former Villanova student, he has carried his sporting loyalties straight into the Vatican.

He loves to play tennis, calling himself a keen amateur and even hitting a few balls with touring professionals when schedules allow.

As a fan, he is firmly rooted in his past; he supports Major League Baseball's Chicago White Sox and follows Villanova Wildcats basketball with almost alumni-level zeal, celebrating their championship runs. From Rome, he also keeps an eye on the NBA, cheering on former Villanova stars now lighting up the New York Knicks.

Sarkozy's cell was all but unique

NICOLAS Sarkozy's – former President of France, brief stint at Paris's La Santé prison starkly diverges from typical detainees' grim reality.

Placed in the isolation wing for security, due to his high-profile status as ex-president—he occupied a 9m² solo cell with bed, shower, hotplate, optional TV and fridge, unlike the overcrowded cells where thousands share space on floor mattresses amid France's 84,000 inmates versus 62,000 spots.

His routine; one-hour solo yard walk daily in a fortified 30m² enclosure, gym or library access, unlimited validated calls, and three 30-minute weekly visits—standard for isolation, but he avoided common threats like illicit phones or violence. No general-population mixing; specially trained guards escorted him exclusively.12

While detainees endure surpopulation and shared misery, Sarkozy's protective regime granted privacy and amenities, though he reportedly survived on yogurt alone amid stress.

Cartoon by Gado

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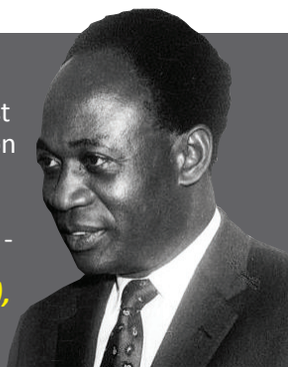
> It is clear that we must find an African solution to our problems, and that this can only be found in African unity -
>
> ***Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972), the first President of Ghana.***



Letters to the Editor

When leaders turn blessings into a curse

Hello Editor,
A good number of African leaders continue to plunder the continent's vast resources for personal gain while their people endure poverty, unemployment and collapsing services.

Oil, gold, diamonds and rare minerals enrich a narrow elite instead of funding schools, hospitals and infrastructure.

Until there is real accountability, transparent contracts and citizens' power to punish corruption, Africa's wealth will remain a curse, not a blessing.

Okello Mustafa,
Kampala, Uganda
Via email

New voice for serious African journalism

Hello Editor,
I write to warmly congratulate you and your team at The AfriFiles for the magazine's consistently rigorous, well-researched articles and bold features.

Your reporting combines depth, clarity and courage, illuminating African realities too often misrepresented or ignored.

In an age of shallow commentary, The AfriFiles has become an essential, credible voice for serious African analysis and storytelling.

Isamil Sagot,
Juba, South Sudan.
Via email

African leaders must emulate Odinga

Hello Editor,
RAILA Odinga was a true African patriot whose lifelong commitment to democracy, justice and good governance inspired millions beyond Kenya's borders.

He consistently put national and continental interests above personal gain, enduring detention, defeat and vilification without abandoning his principles.

Today's leaders should emulate his courage, integrity and panAfrican vision if our continent is to grow, unite and fulfil its vast potential.

Catherine Calvin,
Pretoria, South Africa.
Via email

President Ibrahim Traoré donating blood

Ibrahim Traoré

A 'Young Jesus' for Burkina Faso?

Listen to analysis on mobile

Listen to analysis on PC

By Dr. Nichols BURKE

BURKINA Faso is one of Africa's quietly remarkable nations; rich in history, courage, and ideas - yet routinely denied the chance to see its aspirations fully unfold.

Beyond its armed struggle against French colonialism, when it was known as Upper Volta until independence in 1960, the country gave the continent one of its most iconic modern leaders; Thomas Sankara.

Former Burkina Faso President Thomas Sankara. Photo: Langevin Jacques/ Getty Images

Sankara took power at just 33, ruling from 1983 until his assassination in 1987 in a coup led by his erstwhile ally Blaise Compaoré, widely believed to have enjoyed French support.

His legacy endures because he tried to rewrite the rules of African governance. He promoted food selfsufficiency, free healthcare, mass vaccination, universal education, women's rights and environmental protection, while rejecting foreign aid, structural adjustment, and the trappings of neocolonialism.

Few of those gains survived him. Under his successors, Burkina Faso slid back into familiar patterns of dependency and entrenched poverty.

Today, 35 years after Sankara's death, many Burkinabè see echoes of him in their current leader, Captain Ibrahim Traoré.

At 37, this softspoken artillery officer has refashioned himself as a champion of sovereignty and popular development, waging what he calls a struggle against "imperialism and neocolonialism."

His admirers, in Burkina Faso and beyond, hail him as the bold new face of African resistance. Some go so far as to dub him a "young Jesus"—a description meant less in religious terms than as a symbol of sacrifice, moral rectitude, and defiance in the face of powerful empires.

The rise of a captain

Traoré came to power on 30 September 2022, in the country's second coup that year. He toppled LieutenantColonel PaulHenri Sandaogo Damiba, who himself had ousted an elected president just eight months earlier amid mounting jihadist attacks.

Damiba had promised security but delivered little. Insurgents linked to alQaeda and the Islamic State tightened their grip on large swathes of the countryside.

Villages were overrun, thousands were killed, and roughly two million people were displaced. Damiba was also accused of corruption and of drifting toward the familiar habits of personal rule.

Traoré and his fellow officers justified their putsch as a necessary correction. The young captain quickly framed his mission in sweeping historical terms; restoring security, reclaiming control over natural resources, and repositioning Burkina Faso in a world order they see as rigged against former colonies.

One of his first and clearest acts was geopolitical. He signalled that Burkina Faso would no longer align automatically with Paris or Washington.

In a series of speeches, he vowed that his country would not remain a "vassal" state serving the interests of its former colonial master.

A turn to Moscow

The most dramatic expression of this shift has been Traoré's embrace of Russia. His government has invited an estimated 2,000 Russian security personnel into the country; part of a broader security and economic partnership that includes training, arms supplies, and mining interests.

This realignment came into sharp focus at the Russia–Africa summit in St. Petersburg in July 2023. Standing before Vladimir Putin and a hall full of African heads of state, Traoré delivered a fiery address that ricocheted around social media.

African leaders, he declared, must stop being puppets that dance whenever imperialists pull the strings.

For many young Africans disillusioned with the West, the speech was electrifying. Video clips, set to music and revolutionary slogans, spread rapidly in francophone online spaces. In Ouagadougou, Traoré's image began to appear on murals alongside Sankara's. Western capitals were less impressed. French President Emmanuel Macron dismissed the Russia–Burkina partnership as "a dangerous illusion," arguing that it merely swapped one dependency for another.

President Ibrahim Traoré

Analysts in Europe warn that Russian involvement, whatever its immediate security gains, risks deepening militarization and weakening already fragile institutions.

But for Traoré's supporters, the pivot to Moscow is above all an act of defiance: a symbol that Burkina Faso will choose its partners on its own terms, even at the cost of Western displeasure.

A symbol of generational revolt

Since the 2022 coup, Traoré has been cast as more than the leader of a small, landlocked country. In regional discourse, he has become a symbol of generational revolt - one of a new cohort of African leaders openly rejecting postcolonial hierarchies.

Unlike many older strongmen, Traoré cultivates a different persona. He dresses simply, often in fatigues without ostentatious decorations. His speeches mix revolutionary rhetoric with an almost pastoral message of shared sacrifice.

He speaks directly to "the people in the villages," acknowledging hardship while promising that no Burkinabè will be left behind.

Central to his message is a simple pledge; that Burkina Faso's mineral wealth, especially gold, must serve the entire population, not just a narrow elite and foreign shareholder.

Translating rhetoric into policy, his government has created a state mining enterprise to give the government direct control over strategic projects.

It has required foreign mining companies to cede 15 per cent of their shares to local stakeholders.

It has established a national gold refinery so that ore can be processed domestically instead of being exported in raw form. It has also nationalized two gold mines previously listed on the London Stock Exchange.

To his admirers, these moves confirm that he is willing to confront multinational capital and rewire a deeply unequal economic model.

To his critics, they risk scaring away investment, undermining transparency, and concentrating even more power in the hands of a military junta.

Democracy suspended

This is where the "young Jesus" analogy becomes contentious. For all the talk of justice and sacrifice, Traoré is, fundamentally, a coup leader presiding over a suspended constitution.

Human rights organizations accuse his government of muzzling dissent, alleged harassing journalists, and turning a blind eye to abuses by security forces and local militias in the name of counterterrorism.

His officials respond that Western NGOs care more about procedure than about the daily terror faced by villagers under jihadist threat.

Public opinion is complex. A 2024 Afrobarometer survey suggests that while support for multiparty democracy is eroding in Burkina Faso, many citizens express satisfaction with the current leadership as long as living conditions, security, and dignity show tangible improvement.

For a growing segment of the population, "democracy" has come to mean elections without progress. Under such conditions, the promise of order, social justice, and national pride can outweigh the demand for formal democratic rituals.

An uncertain future

Traoré's open defiance of Western powers and his reorientation of alliances have made him a hero to some and a target to others.

History is not on the side of African leaders who challenge powerful external interests. Sankara's fate, like that of Patrice Lumumba in Congo or Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, looms over any discussion of his future.

In January 2024, Burkina Faso deepened its break with the regional and international status quo by withdrawing from the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas). Alongside Mali and Niger—two other countries now governed by military juntas, it formed the Alliance of Sahel States, a loose bloc that presents itself as an alternative pole of sovereignty in West Africa.

Within this alliance, the three countries have removed tariffs on trade among themselves and imposed only a 0.5 per cent levy on goods from outside.

Ecowas, which had already sanctioned these regimes, now faces the prospect of a durable split at its core. The move rattled not only regional diplomats but also foreign investors, security planners, and aid agencies.

Can Traoré last?

That is the central question haunting both his supporters and his detractors. His domestic popularity, at least for now, is palpable.

His rhetoric resonates with a wider African youth that feels shut out of economic opportunity and betrayed by traditional elites.

Yet the risks he runs are immense. Militarized politics, deepening conflict, economic fragility, and greatpower rivalries have brought down many leaders who tried to change course too abruptly.

Traoré's Burkina Faso is attempting all of this while grappling with one of the world's most lethal insurgencies.

A fleeting revolutionary or a turning point?

The "young Jesus" label, repeated in markets and on social media, reflects a hunger for saviours in a region weary of crisis. It casts Traoré as a figure prepared to suffer, even to die, for the liberation of his people.

But messianic politics is a dangerous game. It can inspire extraordinary courage, and justify extraordinary abuses.

What is clear is that Traoré has already altered Burkina Faso's political landscape and unsettled longstanding regional arrangements.

He has revived a language of radical sovereignty that many assumed died with Sankara.

Whether he can match that rhetoric with enduring institutions, inclusive governance, and genuine security remains uncertain.

If he succeeds, if he stabilizes the country, broadens prosperity, and gradually restores constitutional rule without surrendering hardwon autonomy, he may be remembered as the leader who finally allowed Burkina Faso's interrupted story to keep unfolding.

If he fails, he risks joining a long list of African reformers whose experiments were cut short, their countries returning, once again, to a familiar script of instability and dependency.

In that sense, the real question is not whether Ibrahim Traoré is a "young Jesus," but whether Burkina Faso will be allowed to outgrow the need for saviours at all, and instead build a state where justice and dignity depend not on a single charismatic figure, but on institutions strong enough to outlast him. ■

In that sense, the real question is not whether Ibrahim Traoré is a "young Jesus," but whether Burkina Faso will be allowed to outgrow the need for saviours at all, and instead build a state where justice and dignity depend not on a single charismatic figure, but on institutions strong enough to outlast him.

Illustration by Sarah Hanson

Africa fintech future depends on collaboration

AFRICA's financial technology story is no longer a fringe narrative of clever startups operating on the edges of weak banking systems.

It has become one of the continent's most consequential economic transformations, reshaping how people save, pay, borrow, and trade.

Yet as fintech matures, a central truth is becoming unavoidable: innovation alone is not enough.

According to a recent analysis by consulting firm EY, fintech cannot thrive in isolation.

Its long-term success depends on dense collaboration across regulators, banks, telecom companies, technology platforms, and development partners; an ecosystem approach that is increasingly separating thriving markets from stagnant ones.

This argument comes at a critical time. Sub-Saharan Africa remains one of the least financially included regions in the world, with roughly 42 percent of adults still unbanked.

That figure represents hundreds of millions of people excluded from formal savings, credit, insurance, and investment tools.

Yet it also explains why Africa has become a global laboratory for digital finance. Where traditional banking failed to scale, mobile phones did.

Mobile money platforms have radically altered access to financial services over the past decade.

Today, Africa accounts for more than half of the world's mobile money accounts, and in several countries mobile money transactions exceed annual GDP.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, mobile money is estimated to contribute around 4.5 percent of GDP, rising above 8 percent in markets such as Kenya.

These are not marginal gains. They reflect structural change in how economies function, particularly at the base of the income pyramid.

The ecosystem advantage

What distinguishes successful fintech markets from struggling ones is rarely talent or demand alone. It is the presence of a functioning ecosystem.

Regulators who understand innovation, telecom companies willing to open infrastructure, banks prepared to partner rather than block, and investors ready to take long-term risks all shape outcomes.

Kenya's capital, Nairobi, often called the "Silicon Savannah;"illustrates this dynamic.

Over the past 15 years, Kenya has combined regulatory experimentation, mobile network dominance, and an active startup culture to build one of Africa's most mature fintech landscapes.

Regulatory sandboxes allowed innovators to test products without excessive early compliance burdens, while telecom operators provided nationwide rails for payments and data.

The result has been a dense fintech cluster spanning payments, lending, carbon markets, agritech finance, and cross-border remittances.

Firms such as Melanin Kapital have benefited from this environment, leveraging regulatory openness and digital infrastructure to scale products that link finance with climate and sustainability markets.

This kind of progress does not happen by accident. Telecom companies, in particular, have played an outsized role in Africa's fintech rise.

In many countries, they were the first institutions to offer financial services at scale. Mobile network operators today are no longer just connectivity providers; they are financial intermediaries.

MTN, Africa's largest telecom operator by subscribers, reported fintech revenue growth of more than 35 percent in 2025, driven largely by mobile money, payments, and data-enabled financial services.

That growth reflects how deeply fintech has become embedded in everyday economic life.

Yet fragmentation remains one of the biggest brakes on scale. Africa's fintech markets are still divided by national regulations, incompatible payment systems, and uneven infrastructure.

Moving money across borders in Africa can still be more expensive and slower than sending funds to Europe or North America.

Industry leaders increasingly point to interoperability—between mobile money platforms, banks, and national systems—as the next decisive frontier.

Capital, scale, the uneven boom

Investment patterns reveal both confidence and caution.

Nearly half of Africa's fintech companies have been founded in the past six years, collectively raising around six billion US dollars in equity since 2000.

As of 2025, Africa counts nine unicorns - startups valued at over one billion dollars, and eight of them operate in fintech.

Payments companies, digital banks, and cross-border platforms dominate this elite group, reflecting where investors see scalable returns.

But beneath the headline valuations lies a more complex reality.

Deal volumes fell sharply in 2023 as global capital tightened, exposing how vulnerable African fintechs can be to external shocks.

Many startups remain heavily dependent on venture funding, with limited access to local capital markets or long-term debt.

This imbalance reinforces the EY report's emphasis on ecosystem strength. Where capital markets are shallow and policy coordination weak, fintech growth becomes fragile, no matter how innovative the product.

South Africa's TymeBank offers a glimpse of what is possible when fintech aligns with broader financial systems. Operating as a fully licensed digital bank, it has scaled millions of low-cost accounts by partnering with retailers and leveraging data rather than branches.

Its model shows that fintech does not have to exist outside the banking system; it can also transform it from within.

Beyond mobile money

Africa's fintech evolution is now moving beyond simple wallets and peer-to-peer transfers.

Embedded finance, where payments, credit, and insurance are woven directly into non-financial platforms; is gaining ground, with the market projected to exceed 13 billion dollars by the mid-2020s.

Ride-hailing apps offer loans to drivers, agritech platforms extend credit to farmers, and e-commerce sites provide buy-now-pay-later services to consumers who have never had a credit score.

Artificial intelligence and alternative data are also reshaping lending.

By analyzing mobile usage, transaction histories, and behavioral patterns, fintechs are extending credit to informal workers and micro-entrepreneurs long ignored by banks.

This data-driven approach is controversial - raising questions about privacy and consumer protection, but it is also expanding access to capital at an unprecedented scale.

Cross-border payments represent another crucial frontier.

Initiatives such as the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System aim to reduce reliance on external currencies and correspondent banks, cutting costs for intra-African trade and remittances.

If fully implemented, such systems could unlock new efficiencies for small businesses and exporters, aligning fintech growth with the African Continental Free Trade Area's broader ambitions.

Inclusion and regulation

Despite progress, access alone does not equal inclusion. Gender gaps, rural-urban divides, and income disparities persist.

Women in many African countries remain significantly less likely to own mobile money accounts or access credit. Internet coverage and smart-phone penetration, while improving, are still uneven.

These challenges cannot be solved by startups acting alone.

Regulatory harmonization remains a central test. While some countries embrace innovation, others impose restrictive rules that limit experimentation.

The absence of consistent consumer protection standards also risks undermining trust if digital finance expands faster than oversight.

This is where collaboration becomes not just beneficial but essential.

Regulators must balance innovation with stability, industry must share responsibility for consumer education, and development partners must help de-risk investments in underserved markets.

Kenya's experience shows that when this balance is struck, fintech can move from novelty to national infrastructure.

The same lesson applies across the continent. Markets that build inclusive ecosystems will attract investment, talent, and trust.

Those that do not risk seeing innovation stall or migrate elsewhere.

Africa's fintech revolution is often described in superlatives, fastest growing, most innovative, most disruptive.

Yet its ultimate success will be measured less by unicorn counts than by everyday outcomes; whether small traders can access affordable credit, whether families can save securely, whether cross-border trade becomes cheaper and faster, and whether digital finance narrows rather than deepens inequality.

The next decade will determine whether fintech becomes a durable pillar of Africa's development or remains a series of isolated success stories.

The evidence is increasingly clear. Collaboration is no longer optional. It is the infrastructure on which Africa's digital financial future will be built. ■

The True Metals factory is one of several lead recyclers to be shut down by Nigerian officials.

Nigeria close factories linked to U.S. auto industry amid lead poisoning inquiry

By Will FITZGIBBON and Peter GOODMAN

THE Nigerian government has begun cataloging the health and environmental damage caused by factories that shipped recycled lead to the United States for use in car batteries.

Recently, a team of scientists visited the industrial town of Ogijo, Nigeria, outside Lagos, to test the soil and air for lead.

Officials have shut down recycling factories in the area and are making plans to conduct blood tests on about 500 people who live nearby.

Public health experts in Nigeria described the response as one of the most aggressive campaigns to alleviate lead poisoning in the country's history.

The government action followed the publication of an investigation by The Examination and The New York Times, which revealed a public health catastrophe linked to batteries made for the world's largest automakers.

Lead is an essential element in car batteries, and most of it comes from recycling old batteries. The auto industry has portrayed this as an infinitely sustainable, green process. But as the United States tightened regulations to protect Americans from lead poisoning, companies began looking for new suppliers abroad.

That led them to towns like Ogijo, which has become the heartland of lead recycling in Africa.

Blood tests commissioned by The Times and The Examination found that about 70% of volunteers had lead poisoning. Half the children had lead in their bodies at levels associated with permanent brain damage.

While the extent of the pollution and the ecological damage remain unknown, local officials are already talking in broad terms about compensating people who live nearby. Some families say that they've been encouraged to move but cannot afford to do so.

"There must be consequences for action or inactions," said Ola Oresanya, the regional environmental commissioner, who is leading the local response.

The auto industry has known for decades that international lead recycling factories were spewing toxic smoke into the air.

A major battery manufacturer blocked an effort to address the problem, while car companies repeatedly declined to sign onto inspection and certification programs.

The shutdown of Ogijo's recycling plants could prove so costly for those companies that they finally invest in cleaner technology and better working conditions, said Andreas Manhart, a senior researcher at the Oeko-Institut, a research institution in Germany that promotes safe recycling practices.

"The pressure will increase standards over time," Manhart said. "The Nigerian market is just too attractive to abandon."

Representatives of two factories in Ogijo have denied any wrongdoing; the others have not responded to requests for comment.

In announcing the shutdown of the plants, the Nigerian authorities cited a widely shared New York Times video that profiled an 11-year-old boy named Freeman Ominyi, who had more than five times as much lead in his blood as the World Health Organization's threshold for lead poisoning.

His father said Freeman suffers from headaches, stomach aches and body pains, which are common symptoms of lead poisoning.

The Nigerian Senate voted to request that the country's emergency management agency help pay for people near the factories to move away. Lawmakers proposed creating a task force to trace lead exports and coordinate the cleanup and medical responses.

"Children are dying slowly," said Sen. Mukhail Adetokunbo Abiru. "Families have lived for years under poisonous smoke and dust."

In response to the Times and The Examination's findings, East Penn Manufacturing, one of the world's largest battery makers, said it stopped buying lead from Nigeria.

But experts say that without industry standards or regulations, metal buyers will continue to pivot from one unsafe recycler to the next.

One solution is for the auto industry to support an independent certification program for lead suppliers, said Mikey Jarrell, a researcher at the University of California, San Diego who studies the recycling industry.

"Make the definitive list; 'Here are the good ones,'" Jarrell said. "And if you are not on the list, you are bad, you're poisoning children, and nobody should buy from you."

The auto industry has resisted programs like that for decades. Most carmakers declined to comment on the findings, the cleanup in Nigeria or their views on a certification program.

Most carmakers said they rely on their suppliers to abide by the law and sustainable sourcing policies, though lead isn't generally among the metals and minerals that get special attention.

Ford is "in touch with all suppliers who use lead to ensure compliance" with its social and environmental standards, according to a statement from a spokesperson, Ursula Muller.

The Nigerian government has made — and broken — promises before to clean up the battery recycling industry. Still, some residents of Ogijo said the government's response left them optimistic.

> **"It gives me hope that real change is possible," said David Owulo, who worked at True Metals, one of the largest of the shuttered plants.**

Residents watched as scientists in reflective jackets used augers to extract soil samples.

"It gives me hope that real change is possible," said David Owulo, who worked at True Metals, one of the largest of the shuttered plants. "The fact that they keep coming back tells me that something will change."

Modinat Balogun, who lives near True Metals, said she hoped that the authorities will follow through. "We hope the government will match their words with action."

Others said that, after being profiled in the article, they have been shunned by their neighbours, who blame them for closing one of the few steady sources of income in the community.

Nigeria produces so much lead that the industry cannot easily shift production to other countries, Manhart said. But records show that new suppliers of recycled lead are entering the supply chain. ■

This story was published by The Examination which is an independent nonprofit newsroom that investigates preventable health threats and empowers people in harm's way

Taking water samples at True Metals. All Photos: Victor Adewale / The New York Times

President of Mali, Colonel Assimi Goïta

Mali, Burkina Faso bar U.S. citizens in retaliation

By The AfriFiles REPORTER

IN a significant diplomatic response, Mali and Burkina Faso have announced plans to prohibit United States citizens from entering their countries.

This decision follows the President Donald Trump administration's recent expansion of its travel ban, which placed full entry restrictions on these two West African nations among others.

The reciprocal measures by both countries signal a growing strain in relations between these African states and the United States.

In separate official statements, both governments clarified their intentions. Burkina Faso's Foreign Affairs Minister, Karamoko Traoré, stated that the country was acting based on the "principle of reciprocity."

This principle, which involves mutual recognition of each country's actions, aimed to underscore the importance of equitable treatment in international relations.

Mali's foreign ministry echoed this sentiment, expressing regret over the U.S. decision and calling for "mutual respect and sovereign equality."

They highlighted that such a significant policy shift was made by the U.S. without prior consultation with their government, a point that reflects a desire for dialogue and respect in diplomatic engagements.

The decision by Mali and Burkina Faso comes shortly after reports from Niger's state news agency indicated that Niger also imposed a similar travel ban on U.S. citizens.

However, as of the current moment, there has been no official statement or confirmation from Niger's foreign ministry regarding this travel restriction, leaving some ambiguity around the regional response to the U.S. travel ban.

These three countries; Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, are currently ruled by military juntas following recent coups.

The changing political dynamics have led them to form a regional bloc, increasingly pivoting toward Russia.

This realignment has emerged as relations with Western powers and neighbouring West African nations have become increasingly strained in recent years, particularly due to security issues and differing perspectives on governance and internal security.

Recently, the White House announced that full entry restrictions would go into effect on January 1, 2026 for nationals from Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, as well as South Sudan, Syria, and holders of Palestinian Authority passports.

The administration justified this significant move as a means to "protect the security" of the United States, highlighting ongoing concerns regarding national security and immigration controls.

Moreover, partial restrictions were imposed on an additional 15 countries, including Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

The White House has communicated that these restrictions will remain effective until the affected countries demonstrate "credible improvements" in areas such as identity management, information-sharing, and cooperation with U.S. immigration authorities.

Notably, the policy includes several exceptions that soften the impact of the ban; lawful permanent residents, many existing visa holders, diplomats, and athletes traveling for major sporting events are not affected by these new travel restrictions.

Furthermore, the administration stated that case-by-case waivers could be available for individuals whose travel is deemed to be in the national interest.

The recent move by Mali and Burkina Faso to impose travel restrictions on U.S. nationals reflects a broader trend of deteriorating relationships between African nations and Western powers, driven in part by ongoing security challenges and shifting geopolitical alignments.

The ripple effects of these diplomatic actions could extend beyond mere travel restrictions, potentially influencing economic and political relations within the region and with the U.S. for the foreseeable future.

As Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger navigate their futures amid increasing tensions with Western powers, the reciprocity in travel restrictions showcases the complexities of international relations in the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

The decisions made in this context could garner further scrutiny, inviting additional diplomatic fallout that may reshape the strategic landscape between Africa and the United States, posing questions about the future of cooperation and partnership on critical issues such as security, trade, and investments. ■

"For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."
The first President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela

Evaluating the Obama complex legacy in Africa

By Piersel CHURCHIL

WHEN Barack Obama told Ghana's parliament in 2009 that "Africa doesn't need strongmen; it needs strong institutions," the line shot around the continent.

One could hear it on radios in Lagos taxis, see it in Nairobi newspaper headlines, and feel it in countless living-room debates.

This time, the message wasn't coming from some distant, stiff-collared diplomat. It was from a man whose father grew up in a tiny Kenyan village, a man who had publicly wrestled with what it meant to be both African and American.

Obama's rise put places like Nyang'oma Kogelo on the map. People named their children after him and painted his face on their walls.

For many Africans, he felt less like a foreign leader and more like a long-lost cousin who'd finally made it. But good feelings can cloud the picture.

Now, years after he's left office, a tougher question needs asking; beyond the symbolism, was Barack Obama actually good for Africa? And how does his record compare to the presidents who came before him?

The best way to figure that out is to look at four key areas; health, security, democracy, and the economy.

The health revolution he didn't start - but saved

When Obama took office, a quiet revolution in African public health was already in full swing, thanks to George W. Bush.

Bush had launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Pepfar) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI).

These weren't small-time programs; they were flooding clinics with life-saving drugs, bed nets, and training on an unprecedented scale.

Then the 2008 financial crisis hit, and it would have been easy for Washington to pull back on that generosity. Instead, Obama doubled down.

President Barack Obama (right) and First Lady Michelle Obama pose for a photo during a reception at the Metropolitan Museum in New York with Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania. This was September 23, 2009. Photo: WH

In his first year, he signed a bill that authorized nearly $50 billion for the fight against HIV/AIDS, TB, and malaria.

Under his leadership, Pepfar evolved from an emergency fix into a sustainable part of countries' own health systems, all without losing its massive impact.

The numbers tell the story. By 2016, PEPFAR was providing antiretroviral drugs to about 11.5 million people, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. That year alone, its programs conducted over 74 million HIV tests.

Millions of pregnant women got access to services that stopped them from passing the virus to their babies, causing pediatric infections to plummet in countries like Kenya and Zambia.

It was a similar story with malaria. Obama kept PMI going and expanded it. Between 2000 and 2015, malaria death rates in Africa fell by an astonishing 62 percent.

The U.S. can't take all the credit, but American-funded bed nets and treatments were a huge part of that victory. These aren't just statistics. They are parents who got to see their children grow up. They are clinics that no longer had to turn away the dying.

Obama didn't create these programs, but at a moment when they could have been gutted, he chose to protect and expand a legacy that was changing the face of the continent.

Security balancing act

If health was a clear win, Obama's security record in Africa is a lot murkier. His administration expanded a model where African troops did the fighting on the front lines, with the U.S. providing the money, training, and intelligence.

Look at Somalia. When Obama came into office, the extremist group Al-Shabaab controlled much of the country. Washington poured support into a regional African Union force that, over time, managed to push the militants out of major cities and give the Somali government a foothold.

But Obama also normalized a very different tool; the drone strike. Airstrikes against Al-Shabaab leaders became common.

But for Somalis on the ground, this meant the U.S. was both a partner helping rebuild their country and a mysterious power that could deliver death from the sky, sometimes killing civilians with little explanation.

In West Africa, the rise of Boko Haram presented a similar challenge. As the group terrorized northeastern Nigeria, the U.S. offered intelligence and support.

But American laws, like the Leahy Law, blocked aid to foreign military units accused of human rights abuses.

For Nigerian commanders in the thick of a brutal war, it felt like their ally was demanding they fight by pristine rules while their country burned.

And then there's Libya - the shadow that hangs over Obama's entire Africa policy. In 2011, he joined a NATO air campaign to protect civilians from Muammar Gaddafi. Soon, Gaddafi was dead, but the country fell apart.

What seemed like a clean intervention spiralled into chaos as militias carved up the nation and Gaddafi's vast weapon stockpiles flowed south, fuelling conflicts in Mali and across the Sahel that are still raging today.

Obama has called the failure to plan for the aftermath in Libya the biggest mistake of his presidency.

For many Africans, that's a distinction without a difference. They saw a president who, for all his talk of partnership, signed off on an air war that left them to deal with the deadly consequences.

For many Africans, that's a distinction without a difference. They saw a president who, for all his talk of partnership, signed off on an air war that left them to deal with the deadly consequences.

Strong institutions, not strongmen

Throughout his presidency, Obama's big message was about good governance. He'd lecture leaders who tried to change constitutions to stay in power, joking that he'd probably win a third term himself, but that respecting the rules was more important.

This wasn't just talk. His signature program, the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), was a bet on the continent's future.

Instead of focusing only on today's presidents, YALI identified Africa's brightest young entrepreneurs, activists, and civil servants and brought them to the U.S. for leadership training.

The idea was to build a network of future leaders who could transform their own countries from the ground up. But for all the inspiring speeches and fellowships, democracy had a rough time in Africa during the Obama years.

Rulers in Burundi and the Congo clung to power, and crackdowns on journalists and activists became more common. Washington's influence, it turned out, had its limits.

What Obama did was shift the focus. More than any president before him, he made it clear that America's real partners weren't the strongmen, but the citizens and the institutions they were trying to build.

From handouts to handshakes

On the economy, Obama's main legacy was changing the conversation from aid to investment.

He didn't create the African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa), a trade deal that lets African countries sell goods to the U.S. duty-free.

But he did sign a 10-year extension, giving African businesses the long-term certainty they needed to grow.

His big idea was 'Power Africa.' Launched in 2013, its goal was to help double access to electricity across sub-Saharan Africa. Instead of just writing checks, the program acted as a matchmaker, using U.S. loan guarantees and technical help to get private energy projects off the ground.

Progress was slower than promised, but for millions of people tired of constant blackouts, even small gains in reliable power made a huge difference.

In 2014, he hosted the first-ever U.S.–Africa Leaders Summit in Washington. For three days, the talk wasn't about charity, but about business deals and entrepreneurship.

It was a powerful signal that an American president was finally ready to treat Africa as a serious economic partner, not just a problem to be solved.

So, was Obama the best?

If you measure a president by the sheer number of lives saved, George W. Bush, who created Pepfar, probably still holds the title.

Obama's great achievement in health was to protect and build upon that foundation.

But when it comes to investing in Africa's next generation and shifting the U.S. relationship toward one of genuine economic partnership, Obama's claim is much stronger.

His security record is a mixed bag, with the disaster in Libya weighing heavily against successes elsewhere.

In the end, though, judging Obama on policy alone misses the point. It doesn't capture the psychological boost his presidency gave to millions.

Here was a man with the middle name Hussein, whose father's family lived on a patch of red Kenyan dirt, who could joke about his cousins in Nairobi and have everyone know he wasn't really kidding.

He changed what it meant to be of African heritage on the world stage. Obama's legacy in Africa isn't a simple story of triumph or failure.

It's a complicated mix of lives he helped save, a war he came to regret, and a new generation of leaders he sought to inspire.

Whether he goes down as the "best" U.S. president for Africa might depend less on what he did, and more on what that generation he bet on does next. ■

Obama with his family – on father's side in Kenya.

The curse of Africa hidden billions

By Julius HOLISE

AFRICA is a geological powerhouse, harbouring 40% of the world's gold reserves, up to 90% of its chromium and platinum, a third of global mineral resources, and 60% of the planet's uncultivated arable land—enough to potentially feed nine billion people by 2050, according to a 2022 UN Food and Agriculture Organization report.

Yet, this bounty coexists with staggering poverty; 40% of Sub-Saharan Africans live on less than $2.15 a day, and the region accounts for 30% of the world's extreme poor, as per World Bank data from 2023.

This glaring contradiction forms the core of the "trillion-dollar trap," where Africa's natural wealth fuels global economies—from smartphones in Silicon Valley to electric vehicles in Beijing—while leaving its 1.4 billion inhabitants mired in underdevelopment.

The disparity is not accidental; it's a legacy of colonial exploitation, rigged trade systems, and internal governance failures. From the cobalt mines of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where child labour persists despite the mineral's role in tech giants' supply chains, to the cocoa fields of Ghana, where farmers earn pennies on the dollar, the question persists; why does a continent so rich remain so poor?

This feature dissects the mechanics of this curse, backed by verifiable data, and explores pathways to break free.

Colonial roots of dependency

The foundations of Africa's economic predicament were laid during the colonial era, when European powers—Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal—treated the continent as a resource colony rather than a set of viable nations.

By the late 19th century, these empires had carved up Africa in the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, prioritizing extraction over development. Railways, built at great human cost, were designed to ferry minerals directly to ports for export, not to connect communities or spur internal trade.

For instance, in the Belgian Congo (now Democratic Republic of Congo - DRC), the railway network, constructed with forced labour that resulted in over 10 million deaths by some estimates from historians like Adam Hochschild, linked mining hubs to coastal export points, bypassing potential industrial hubs.

Today, 80% of Africa's rail infrastructure still serves export purposes, as reported by the African Development Bank in 2021, perpetuating this "evacuation economy."

Independence in the 1960s brought political sovereignty but left economic structures intact, integrating African nations into the global market as raw material suppliers.

UNCTAD data from 2022 reveals that raw commodities constitute 75% of Africa's merchandise exports, with countries like Zambia and Nigeria relying on copper and oil for over 80% of their foreign earnings.

This dependency has profound consequences: the DRC, holding 70% of the world's cobalt and 30% of its diamonds, exported $12 billion in raw minerals in 2022 but retained only 10% of that value due to unprocessed exports, according to World Bank trade analyses.

Meanwhile, global demand for these resources—driven by the electric vehicle boom, which saw lithium-ion battery demand rise 500% from 2010 to 2023 per International Energy Agency figures—enriches foreign corporations while African economies stagnate.

Corruption exacerbates this, with Transparency International's 2023 report noting that opaque mining contracts in Africa lead to annual losses of $30 billion. This colonial hangover not only limits economic diversification but also fuels social unrest, as seen in the 2021-22 protests in Nigeria over fuel subsidies tied to oil dependency.

In essence, Africa's role as a "global warehouse" has evolved little since the 20th century, trapping it in a cycle of low-value trade and missed opportunities for self-sustained growth.

The processing gap

At the heart of Africa's underdevelopment is the chasm between raw extraction and value-added processing, where the real profits are made.

While Africa supplies the raw materials that underpin modern industries, it captures only a fraction of the downstream value.

Take cocoa as a prime example: Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana produce 60% of the world's supply, yet they earn less than 6% of the $100 billion global chocolate market, as per the International Cocoa Organization's 2023 report.

Farmers in these countries toil in hazardous conditions, often earning below $1.50 per day, while multinational firms like Mars and Hershey handle roasting, packaging, and branding in Europe and North America, pocketing margins of 30-50%.

This pattern repeats across minerals: Africa's coltan and lithium, vital for electronics and renewable energy, are exported raw to China, which processes 80% of the world's rare earth elements, as noted in a 2022 UNCTAD study.

The economic toll is immense. A 2023 UN report estimates that if African nations processed just 20% more of their minerals domestically, they could create 1.5 million jobs and add $25 billion to regional GDP annually.

Yet, barriers like inadequate infrastructure—Sub-Saharan Africa has only 25% of the electricity access needed for industrial-scale processing, per World Bank 2021 data—and foreign investment biases hinder progress. In South Africa, for instance, the processing of platinum generates $10 billion in exports, but 70% of the value is lost to imports of refined products from Europe.

This "value-added void" not only exports jobs but also reinforces inequality: a 2024 Oxfam report highlights that African countries import manufactured goods at a 20-30% premium, draining $50 billion in foreign exchange annually.

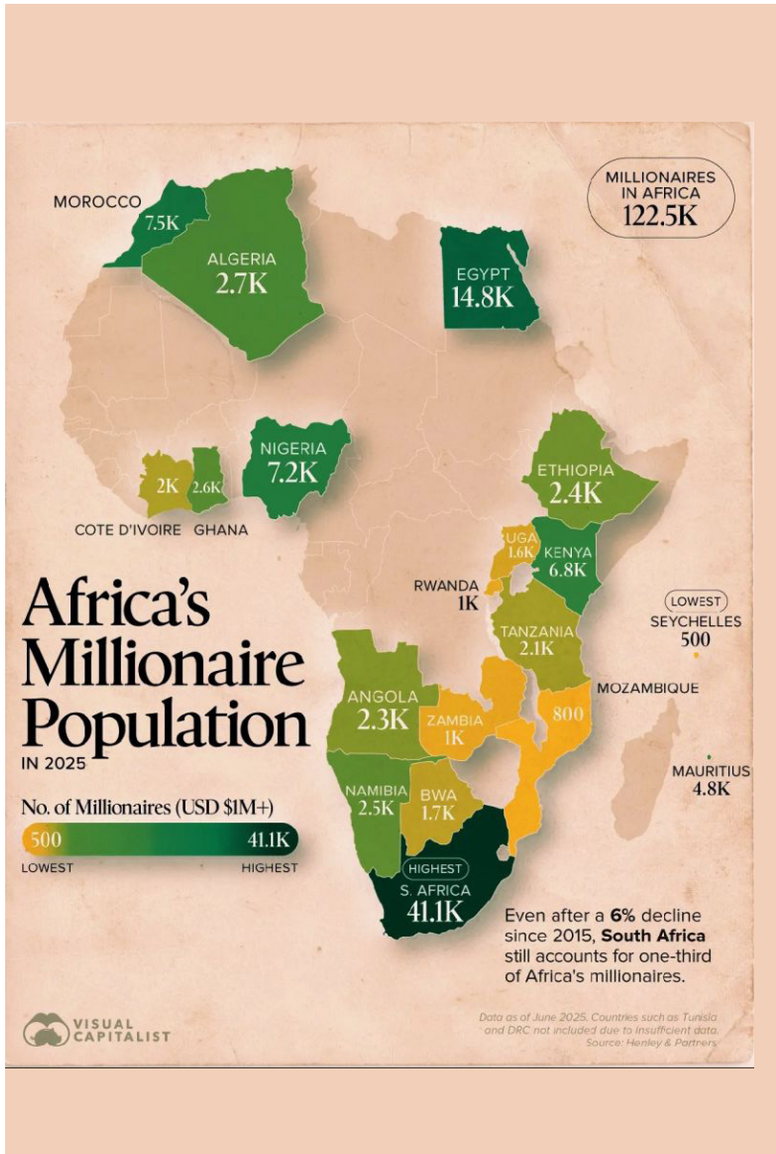
Historically, this gap traces back to colonial policies that forbade local industries, and today, it manifests in trade agreements like the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements, which critics argue favour European processors.

Bridging this gap requires not just investment but policy shifts, such as Ghana's 2023 ban on raw gold exports, which aims to retain 15% more value through local refining. Without such measures, Africa risks remaining a perpetual supplier in the global economy, its resources enriching others while its people lag behind.

Illicit wealth drains

Perhaps the most insidious aspect of the trillion-dollar trap is the unchecked flow of illicit funds that siphon wealth from Africa faster than aid can flow in.

Far from being aid-dependent, Africa is a net creditor to the world, losing $88.6 billion annually to illicit financial flows (IFFs), compared to the $48 billion in development assistance it receives, as per UNCTAD's 2023 figures.



These outflows, often orchestrated by multinational corporations, involve tactics like trade mis-invoicing, where exports are undervalued to evade taxes—and transfer pricing, funnelling profits to tax havens like the Cayman Islands or Switzerland.

A 2021 African Union study revealed that Nigeria alone loses $10 billion yearly to such practices, with oil companies like Shell reporting intra-company transfers that shift $5 billion in profits offshore annually.

The mechanisms are diverse and damaging. In Zambia, copper exports worth $8 billion in 2022 were mis-invoiced by 20-30%, according to Global Financial Integrity's analysis, depriving the government of funds for public services.

Opaque contracts exacerbate this: in the DRC, mining deals with Chinese firms have led to $1.5 billion in lost royalties since 2015, as documented in a 2022 Resource Governance Index report.

These losses perpetuate a vicious cycle, with IFFs accounting for 65% of capital flight from Africa, per UNODC data, equivalent to the continent's entire health budget.

The human cost is profound—schools go unbuilt, roads unpaved, and healthcare systems collapse, as seen in Sierra Leone, where IFFs from diamond trades contributed to the 2014 Ebola crisis by weakening infrastructure.

Corruption plays a pivotal role, with the World Bank's 2023 governance indicators showing that resource-rich states score 20 points lower on transparency metrics.

However, success hinges on domestic reforms: strengthening anti-corruption bodies, as Nigeria has done with its 2022 whistleblower policy, and investing in education—Sub-Saharan Africa needs 15 million more teachers by 2030, per UNESCO data, to build a skilled workforce.

Initiatives like the African Union's High-Level Panel on IFFs, launched in 2019, aim to recover $100 billion by 2030 through better regulations, but enforcement remains weak.

This drain not only starves economies but also erodes trust, fuelling conflicts like the ongoing instability in the Sahel, where resource smuggling finances insurgencies.

Emerging pathways

Despite the entrenched challenges, a wave of optimism is sweeping Africa, driven by youthful innovation, policy reforms, and international partnerships.

Nations are increasingly demanding "beneficiation," or local processing, to capture more value from their resources.

Botswana exemplifies success: by negotiating with De Beers in 2008, it relocated diamond sorting to Gaborone, creating 10,000 jobs and retaining 40% of export value, as per a 2023 Ministry of Minerals report.

Similarly, Ghana's 2023 gold export ban has spurred a $500 million refining facility, projected to add 5,000 jobs and $2 billion to GDP by 2025, according to government estimates.

On a continental scale, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), effective since 2021, promises to transform trade dynamics by eliminating tariffs on 90% of goods among 54 countries.

The World Bank projects this could boost Africa's income by $450 billion by 2035, lifting 30 million from extreme poverty and fostering regional industries, such as manufacturing vehicle parts in Kenya for assembly in South Africa.

These efforts are bolstered by global initiatives, like the EU's 2024 Sustainable Raw Materials Act, which encourages fair trade, and the UN's 2030 Agenda, targeting $100 billion in climate finance for African renewables.

However, success hinges on domestic reforms: strengthening anti-corruption bodies, as Nigeria has done with its 2022 whistleblower policy, and investing in education—Sub-Saharan Africa needs 15 million more teachers by 2030, per UNESCO data, to build a skilled workforce.

Activists like those in the #EndImpunity movement are pressuring leaders for transparency, while tech hubs in Rwanda and Kenya demonstrate how digital innovation can diversify economies.

Africa's poverty is a man-made design, as Nelson Mandela declared, but with unflinching political will, the trap can be dismantled.

The world stands at a crossroads: continue exploitation or foster equitable partnerships. Unlocking Africa's potential isn't just about charity—it's about redefining global prosperity for the 21st century. ■

The writer is an economist based in Accra, Ghana.
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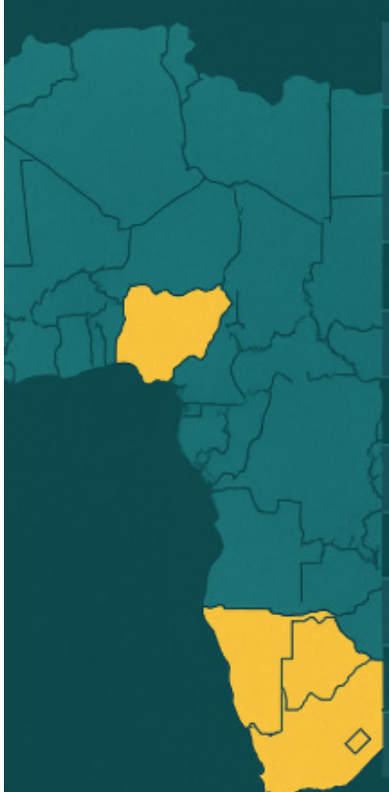
TOP 10 RICHEST COUNTRIES IN AFRICA



Rank	Country	Nominal GDP (USD)	Key Economic Drivers
1	Nigeria	$510 billion	Oil, tech, agriculture, services
2	South Africa	$398 billion	Tourism, agriculture, construction
3	Egypt	$387 billion	Tourism, agriculture, construction
4	Algeria	$240 billion	Oil, gas, public investment
5	Ethiopia	$153 billion	Agriculture, textiles, energy
6	Kenya	$153 billion	Tourism, agriculture, automotive
7	Morocco	$147 billion	Gold, cocoa, energy
8	Ghana	$167 billion	Oil, diamond mining
9	Angola	$87 billion	Agriculture, mining
10	Tanzania	$85 billion	Agriculture, mining, tourism

General Doumbouya wins, new era begins

By Our Political EDITOR

THE recent election in Guinea, resulting in the victory of General Mamady Doumbouya, marks a significant turning point in the country's political landscape.

Having secured a majority of the votes, Doumbouya's ascension to the presidency is the culmination of a tumultuous four-year period characterized by military rule following a coup in 2021.

This analysis examines the implications of his election in terms of political legitimacy, public sentiment, and potential future challenges for Guinea.

General Doumbouya, previously the leader of the junta that seized power, faces a dual challenge; to maintain the support of the military while simultaneously gaining the trust of the Guinean people and the international community.

His hope to legitimize his rule through democratic processes is a critical step, as the transition from coup leadership to elected president may provide him the opportunity to consolidate power.

However, this shift raises doubts regarding the authenticity of the electoral process and whether it truly reflects the will of the Guinean population.

Throughout Guinea's history, the shadows of authoritarianism and military influence have loomed large. The political landscape has been marred by instability, and this recent election was no exception.

Public sentiment has been polarized. Supporters of Doumbouya see him as a stabilizing force capable of steering the country away from the previous government's failures, which were riddled with allegations of corruption and ineffective governance.

In contrast, critics argue that his election undermines democratic ideals, as it follows a period of military rule that curtailed civil liberties and suppressed dissent.

International observers and the Guinean populace will closely monitor the transparency of the electoral process.

While Doumbouya's election may provide a veneer of legitimacy, there are concerns about the extent to which dissenting voices were silenced during the lead-up to the election.

Reports of intimidation, harassment of opposition candidates, and restricted media coverage have raised alarms regarding the fairness of the electoral environment.

The credibility of Doumbouya's administration hinges on addressing these concerns and demonstrating a genuine commitment to democratic processes.

For Doumbouya, the immediate challenge will be to form a cabinet that includes a diversity of political representation.

Failing to do so risks alienating significant segments of the electorate and perpetuating the divide between military and civilian leadership.

His cabinet choices will signal to both his supporters and detractors whether he is willing to embrace a truly democratic governance style or whether he intends to govern primarily through military influence.

Additionally, Doumbouya must contend with pressing socio-economic challenges that Guinea faces today. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing difficulties, leading to increased unemployment and poverty rates.

Guinea's President General Mamady Doumbouya

Implementing effective economic reforms, addressing public health issues, and fostering development will be critical for his administration to maintain popular support.

His ability to deliver tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary Guineans may be the litmus test for his success in this new role.

Furthermore, Doumbouya must navigate the complexities of regional geopolitics. Guinea's position in West Africa places it among nations facing similar struggles with governance and stability.

Strengthening ties with neighbouring countries, while ensuring that Guinea remains sovereign and avoids external influences that could destabilize the government, will be a balancing act.

General Mamady Doumbouya's election as president of Guinea embodies a delicate interplay of military might and democratic aspirations.

While his victory may signal a new era for Guinea, the legitimacy of his rule will depend on his administration's actions in the coming months. To gain the trust of a skeptical populace, Doumbouya must prioritize transparency, inclusivity in governance, and effective economic management.

Ultimately, the success of his presidency will be judged by his ability to unify a fragmented nation and deliver on the promise of a prosperous and stable Guinea.

Pills, power inside America's new Africa playbook

There is a tension here. On one hand, stronger domestic investment in health could shield Mozambique from future aid shocks and build a more sustainable system.

By Julius AFONSO

ON December 16, 2025 Washington quietly redrew the map of its engagement with Mozambique.

A pledge of $360 million a year for five years in health funding did more than reverse an earlier chill in relations; it signalled how tightly public health, energy, security and strategic minerals have become bound together in US foreign policy.

Only months before, the mood had been starkly different. US aid had been suspended and Usaid's office in Mozambique briefly shut its doors, feeding fears that the President Donald Trump administration's "America First global health strategy" meant a sharp retreat.

The new package does not fully restore every cancelled project, but its scale points to a calculation in Washington; keeping Mozambique close serves American interests.

Officially, the health funding is justified as a way to stop disease before it reaches American borders or threatens US personnel and investments abroad. Yet the pattern of funding cuts, pauses and reinstatements suggests a broader logic.

As money returns, it does so in tandem with other decisions that reveal the hierarchy of US concerns.

Government-backed financing for TotalEnergies' massive gas project in Cabo Delgado has been restored.

So too have Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grants, but only after they were reshaped to prioritise Cabo Delgado and the Nacala goods corridor.

Development language remains in place, yet the geography of that "development" now closely tracks the sites of major energy and logistics assets.

Cabo Delgado is central to this story. Offshore, it anchors multibillion-dollar gas projects, including one led by US oil giant ExxonMobil.

Onshore, it holds sizeable graphite deposits mined by Syrah Resources, whose production feeds US-based manufacturing of anodes for electric vehicle batteries. The graphite moves out through the ports of Pemba and Nacala, then into global supply chains that Washington increasingly views as strategic territory.

US diplomats have been unusually explicit about this. Abigail Dressel, head of the US mission in Mozambique, has described graphite as a strategic resource, an assessment sharpened by China's dominance in graphite production and its recent export restrictions.

For Washington, diversifying away from Chinese supply is no longer just an economic preference but a security imperative. Mozambique, by virtue of its gas and minerals, has become a useful counterweight.

That usefulness helps explain why Mozambique has fared better than many African peers under the Trump administration. But the renewed generosity is far from unconditional.

A key requirement of the health package is that Maputo increase its own health spending by 30% over five years. US officials frame this as an effort to combat "dependency culture" and to push African governments to shoulder more of the burden.

There is a tension here. On one hand, stronger domestic investment in health could shield Mozambique from future aid shocks and build a more sustainable system.

On the other, such rapid scaling in a tight fiscal environment may be unrealistic, forcing hard trade-offs with other priorities such as education, infrastructure or security in a conflict-affected north.

In that sense, the new US commitment is less a clean break from the past than a refined instrument of statecraft.

Health funds, energy backing and infrastructure grants now move together, guided by a single strategic compass.

Mozambique's apparent good fortune rests not only on humanitarian concern, but on its continued value as a supplier of gas and critical minerals, and on its ability to keep pace with Washington's demanding terms. ■

President Paul Kagame. Photo: Jakub Porzycki / AFP

Qatar agreement smart move to transformation

By Estheria KAGINE

RWANDA, often celebrated for its impressive economic recovery and transformation over the past two decades, has recently entered into a pivotal economic agreement with Qatar.

This partnership, which includes initiatives in tourism, agriculture, and infrastructure development, has the potential to significantly advance Rwanda's economic objectives.

By leveraging Qatar's financial resources and expertise, Rwanda aims to bolster its economy, create jobs, and stimulate sustainable growth.

One of the most promising aspects of the Rwanda-Qatar agreement revolves around tourism.

Rwanda has already made significant strides in positioning itself as a premier ecotourism destination, attracting approximately 1.6 million visitors in 2019, which contributed to a tourism revenue of around $498 million, according to the Rwanda Development Board.

By targeting Qatari investment in tourism infrastructure—such as luxury resorts, lodges, and related services—Rwanda stands to enhance its appeal, particularly to affluent travellers from the Gulf region.

The agreement is poised to improve marketing and promotional strategies tailored to attract tourists from Qatar and neighbouring countries, backed by investments that could elevate Rwanda's hospitality standards.

For instance, the construction of new luxury hotels and the enhancement of existing facilities would not only create employment opportunities but also increase the country's capacity to host international events.

Given that the global tourism market is expected to bounce back post-Covid-19, Rwanda's investments in tourism could yield returns that far exceed the initial capital outlay.

Rwanda's agricultural sector, which employs over 70% of the population, is another focal point of the agreement with Qatar.

The nation faces challenges related to food security and productivity; however, Qatari investment could provide the necessary impetus for modernization.

Qatar, which has been exploring sustainable agricultural practices to ensure food security domestically, can share valuable insights and resources.

The Rwandan government has prioritized agricultural development, aiming to increase crop production by 10% annually. Qatari investment can help achieve this goal by introducing advanced technology and techniques, such as drip irrigation and climate-smart agriculture, which can improve yield significantly.

With more efficient farming practices, Rwanda could not only ensure food security for its population but also increase its capacity to export agricultural products to new markets, contributing to its trade balance.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), agricultural production in Rwanda has grown by approximately 6% annually over the past decade, but with the help of Qatari expertise, this growth rate could be augmented, leading to better economic outcomes for rural communities and contributing to poverty reduction.

Infrastructure is critical to Rwanda's long-term growth strategy. The Rwandan government has identified transport and communication as key priorities, aiming to develop infrastructures that can support economic activities and enhance connectivity within the region.

Recent figures indicate that Rwanda's public investment in infrastructure has grown steadily, with spending expected to reach $1.7 billion by 2024.

Qatar's involvement can accelerate infrastructure projects such as road construction, transport networks, and telecommunication enhancements. By investing in modern transport links, Rwanda can improve trade logistics, reduce transportation costs, and facilitate quicker access to markets for both local producers and foreign investors.

Additionally, improved infrastructure directly contributes to enhanced economic performance. According to the African Development Bank, countries that invest between 5-7% of GDP in infrastructure can expect to boost economic growth by more than 1% annually. With Qatar's backing, Rwanda could tap into this potential, creating a ripple effect across various sectors.

The recent agreements between Rwanda and Qatar represent a significant milestone with wide-reaching implications for Rwanda's economy.

By focusing on critical sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and infrastructure, this partnership aims to transform Rwanda into a hub for investment and development in East Africa.

Moreover, as Rwanda seeks to diversify its economy and reduce dependence on agriculture alone, tapping into Qatar's wealth and expertise is crucial.

Noureddin Bongo Valentin

President's wife, son sentenced to 20 years for corruption

Sylvia Bongo Ondimba

By Kawesi PHILLIPE

ON December 15, 2025, the Gabonese judiciary took a significant step in addressing corruption within its political landscape by sentencing former President Ali Bongo's wife, Sylvia Bongo Ondimba, and their son, Noureddin Bongo Valentin, to a staggering 20 years in prison.

The court also ordered each to pay a fine of 100 million CFA francs (about $177,000). In addition, Noureddin Bongo must pay 1.2 trillion CFA francs (nearly $2.1 billion) in damages, while the two were jointly ordered to pay another 1 trillion CFA francs (more than $1.7 billion) for "moral harm" against the state.

The decision was delivered in absentia by a court in Libreville, the capital of Gabon, where both individuals were found guilty of embezzling public funds and exploiting the former president's severe health issues, which began after his stroke in October 2018.

The trial, often described as one of the most pivotal in Gabon's post-independence history, highlighted a notorious chapter in the country's governance.

After President Ali Bongo suffered a debilitating stroke in 2018, his ability to lead was severely compromised. With the president incapacitated, power dynamics shifted, and it became evident that several current and former officials were positioned to exploit the situation for personal gains.

In this precarious environment, the court found that Sylvia (62) and Noureddin Bongo (33) orchestrated a series of unlawful transactions, diverting significant sums of government funds into private accounts and businesses, benefitting unfairly from the administration's authority.

The decision by the court followed a lengthy investigation that began in early 2022 when evidence surfaced suggesting an extensive network of corruption linked to the former first family.

Multiple witnesses testified against the Bongo family, outlining schemes where public contracts were manipulated, and state resources were utilized to uphold lavish lifestyles for the Bongos while neglecting urgent public needs, particularly in health care and education sectors, which were suffering from underfunding.

The verdict, which sent shockwaves through the political elite of Gabon, was received with mixed reactions.

Supporters of the Bongo family, who have held power in Gabon for over 50 years, viewed the trial as a politically motivated ploy to further undermine their influence. In contrast, a significant portion of the public welcomed the ruling as a long-overdue step towards accountability in a country plagued by corruption and nepotism.

Public sentiment swelled in favour of the judiciary, which had acted independently in a region where the rule of law has often been overshadowed by political interests.

As the ruling was pronounced, political analysts began to speculate on the broader implications for Gabon's political landscape. With presidential elections set to occur in late 2026, the conviction could pave the way for a more transparent and equitable governmental framework.

Observers noted that public faith in the judiciary's integrity could spur civic engagement and encourage demands for reforms aimed at enhancing governmental accountability. Many Gabonese citizens have long endured the consequences of corruption, reflecting a critical need for system-wide reforms that ensure transparency and fairness in governance.

Following the ruling, calls for the return of the Bongo family increased, with some citizens rallying to demand the former president and his family's return to face justice in Gabon.

However, the likelihood of their return is slim, especially as Sylvia Bongo has reportedly sought refuge in France, and Noureddin Bongo Valentin has remained elusive, with allegations of having travelled to other countries to evade the law.

These developments created an air of uncertainty regarding the potential future of governance in Gabon and the possibility of holding all corrupt officials accountable.

Internationally, the rulings capture global attention and underscore the necessity for political accountability, especially in Africa, where entrenched autocracies have often sustained power through corruption.

The case of the Bongo family serves as a critical case study in emerging efforts to combat corruption, showcasing a judiciary that is starting to act decisively.

US greenlights $550m to supercharge Lobito Rail

By The AfriFiles REPORTER

IN a strategic move to deepen its economic footprint in Africa, the United States has approved a $550 million loan to Angola for the refurbishment of the Lobito railway line.

This initiative, which was announced in late 2023, forms a cornerstone of Washington's broader efforts to counterbalance China's influence on the continent while tapping into Africa's critical mineral resources.

The Lobito Corridor, stretching from Angola's Atlantic port of Lobito through the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and into Zambia, is poised to become a vital artery for exporting copper, cobalt, and other minerals essential for the global green energy transition.

The loan, provided by the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), will fund upgrades to the 1,300-kilometer railway, including track rehabilitation, signalling improvements, and enhanced logistics infrastructure.

According to the DFC, the project is expected to reduce transportation costs by up to 40% and cut transit times from weeks to days, facilitating the export of minerals from the DRC and Zambia, two of the world's top producers of cobalt and copper.

These resources are crucial for electric vehicle batteries and renewable energy technologies, with global demand projected to surge by 500% by 2050, per the International Energy Agency (IEA).

This investment aligns with the US's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), launched by President Joe Biden in 2022 as a G7 initiative to mobilize $600 billion for sustainable infrastructure in developing nations.

It directly challenges China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has invested over $150 billion in African projects since 2013, including Angola's own oil-for-infrastructure deals.

Analysts view the Lobito project as a "game-changer" in the US-China rivalry for Africa's resources.

"This is not just about building a railway; it's about securing supply chains for the future economy," said Witney Schneidman, a senior advisor at Covington & Burling and former US deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs, in a 2023 Brookings Institution report.

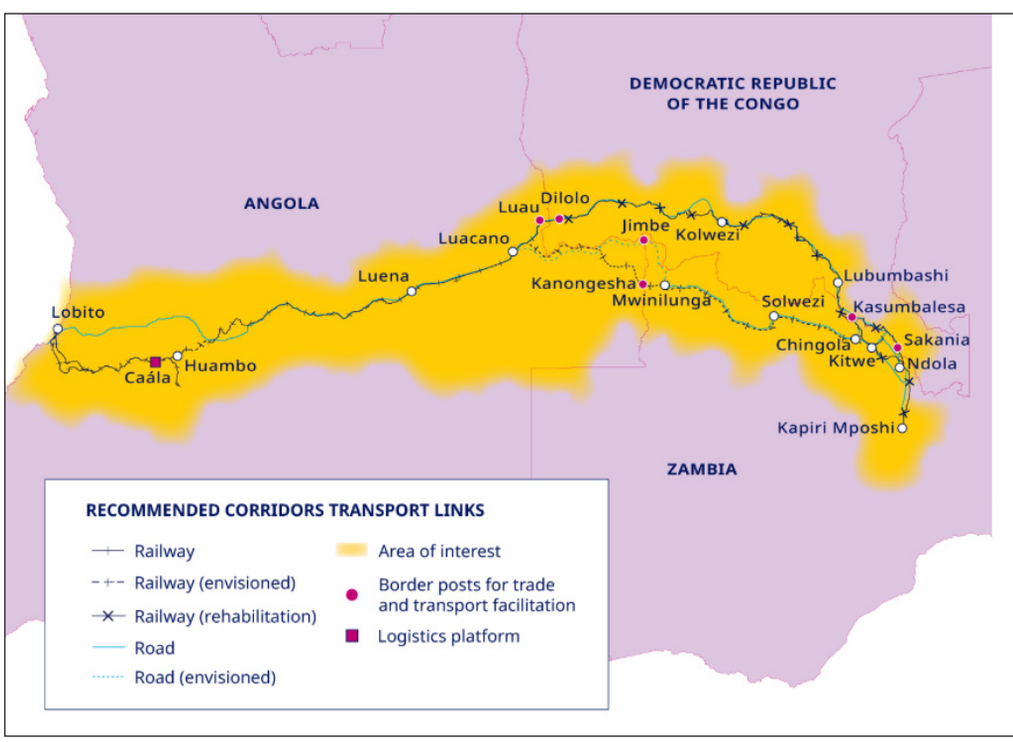
Angolan officials have welcomed the partnership, emphasizing its potential to boost regional integration and economic diversification beyond oil dependency.

Angola's Transport Minister Ricardo de Abreu stated in a November 2023 press conference; "The Lobito Corridor will transform Angola into a logistics hub, creating jobs and fostering sustainable development across southern Africa."

Verifiable data from the World Bank supports this optimism, estimating that the corridor could generate up to $3 billion annually in economic benefits by 2030, including 10,000 direct jobs during construction.

However, challenges loom. Critics argue that US investments, while transparent and environmentally focused, often lag behind China's rapid, no-strings-attached financing.

Environmental concerns also persist, with potential impacts on local ecosystems in the Congo Basin. Moreover, geopolitical tensions could complicate implementation; the DRC's mineral-rich regions have faced instability, including armed conflicts over resource control.



Analytically, this loan signals a pivot in US Africa policy from aid to investment, aiming to foster mutual benefits rather than dependency.

As Biden remarked at the 2022 US-Africa Leaders Summit: "We're all in on Africa's future." Yet, success hinges on execution, ensuring the project delivers tangible results without exacerbating debt burdens, as seen in some BRI cases.

For Africa, the Lobito railway represents a test case: can Western-backed infrastructure compete with Eastern models in delivering prosperity?

In the broader context, this initiative underscores the intensifying scramble for Africa's minerals amid the energy transition.

With the EU and Japan also pledging support for the corridor, it could evolve into a multilateral counterweight to China's dominance. As global powers vie for influence, Angola's Lobito line may well redefine the continent's economic landscape.

Groundbreaking landmark for religious freedom

By The AfriFiles REPORTER

IN a landmark ruling on December 24, 2025, Tanzania's High Court took a bold step in reinforcing religious freedom by striking down the government's endorsement of a singular Muslim authority, the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (Bakwata), as the sole representative of all Muslims in the nation.

This pivotal decision not only declared the government's actions unconstitutional but also underscored the essential principles of equality and the right to self-organization among various Muslim communities.

A coalition of ten distinguished Muslim scholars and leaders, spearheaded by figures; Sheikh Prof Hamza Mustafa Njozi and Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda, fronted the legal challenge against the government.

They contended that the stipulation requiring all Muslim organizations to obtain a "reference letter" from Bakwata for registration was a violation of their constitutional rights, including equality before the law and the freedom to practice their religion and associate freely.

Challenging government overreach

The case predominantly revolved around the actions taken by the Registrar of Societies and the Administrator-General, who had effectively imposed Bakwata as the authoritative body that all Muslim organizations must adhere to or obtain clearance from in order to operate legally.

The court focused on Articles 13, 19, and 20 of Tanzania's 1977 Constitution, emphasizing that they protect fundamental rights of equality, religious freedom, and the right to association.

With a thorough examination, the judges uncovered the disturbing legacy of state interference in religious matters dating back to the late 1960s. Bakwata was created during a time when the government dissolved other Muslim organizations, significantly curtailing the diversity of representation among the Muslim community.

Unravelling historical context and authority

The High Court scrutinized the formation of Bakwata, revealing that it supplanted two pre-existing organizations that were forcibly disbanded by the government, raising critical questions about legitimacy and transparency.

Notably, the court expressed frustration over the government's inability to produce vital foundational documents regarding Bakwata's establishment, including its original Constitution.

This lack of documentation, including evidence of founding members and procedural legitimacy, prompted the court to question whether Bakwata truly represented all Tanzanian Muslims or merely served a particular sectarian interest.

Exclusionary measures in Bakwata's constitution

In evaluating Bakwata's organizational structure, the court discovered constitutional clauses that restricted leadership roles to a specific denomination within Islam, the Ahlu Sunna Waljamaa, thus excluding Shia Muslims and other Sunni interpretations.

The Chief Sheikh (Mufti) of Tanzania, Sheikh Abubakar Zubeir bin Ally

This discovery indicated that Bakwata's claim to represent a unified Islamic front was fundamentally flawed, as it systematically alienated significant portions of the Muslim population.

The court elaborated on the diversity present within the Muslim faith, affirming that true representation must include various sects and interpretations. By referencing scholarly perspectives on Islamic sects, the judges reinforced the idea that representation cannot be monopolized by a single group.

Judicial rulings and directives

Upon ruling, the High Court made several critical announcements. Firstly, the court categorically stated that Bakwata cannot claim to be the governing authority for all Muslims in Tanzania.

Secondly, it deemed the actions of the Registrar of Societies and the Administrator-General as unconstitutional, nullifying the practices that demanded Muslim organizations obtain approvals exclusively from Bakwata.

The court prescribed the regulatory bodies to cease practices that infringe upon the registration rights of Muslim entities, thereby fostering an environment of inclusivity and respect for individual rights within the Muslim community.

Sheikh Prof. Hamza Mustafa Njozi

Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda

A resounding call for religious freedom

In the aftermath of the ruling, Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda heralded the decision as a critical victory for freedom of expression and religious practice in Tanzania. He emphasized that this judgment liberates all Muslims from the constraints imposed by Bakwata's monopolistic grip, allowing for the establishment and governance of their organizations without unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles.

Plans were swiftly made for conferences aimed at adequately communicating the decision's implications to the broader Muslim populace, highlighting its significance as a transformative moment in Tanzanian history.

Transformative impacts on governance

The High Court's decision is anticipated to reshape the legal and social landscape surrounding the relationship between the state and religious entities in Tanzania.

It stands as a powerful affirmation of protection against undue state influence, advocating for a model of governance where all faiths coexist harmoniously.

This ruling sends a clear message regarding the necessity for impartiality in governmental relations with varying religious groups, supporting the establishment of a pluralistic society where diverse beliefs are not only acknowledged but embraced.

As the implications of this landmark ruling unfold, it is anticipated that Muslim organizations will take proactive steps to redefine their engagement with state authorities, paving the way for a future rooted in mutual respect and collaboration across different sects.

The High Court's decision in the Bakwata case signifies a monumental advancement toward fostering an inclusive society where all Muslims can freely practice their faith without governmental control or coercion.

By affirming the principles of equality and religious liberty, the ruling encourages a more pluralistic approach to governance, recognizing the rich diversity within the Muslim community in Tanzania.

This judgement not only addresses the historical injustices regarding representation but also serves as a template for future engagements between religious organizations and the state. It confirms that all faith traditions deserve respect and representation, regardless of their denominational affiliation.

Moreover, the court's conclusions signal a reawakening among Tanzanian Muslims, inspiring a renewed commitment to advocating for their rights and participation in societal affairs.

As the Muslim community rallies around this victory, it is positioned to explore new opportunities for unity and collaboration, embracing all sects and schools of thought in an effort to build a cohesive identity that respects and celebrates diversity.

In the long term, this ruling could inspire other marginalized religious groups to seek justice and recognition in Tanzania, potentially leading to a broader movement advocating for religious freedom across the country. The court's determination to uphold constitutional rights reinforces the importance of safeguarding democratic values and protecting individuals against governmental overreach.

As Tanzania navigates this new legal landscape, it sets forth an example for other nations grappling with similar issues of religious representation and freedom.

The Bakwata ruling will undoubtedly shape the future of religious interactions within the nation, fostering an environment where dialogue, cooperation, and respect for all beliefs can thrive.

In essence, the court's ruling is not merely a victory for the petitioners or the Muslim community; it represents a significant stride for human rights in Tanzania as a whole.

The ongoing dialogue sparked by this decision may pave the way for greater awareness and protection of religious freedoms, inspiring a generation committed to equality, inclusion, and justice for all in their religious and civil lives.

This moment, celebrated by many as a triumph of justice, promises to reverberate throughout the fabric of Tanzanian society, redefining the relationship between religion and the state for years to come.

Battle against starvation finds new strength

By Charity BANDA

THE dry landscape of Malawi, once vibrant with green maize fields, bears the scars of failed harvests, leaving nearly four million people facing food insecurity.

But now, a glimmer of hope emerges from the horizon — maize purchased from neighbouring Zambia is set to arrive by the first week of January, bringing promise of relief to a nation starved for sustenance.

As the sun rises over Malawi, the Transporters Association of Malawi (TAM) gears up for a critical mission. Local transporters have been contracted to convey 100,000 metric tonnes of maize, complemented by an additional 100,000 metric tonnes to be transported by their Zambian counterparts.

Frank Banda, the TAM spokesperson, speaks with a sense of urgency, reflecting the voices of many: "We are mobilizing trucks for this vital task. This is a collaborative effort, involving both members and non-members of our association, to ensure timely delivery."

In the bustling towns and remote villages, the news of the incoming maize has been met with relief. Grace Mijiga Mhango, President of the Grain Traders and Processors Association of Malawi, expresses the pressing need for this shipment.

"Any further delays could have worsened our maize shortage," she warns, emphasizing that the costs of basic food items would skyrocket, compounding the suffering of the already vulnerable population.

The maize procurement deal between Zambia and Malawi, valued at approximately K135 billion, illuminates the desperation and determination of a government striving to protect its citizens from the ravages of hunger.

Behind the scenes, efforts are underway to finalize paperwork and secure financing—initial delays caused by payment disputes threatened to upend the delicate balance of hope and despair.

As winter settles over the region, the shipping of maize is more than just a logistical endeavour; it's a lifeline.

This initiative is part of Malawi's broader strategy to stabilize food prices and replenish the Strategic Grain Reserves (SGR), essential during the lean months spanning October to March. Each grain represents not just sustenance but a chance for families to gather around a meal, to nourish their children, and to dream of a brighter future.

While aid is on the way, the journey is fraught with challenges. Navigating the logistics of transportation in a country marked by poverty and infrastructural limitations requires resilience and dedication.

As trucks are mobilized and routes plotted, the faith of Malawians is renewed. Communities gather to share stories of survival, exchanging recipes and preserving traditions even in the face of adversity.

In kitchens across Malawi, families hold onto hope, understanding that every sack of maize that arrives is a collective triumph. It is a testament to their unity—a reminder that they are not alone in this fight against hunger.

The maize symbolizes a future where children can thrive, where farmers can cultivate their fields once again, and where the narrative of starvation can shift to one of abundance.

As January approaches, the anticipation builds. Malawians prepare not just for the arrival of maize, but for the revival of their spirit. The seeds of change are being sown; with every shipment, they inch closer to overcoming the dire circumstances that have long plagued them.

In the face of starvation, hope takes root, a resilient force against the hunger that has haunted their lives for too long.

Forest ghost of freedom, rediscovering Dedan Kimathi

By Abel ORENGE

IN the busy heart of Nairobi – a Kenyan capital, traffic grinds past Dedan Kimathi Street every day.

Hawkers shout over matatus' horns, office workers hurry by, and above them a modest street sign bears the name of one of Kenya's most important – and most misunderstood – freedom fighters.

For many who pass beneath it, Dedan Kimathi is just that; a name on a signpost, a half-remembered figure from a primary school textbook, the face on a statue whose story has never been fully told.

How does a man condemned to the gallows by the colonial state as "the most dangerous terrorist in Kenya," and later hailed as a hero of independence, end up so vaguely remembered in the very republic he helped to bring into being?

To understand why Dedan Kimathi wa Waciuri has been reduced to a handful of streets and monuments, we must go back to the forest, to the contradictions of Kenya's struggle, and to the uneasy politics of memory that followed.

From Tetu to the Forest

Dedan Kimathi was born in 1920 in Tetu, Nyeri, in the foothills of Mount Kenya. Like many Africans under British rule, his life story began at the edge of dispossession.

His Gikuyu community had already been pushed from fertile land onto crowded reserves to make way for white-owned farms.

The colonial state's "hut tax" ensured that African men had to seek wage labour – badly paid, often brutal – to survive.

His early life, seen through oral accounts and fragmentary records, reveals a restless young man moving between odd jobs; a teacher here, a clerk there, casual work on farms and in towns.

He served briefly in the King's African Rifles during World War II but never left Kenya. Yet the war, and the wider political climate it helped create, mattered.

Thousands of African soldiers were exposed to the glaring hypocrisy of an empire that preached freedom abroad while denying it at home. The post-war period radicalised a generation; Kimathi was one of them.

By the late 1940s, resistance in central Kenya was shifting from petitions and polite constitutional appeals to more confrontational, often clandestine forms of organising.

Within the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru communities, secret oath-taking ceremonies flourished, binding initiates to a common cause of reclaiming land and dignity. Kimathi, intense and charismatic, quickly became a central organiser in this underground world.

It was not inevitable that he would become the most famous guerrilla commander of his generation. That path was forced by the closing off of legal politics.

As the colonial government banned African political organisations and exiled or jailed more moderate leaders, what remained was the forest.

The making of a commander

When the armed phase of the Mau Mau uprising began in the early 1950s, Kimathi was already known as a capable oath administrator and organiser.

He slipped into the Aberdare and Mount Kenya forests, joining groups of armed fighters who saw no other way to reclaim their land and dignity.

In the forest, he rose not only because of personal bravery but because he understood the importance of organisation and ideas.

What might have remained a loose alliance of armed bands, he tried to shape into a proto-political-military movement.

As a key leader of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), often conflated with Mau Mau, he helped frame the struggle as both a land question and a national liberation project.

Fragments of his forest notebooks survive, enough to offer a glimpse of his mind at work. They reveal a man deeply concerned with discipline and political education.

He railed against looting, rape and indiscriminate violence, insisting that fighters had to embody a higher moral code than the colonial regime they opposed.

Kimathi drafted rough constitutions, spoke of fairness across ethnic lines, and tried to imagine a Kenya beyond settler supremacy and racial hierarchy.

This concern with internal discipline is almost entirely missing from colonial caricatures of Mau Mau as "savage terrorists."

For British officials, Kimathi became the embodiment of the Mau Mau menace, the "arch-rebel" whose capture they desperately sought.

For many African peasants displaced from their land and harassed by the violent colonial counter-insurgency, he was closer to a Robin Hood figure: the man in the forest bearing a simple but electrifying promise, "ithaka na wiyathi" – land and freedom.

Yet the forest was not a romantic theatre of heroism; it was a brutal space shaped by scarcity, informers and fear.

Kimathi operated in that harsh terrain, constantly negotiating between the demands of survival and the ideals he espoused on crumpled pages.

Violence and ambiguity

No honest account of this period can afford sanitisation. The Mau Mau war was brutal. Atrocities were committed on all sides.

Colonial records, for decades treated as the definitive version, focused almost exclusively on Mau Mau violence; the killings of loyalist chiefs, the horror of the Lari massacre, the terror of night-time attacks on settler farms.

For a long time, far less attention was paid to the structural violence that produced the revolt; land alienation, forced labour, racialised humiliation; and later, the campaign of counter-insurgency, with its mass detentions, torture, hangings and collective punishments that scarred central Kenya.

It took decades, and a landmark court case brought by Mau Mau veterans against the British government in the 2010s – for the full extent of colonial brutality to begin filtering into public consciousness.

Kimathi's role sits precisely in this contested terrain, where the line between "freedom fighter" and "terrorist" depends on which archive one reads.

He ordered executions of informers and collaborators. His movement exacted retribution on those perceived as betraying the cause. Some of those killed were themselves victims of an impossible choice, trapped between a ruthless colonial state and a ruthless underground.

That ambiguity made Kimathi powerful during the war. It also made him dangerous to remember clearly once the war was over.

Capture and the convenience of martyrdom

On a cold October morning in 1956, colonial police ambushed a small group of guerrillas near Kahigaini in Nyeri.

Kimathi was shot in the leg and captured, wearing a leopard-skin jacket that would become iconic in later depictions. The colonial state had finally seized its prize.

His trial was swift and politically charged. He was not tried for sedition or treason, but for the narrow technical crime of illegal possession of a firearm and ammunition.

Found guilty, he was sentenced to death. The choice of charge was symbolic; the British were at pains to present this as a simple criminal matter, not the execution of a political opponent.

Even so, the trial bore all the marks of a showpiece. Prosecutors presented him as a ruthless killer responsible for Mau Mau atrocities.

Any attempt to frame the rebellion in political terms was restricted. Kimathi, defiant to the end, refused to denounce the cause for which he had fought. In his eyes, what the court called crime was resistance to an unjust occupation.

He was hanged at Kamiti Prison on 18 February 1957, and buried in an unmarked grave whose exact location remains uncertain to this day.

Anonymity was, in itself, a political tool. The colonial authorities understood the power of martyrs; by concealing his grave, they hoped to deny future generations a physical shrine around which to rally.

They did not cancel his legend, but they pushed it into the shadows. Kimathi's death cemented his mythic status just as thoroughly as it erased his physical presence.

Independence without the forest

Six years after his execution, Kenya became independent. Yet the new state did not wholeheartedly embrace the Mau Mau fighters, let alone their most uncompromising commander.

In a striking irony, many of the figures who came to dominate post-independence politics had either opposed the armed uprising or maintained careful distance from it.

Jomo Kenyatta, independence leader and first president, had been imprisoned during the 'Emergency' and accused of being the "leader of Mau Mau," a charge he rejected.

After 1963, he presided over a narrative that played down Mau Mau's role, preferring a story of constitutional negotiation, national unity and the gradual, peaceful assumption of power.

For the emerging elite, Kimathi and his comrades represented a more radical vision of what independence might mean.

They had fought, and died, not just for a flag and an anthem, but for land redistribution and social transformation.

To fully centre them in the national story would be to legitimise demands that the post-colonial state was unwilling to meet, especially on land, which frequently passed from white settlers into the hands of African politicians and businessmen, while many landless veterans remained landless.

The Mau Mau movement itself remained banned until 2003. For four decades, veterans existed in a historical limbo; tolerated but rarely honoured, sometimes openly vilified.

Their struggle was acknowledged in private memories and within certain communities, but rarely dignified in the official national script.

A bronze statue monument of the Kenyan freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi in the street of Nairobi. Photo: Simon Maina/AFP or licensors

In that climate, Dedan Kimathi survived in fragments; a hero in Gikuyu oral tradition, a villain in colonial archives, a ghost in state-sanctioned history.

Official memory not enough

Kimathi has been selectively remembered. Street names across Kenyan towns bear his name. In February 2007, a towering bronze statue of him was unveiled in central Nairobi, capturing him in his leopard-skin attire, bare-footed, rifle in hand, eyes narrowed against some invisible horizon.

School textbooks now mention him more openly than in the 1970s and 80s. Mau Mau veterans have gained limited recognition and some compensation, mostly through cases against the British government rather than Kenyan initiatives.

Yet these gestures, though significant, often lack depth. Naming a street after someone does not, by itself, tell a story. For many young Kenyans, Kimathi is a symbol stripped of context; a freedom fighter, yes, but why, how and at what cost? Lacking rigorous public history, his image floats like a logo above the messy realities beneath.

The reasons for this thin memorialisation are tangled. The political class has long been anxious about figures associated with radical land reform and social equality in a country still marked by stark inequality and unresolved land disputes.

Kimathi's insistence on "land and freedom" cannot be comfortably separated, and that makes his memory unsettling in a landscape where large estates, some rooted in colonial grants, sit next to crowded informal settlements.

Ethnic politics have also played a role. Because the Mau Mau uprising drew heavily from Gikuyu, Embu and Meru communities, some leaders feared that foregrounding it would narrow the national story to one region and one set of grievances.

Simplifying independence into a narrative of broad-based, peaceful transition allowed for a cleaner, if less honest, sense of unity.

Layered over this is the persistence of colonial historiography. For decades, the main written sources on the Emergency came from British administrators, soldiers and settlers.

The Kimathi that appeared in these texts was a monster. Only later, as archives opened and veterans' voices began to be recorded, did a fuller, more contradictory figure begin to emerge. But the older images have proved stubborn.

Kenya also lacks strong institutions dedicated to telling this story in all its complexity. There is no major national resistance museum to anchor such memory; monuments stand isolated, school syllabuses skim lightly, and serious public debate is rare. The result is a kind of amnesia by default.

Between myth and man

There is another difficulty; Kimathi does not fit easily into a neat heroic mould. To some, he is the ultimate martyr. To others, he represents a movement that sometimes turned its guns on fellow Africans.

Official commemoration tends to prefer "tidy heroes" – figures who can be celebrated without reopening wounds. Kimathi is not tidy.

And yet, the very contradictions that make him awkward to celebrate are what make him valuable to remember.

He was a guerrilla commander who believed that armed resistance was the only language a violently entrenched colonial order would understand.

His forces punished informers and collaborators, and some of those punished were frightened villagers doing what they thought necessary to survive. The forest was not a site of moral purity.

But Kimathi was also more than just a man with a gun.

Those rough notebooks, the testimony of his comrades, and his insistence on discipline suggest a figure wrestling with questions of justice, accountability and a future beyond war.

He understood land not merely as property but as the foundation of dignity and belonging.

He anticipated that independence without social transformation would be an empty shell.

To remember him only as a militant is to flatten him. To remember him only as a flawless hero is to turn him into a myth and make him unusable for serious reflection. It is in the tension between these two impulses that his story gains contemporary force.

Why he still matters

In today's Kenya, where a young population faces unemployment, rising inequality and persistent corruption, Kimathi's story is not just a chapter in a dusty history book; it is a mirror.

He stood at the intersection of three questions that refuse to go away, who owns the land, and on what terms? What does independence mean beyond the lowering of one flag and the raising of another? And who has the power to define a nation's heroes, and thus its sense of self?

The grievances that pushed men and women into the forest in the 1950s – land theft, forced displacement, exclusion from economic opportunity – echo faintly in contemporary protests over land grabs and evictions.

The disappointment of those who feel that "uhuru" has been captured by a small elite is not entirely disconnected from Kimathi's warning that freedom without justice would be fragile.

In confronting his legacy honestly, Kenya is forced to look again at its own founding bargain; the compromises made with former settlers, the choices around land redistribution, the decision to mute certain voices in the name of stability.

Kimathi's life does not offer a blueprint, but it does offer a vocabulary; of land, dignity, sacrifice and collective responsibility that retains its charge.

Beyond the street signs

If Dedan Kimathi is to become more than a name on a Nairobi street or a stern bronze figure in the city centre, remembrance must go deeper than symbolic gestures.

It demands a fuller integration of Mau Mau and the KLFA into the national curriculum, not as a two-page episode but as a central, contested chapter in Kenya's making.

It suggests the need for robust public institutions – museums, archives, oral history projects – where documents, testimonies and debates about the struggle can live together in the open.

It calls for artists, writers and filmmakers to reclaim him as a character in our cultural imagination, not an icon frozen on a pedestal but a human being, flawed and courageous, driven and divided.

Fiction and film often succeed where official history hesitates, exploring emotional truth as well as documentary fact.

And it requires physical acts of restoration, such as the long-promised effort to locate and properly mark his grave at Kamiti.

To give him a known resting place would not be about creating a shrine to an unblemished hero, but about acknowledging that the republic stands partly on the bones of those it once preferred to forget.

Ultimately, the greatest injustice done to Dedan Kimathi is not that streets and statues bear his name; it is that we have treated those markers as sufficient.

A freedom fighter is not honoured by metal and concrete alone, but by the seriousness with which his struggle is understood and the honesty with which its unfinished business is faced.

As Kenyans hurry down Dedan Kimathi Street today, they are walking over a buried history that still shapes their lives in ways they may not fully realise.

To excavate that history is to do more than rescue one man from partial oblivion.

It is to reopen the question he posed with his life; what would it mean for this country to truly achieve land and freedom, not only in name, but in fact. ■

Mukami Kimathi sits with an image of her late husband Dedan Kimathi, the leader of the Mau Mau anti-colonial uprising. Photo: Jaclynn Ashly

Zamzam water controversy sparks retail backlash

By Peter MONDLANE

IN a significant move prompted by strong investigative journalism, South African retailers have begun removing bottled water labelled as Zamzam from their shelves.

This decision follows a joint investigation by GroundUp and Muslim Views, which revealed that some of the bottled water marketed as Zamzam in Cape Town does not match the chemical profile of authentic Zamzam water sourced from the revered well in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

Zamzam water, known for its spiritual significance within the Muslim community, originates from a well located in Mecca. According to the Saudi Ministry of Media, the export of Zamzam water is explicitly prohibited, allowing only pilgrims who have completed Hajj or Umrah to take a single five-litre bottle with them when leaving the country.

Despite this regulation, Zamzam-labelled bottled water has been marketed and sold in South Africa at inflated prices, typically between R50 (approximately USD 3) and R55 for a 500ml bottle, compared to R10 for standard bottled water from well-known brands.

The investigation involved purchasing Zamzam water from retailers in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg, with confirmed authentic samples sourced from Saudi Arabia for comparative testing.

A reputable local laboratory accredited by the South African National Accreditation System was enlisted to analyze the samples for their mineral composition, focusing on calcium, chloride, fluoride, magnesium, potassium, sulphates, and sodium contents.

Zamzam bottled water in different packages. Photos: Ashraf Hendricks

Lab results and findings

The lab results indicated that the Zamzam water sold in Cape Town exhibited significant differences from the control samples obtained from Saudi Arabia. Specifically, the Cape Town samples contained higher levels of sodium and chloride, while showing lower levels of potassium and fluoride.

Expert analysis confirmed these discrepancies; Ismail Mahomed, a geo-hydrologist, stated, "The Cape Town samples are distinctly different from the confirmed Zamzam and other samples."

In contrast, the bottles sourced from Durban and Johannesburg did not show substantial differences when compared to the authentic Zamzam water samples, suggesting they might plausibly originate from the same source.

The failure of Cape Town's Zamzam samples to display the expected mineral profile raised significant concerns about their authenticity. Harris Steinman, director of Food & Allergy Consulting & Testing Services (FACTS), emphasized that the mineral content identified in the Cape Town samples could not change due to storage or time, leading to the conclusion that they did not come from the same source as authentic Zamzam water.

Regulatory breaches in labelling

Compounding the issue, the labelling on all locally purchased Zamzam water bottles was found to be non-compliant with South African labelling regulations. Breaches included inadequate product descriptions, lack of information about the sanitation methods used, and missing physical addresses. Furthermore, the barcodes on the bottles were inoperative.

Steinman noted a troubling trend where insufficient policing and enforcement could allow misleading products to reach consumers. He advised that consumers should remain vigilant and critical when evaluating product claims, as many companies might not adhere to labelling regulations.

Supplier insights

The investigation identified Khalid Helal, owner of Amiiraa in Gatesville, as a supplier of the Zamzam water products sold in Cape Town. When approached, Helal acknowledged the illegal nature of Zamzam exports but refrained from disclosing the identity of his suppliers.

He claimed that varying sanitation and bottling procedures in Saudi Arabia could result in different lab results.

Helal asserted that the water he sells is the purest Zamzam available in South Africa and provided lab results from a local Cape Town laboratory. However, the results lacked contextual information and did not include controls, leading to further discrepancies when compared to the analysis conducted by the accredited laboratory.

The investigation into Zamzam water in South Africa has not only led to the removal of misleading products from store shelves but has also raised critical questions regarding the authenticity, safety, and labelling of bottled water in the market. As the media continues to hold industries accountable, the importance of transparency and regulatory compliance will be paramount in protecting consumers in the future.

Some of Africa Presidents in group photo.

Why Trump removed US ambassadors from Africa

By Special CORRESPONDENT

PRESIDENT Donald Trump returned to the White House determined to revive the worldview that had defined his earlier presidency; that diplomacy must serve immediate national interest, not abstract ideals or inherited traditions.

In that philosophy, ambassadors are not neutral custodians of continuity; they are political instruments.

It is within this frame that Trump's decision to remove or recall U.S. ambassadors from several African countries must be understood.

Under U.S. law, ambassadors serve at the pleasure of the president. While administrations routinely replace political appointees, Trump went further by recalling career diplomats—a move that broke with post-Cold War norms.

Africa was disproportionately affected, not because it was uniquely hostile to Washington, but because it sat at the intersection of Trump's three deepest foreign-policy suspicions; foreign aid, multilateralism, and bureaucratic autonomy.

Loyalty over continuity

Trump has long argued that the U.S. foreign-policy establishment resists presidential authority. Career ambassadors, trained to operate across administrations, symbolized for him a system insufficiently responsive to electoral mandates.

Removing them was therefore not simply administrative, it was ideological.

Several recalled ambassadors had been appointed or promoted under Democratic administrations and were associated with policies Trump opposed, particularly on governance reform, human rights conditionality, and election observation.

In Africa, U.S. envoys often play outspoken roles on constitutionalism, civic space, and security-sector conduct.

Trump's view was that such advocacy complicated relationships with governments he preferred to engage transactional.

Replacing or sidelining these diplomats allowed the White House to centralize decision-making and reduce independent diplomatic signaling from embassies abroad.

Values-driven engagement

Africa has traditionally been the stage for U.S. diplomacy framed around democracy promotion, humanitarian assistance, and institutional reform. Trump openly rejected this model.

He repeatedly questioned why U.S. taxpayers should fund governance programmes or maintain large diplomatic footprints in countries offering little immediate return.

Ambassadors who emphasized human rights abuses, disputed elections, or civil-society repression were increasingly seen as obstacles rather than assets.

In this sense, the recalls reflected a deeper policy shift: Washington stepping back from moral leadership and repositioning itself as a hard-interest actor.

This recalibration was consistent with Trump's broader rollback of foreign assistance, his scepticism toward election monitoring, and his criticism of international institutions operating in Africa.

Africa, China, and Strategic Disengagement

Ironically, the recalls occurred at a time when Africa's strategic importance was rising due to competition with China.

Yet Trump's approach diverged sharply from conventional containment logic. Rather than strengthening diplomatic presence, he appeared to favour selective engagement, believing that U.S. power could be exercised through trade leverage, military cooperation, or direct leader-to-leader deals without the dense diplomatic infrastructure maintained by previous administrations.

This view underestimated the role ambassadors play in shaping long-term influence. In many African capitals, ambassadors are not merely envoys; they are central nodes connecting security cooperation, investment, humanitarian response, and crisis diplomacy.

Their absence created gaps that competitors—including China, Russia, and Gulf states—were well positioned to fill.

Trump's ambassadorial recalls were also shaped by domestic politics.

His political base has consistently supported reductions in foreign spending and expressed hostility toward what they perceive as unelected global elites.

Career diplomats, particularly those advocating rights-based engagement, became symbolic targets.

By removing ambassadors, Trump reinforced his image as a president willing to dismantle institutions that did not visibly serve his agenda.

Foreign policy became an extension of domestic political messaging: America would no longer apologize, subsidize, or moralize, it would bargain.

Consequences for U.S. – Africa relations

The immediate impact of the recalls was practical. Several U.S. embassies operated without ambassadors during periods of political instability, electoral crises, and security threats.

While chargés d'affaires can manage day-to-day operations, they lack the political weight to negotiate at the highest levels or intervene decisively in moments of crisis.

The longer-term damage was reputational. African governments interpreted the recalls as signals of disengagement or unpredictability.

Civil-society actors saw a retreat from democratic advocacy. Even allied governments questioned Washington's reliability as a consistent partner.

For many Africans, the removals reinforced the perception that U.S. engagement under Trump was conditional, transactional, and reversible.

A deliberate choice

Trump's removal of ambassadors from Africa was not diplomatic neglect—it was deliberate restructuring.

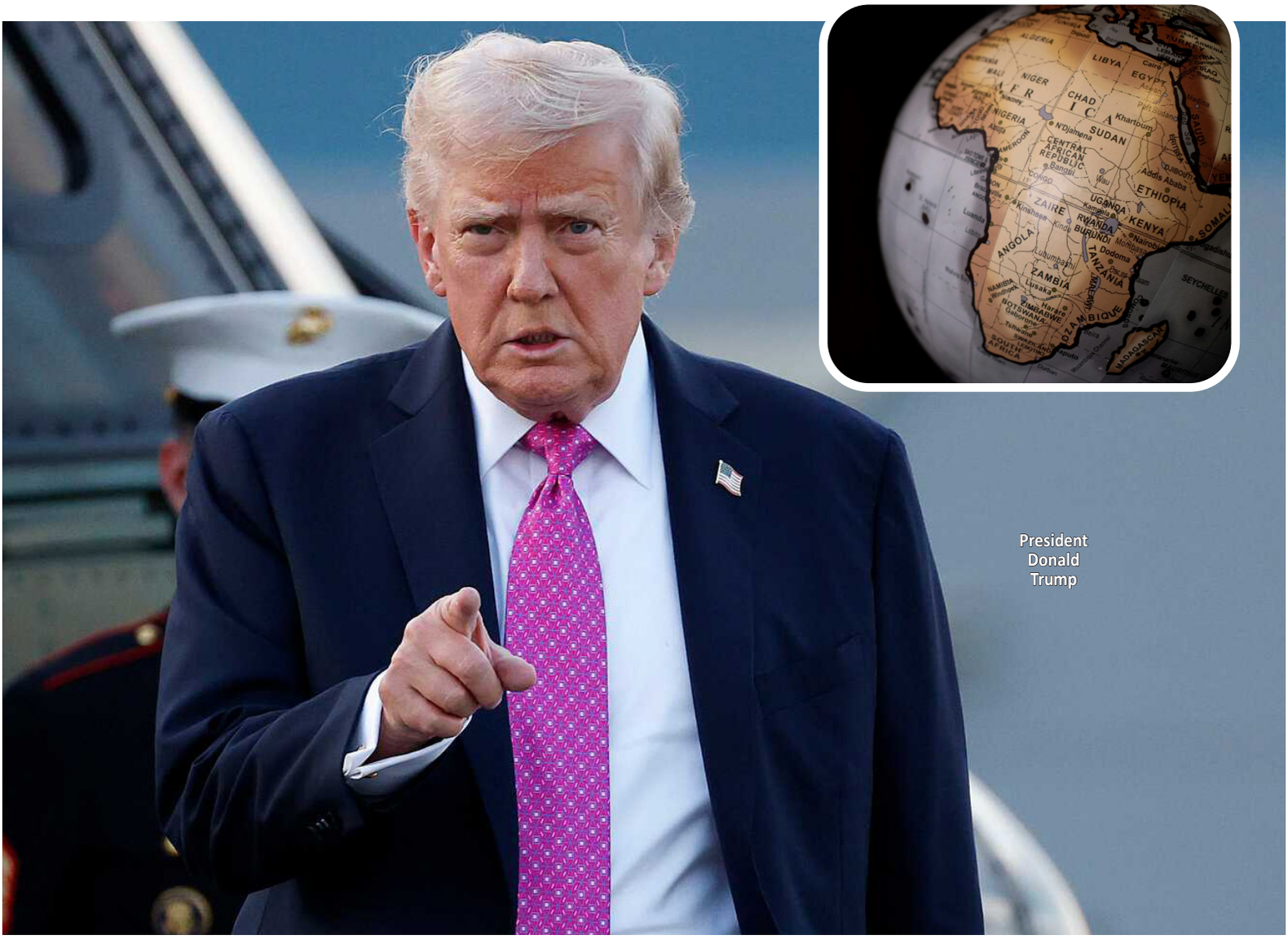
It reflected a presidency that viewed diplomacy as a tool of control rather than dialogue, and Africa as a region of optional engagement rather than strategic partnership.

Whether this approach strengthened American interests remains contested.

What is clear is that it marked a sharp departure from decades of bipartisan consensus that sustained U.S. influence through presence, patience, and professional diplomacy.

In recalling ambassadors, Trump did more than change personnel.

He redefined how power should be projected—and where it should no longer be invested. ■



President Donald Trump

: An awareness poster displayed at the Programme National d'Hygiène aux Frontières office in Butembo, Democratic Republic of Congo, on 19 August 2025. In order to obtain it without vaccination at border posts and in Programme National d'Hygiène aux Frontières offices. (Photo: Jérémie Kyaswekera / SA | AJP)

Yellow fever cards for sale without vaccination

By Jeremie KYASWEKERA

SELLING of fraudulent documents, officials create a dangerous illusion of protection; travellers appear immunised on paper, but in reality they are unprotected. This increases the risk of outbreaks in a region marked by regular cross-border movement of thousands of people.

At the Kasindi border post between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda a handful of dollar bills is all that it takes to bypass one of the most important health requirements of international travel in the region: proof of yellow fever vaccination.

This was confirmed by this reporter's own experience, and by half a dozen other travellers interviewed for this investigation. All had purchased fraudulently issued health documents that allowed them to travel unencumbered across the border. These documents were "sold" by officials from the Programme National d'Hygiène aux Frontières (PNHF), who staff health check points at the border.

PNHF officials are responsible for health-screening travellers, verifying vaccination certificates, and administering vaccinations to those who require them for legal travel. Instead, these officials profit from skirting these responsibilities.

In an area where outbreaks of yellow fever and other tropical diseases can lay waste to communities, such fraud poses a significant threat to the region's public health.

Buying a yellow card

On the morning of 16 September 2025, I stood in line with dozens of travellers at the Kasindi crossing's health checkpoint.

When asked for a "yellow card" — a proof of vaccination certificate — I admitted I did not have one. That should have meant vaccination and a 10-day quarantine, as international regulations demand. Through official channels, a yellow card costs $35.

Instead, the PNHF officials on duty offered me a quick-fix option: I could pay $5 for a "free passage" token declaring me healthy. Ordinarily, these tokens are only issued to people who live near the border and travel regularly across it for work. As an international traveller from far afield, I was not eligible for such a token.

Still, I bargained the price down. I did this to help confirm that the officials were probably requesting a fraudulent payment. After slipping $4 in cash to one of the PNHF officials, she placed the money in a small notebook on the desk. Her colleague issued me a token.

But, I noticed that the token issued to me did not contain an official stamp, so I expressed concern. The officials said that another option for a more official document existed, but that it would be much more expensive. A yellow card would cost me $50 in cash, they said. There was no mention of the vaccination and legally mandated quarantine period.

After some further negotiation, one of the officials led me to an office away from the main checkpoint. I paid this man $45 and in return he issued me with an authentic yellow card.

It was backdated to July 2025, signed, stamped and filled in with records of vaccines I had not received: for polio, for Covid-19 and for yellow fever.

A thriving black market at Congo's borders

Between January and July 2025, I interviewed and observed a number of travellers at Kasindi and Nobili border posts. It was clear that PNHF officials routinely and fraudulently sold the health and vaccination documents needed for cross-border travel.

Travel tokens are intended only for residents who live within 30km of the border and who cross it daily. These certify that the holder is of good health, and are intended as a pass for same-day travellers across the border and back. But, these are sold to international travellers for between $4 and $7.

Real yellow cards are sold for between $35 and $50 to travellers who have not been vaccinated. Agents might advise them on how to answer questions from other authorities.

Counterfeit yellow cards circulate for as little as $15 or $20. These often lack serial numbers or seals, but are still used successfully at checkpoints.

The people I interviewed had all participated in a crime in purchasing one of these documents. They therefore agreed to be interviewed only on condition of anonymity.

A student from Butembo told me she bought her yellow card at a PNHF office in Butembo, a town near the Kasindi border, without being vaccinated.

"I was preparing to go on vacation. But, honestly, I don't even know which part of the body the yellow fever vaccine is administered on," she said with a nervous laugh.

Another traveller recounted being offered a "fast-track" card when he pleaded that he needed to travel urgently. He also haggled the price down from $50 to $45, he said. And, the document was also pre-populated with multiple vaccines he had not received.

A university lecturer explained that he once had to send money to an intermediary in Beni, another town near the border, to obtain a yellow card remotely in 2021, as local offices in Butembo had run out.

"I was preparing to go on vacation. But, honestly, I don't even know which part of the body the yellow fever vaccine is administered on," she said with a nervous laugh.

"I was told that I had to act quickly, because stocks were scarce and in high demand. The booklet arrived already completed and sealed, without me having received the injection. Under these conditions, I understood that money comes before rules," he said.

A journalist in Beni recounted travelling to the Kasindi-Lubirihya border in July 2024, where Ugandan officials issued him a yellow fever card for $30 without any vaccine. He said shortages in Beni and cheaper prices across the border made it straightforward, especially with local contacts.

Likewise, a trader in Nobili confirmed that cards are often issued without vaccines, noting the lack of a local vaccination centre and the eagerness of border agents to "find an arrangement" when people are in a hurry.

An international vaccination certificate fraudulently obtained by the reporter without vaccination at Kasindi border, Democratic Republic of Congo, on 16 September 2025. The card grants travellers a false sense of immunity and undermines vaccination efforts against yellow fever and other preventable diseases. (Photo: Jérémie Kyaswekera / SA | AJP)

The entry point at the boarder

> **"Here, we don't even have a vaccination centre or vaccines. Our role is to monitor and control travellers. We ensure that diseases are not transmitted from one country to another."**

The health stakes: yellow fever in East Africa

Yellow fever is a mosquito-borne viral disease that can cause fever and death.

The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies it as a "vaccine-preventable disease" requiring strict border control. International Health Regulations mandate proof of vaccination for travellers from or into endemic countries.

Yet eastern DRC remains a high-risk zone. WHO reports show that East Africa — including Uganda, the DRC, and Kenya — recorded new confirmed cases between 2023 and 2025. In 2024 alone, 124 confirmed cases were reported across 12 African countries, including the DRC. WHO warned in April 2025 that "rising outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases threaten to reverse years of progress".

By selling fraudulent documents, PNHF agents create a dangerous illusion of protection: travellers appear immunised on paper, but in reality they are unprotected. This increases the risk of outbreaks in a region marked by regular cross-border movement of thousands of people.

Officials deny wrongdoing

When confronted, PNHF officials either downplayed or denied the allegations.

At the Nobili border crossing, the post's chief Justin Ngu-ramo insisted; "Here, we don't even have a vaccination centre or vaccines. Our role is to monitor and control travellers. We ensure that diseases are not transmitted from one country to another."

Asked about the presence of vaccination cards at his post, health officer Adalbert Muliwavyo claimed they were displayed "for awareness-raising reasons".

At Kasindi, station chief Dr Richard admitted that agents issued "consultation tokens", but said they had no legal equivalence to yellow cards. "It is nothing," he said, likening the slip to a luggage label at an airport.

Any payments, he suggested, were merely "gestures of generosity" from travellers to agents — not extortion.

The provincial coordinator of the PNHF, Erick Banga, confirmed that cards lacking serial numbers, seals, or QR codes were forgeries. But he refused to comment on allegations of corruption, saying he was "new to the position".

An agent's admission

The ease with which this reporter could purchase both a token and a real, but fraudulent, yellow card is shocking in its own right. But, the testimony of other travellers shows that this fraud is systemic and occurs at multiple PNHF offices in the region.

A former border agent also confirmed that the fraudulent issuance of yellow fever certificates was not an isolated practice, but routine at the border. In the end he declined to be interviewed for this investigation. But his admission still rings true. ■

This report has been produced by the Southern Africa Accountability Journalism Project (SA | AJP), an initiative of the Henry Nxumalo Foundation with the financial assistance of the European Union. It can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

Salaam Cave the world's most discreet wonder

By The AfriFiles REPORTER

AT the southern edge of Zanzibar, far from the bustle of resort strips and postcard predictability, the island exhales.

Here in Kizimkazi, the Indian Ocean meets coral shores with a gentler rhythm, and time seems to slow in deference to nature.

This is where Salaam Cave lies; quiet, assured, and deeply rooted, at the intersection of ancient land and ancient sea.

It is a place that invites travelers to look beyond the surface and discover a Zanzibar shaped not by trends, but by millennia.

Kizimkazi has long been known for its marine richness. Dolphins, turtles, and pristine coastal ecosystems have defined its reputation among seasoned travelers and conservationists alike.

Yet beneath the brilliance of sunlit water lies another story; one etched into limestone and shadow.

Salaam Cave completes the narrative of this remarkable place, offering a rare pairing of marine biodiversity and underground wonder that few destinations in East Africa can rival.

This is not mass tourism. It is immersive, intentional travel, where discovery replaces consumption, and experience outweighs spectacle.

The waters of Kizimkazi belong, first and foremost, to the sea turtles.

Green turtles and hawksbill turtles have navigated these currents for millions of years, their presence predating Zanzibar itself as a human settlement.

To encounter them here is not to witness an attraction, but to meet living history.

In the early mornings, when the ocean is glassy and the sun rises softly over the horizon, turtles glide through the shallows with unhurried grace.

Swimming alongside them is a lesson in restraint. There is no chasing, no orchestration, only quiet coexistence.

Their slow, deliberate movements encourage visitors to slow down too, to match the rhythm of an ecosystem governed by ancient time rather than modern urgency.

Kizimkazi's growing reputation as a responsible marine destination rests on this ethos of respect.

Local conservation initiatives emphasize education as much as experience. Visitors learn that turtles are not merely symbols of longevity, but essential engineers of the marine environment.

By grazing on sea-grass and supporting reef health, they help maintain the delicate balance that sustains the wider ocean community.

Beyond turtles, the marine biodiversity of Kizimkazi unfolds in layers.

Coral reefs teem with colorful fish, while rays, octopus, and seasonal migratory species pass through deeper waters.

Snorkeling here feels intimate rather than overwhelming, shaped by nature's pace instead of crowded itineraries. It is an encounter defined by quiet awe, not excess.

After hours immersed in the living motion of the sea, the journey shifts direction—towards the land, and further still, beneath it.

Inside Salaam Cave

Set modestly inland, the entrance to Salaam Cave does not announce itself with grandeur.

It appears almost intentionally understated, as if testing a visitor's curiosity.

Those who step off the obvious path are rewarded with a profound change of world.

Descending into Salaam Cave is a sensory transition. The warmth of the sun fades, replaced by cool air and softened echoes.

Light becomes selective, revealing textures and formations shaped by water's patient work over thousands of years.

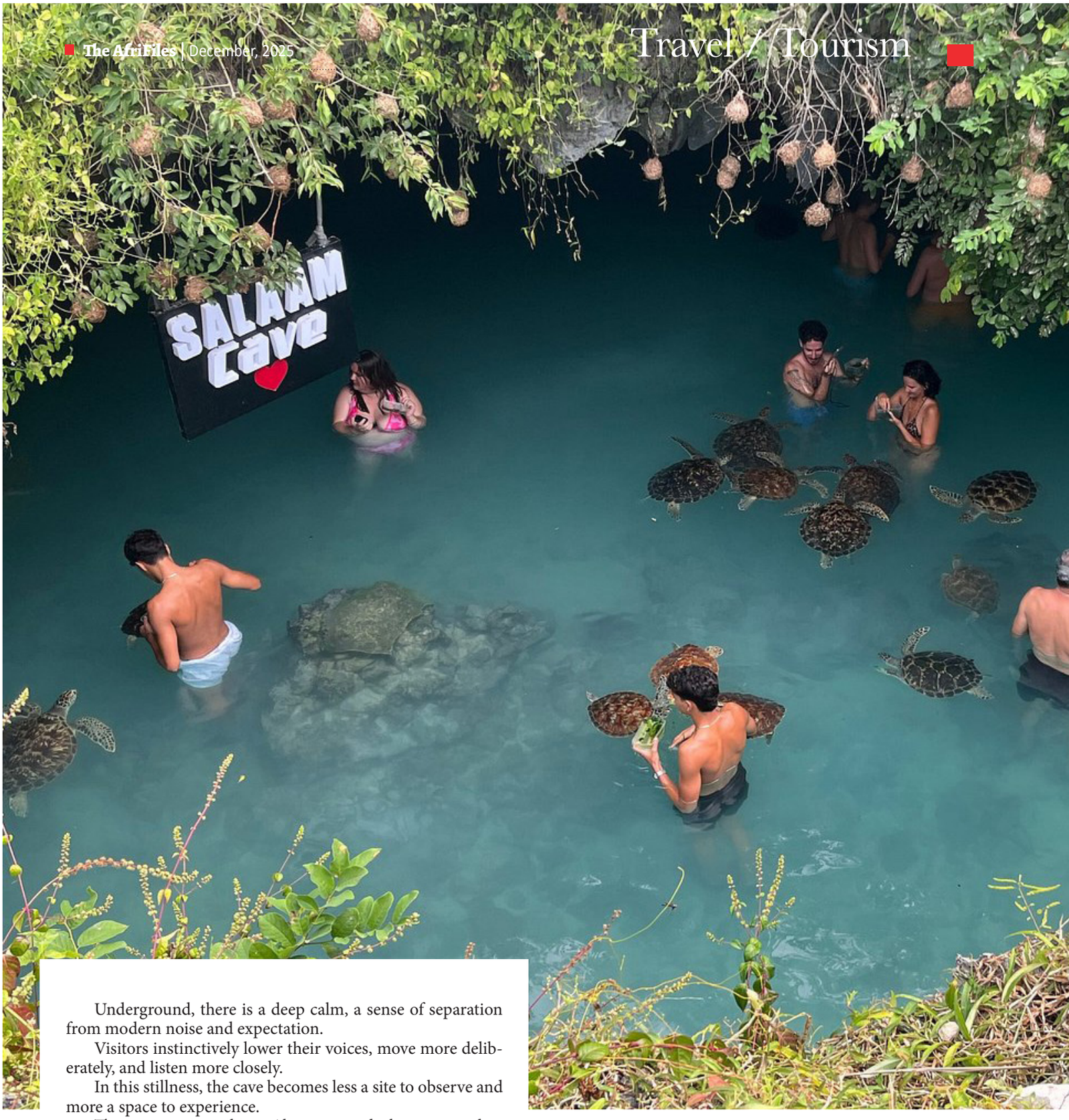
Chambers open gradually, each unveiling sculpted stone that feels at once monumental and intimate.

Guided by local experts from Kizimkazi, the journey unfolds slowly. Stories emerge, not rehearsed scripts, but lived knowledge.

Visitors learn how rainwater filtered through coral rock, how the cave evolved over time, and how such spaces once served as places of shelter, reflection, and cultural significance.

The guides speak with the confidence of those who know the land not as an exhibit, but as home.

What distinguishes Salaam Cave is not scale alone, but atmosphere.



Underground, there is a deep calm, a sense of separation from modern noise and expectation.

Visitors instinctively lower their voices, move more deliberately, and listen more closely.

In this stillness, the cave becomes less a site to observe and more a space to experience.

The contrast is striking. Above ground, the ocean pulses with life, turtles gliding, fish darting, waves breathing in and out.

Below ground, stone holds time, preserving Zanzibar's quieter narrative. Together, they form a dialogue between motion and permanence, between life and land.

Sea, stone become one

What makes Salaam Cave in Kizimkazi exceptional is the seamless connection between these two worlds.

Few destinations allow travelers to encounter ancient marine life in the morning and explore geological history in the afternoon, all within the same landscape.

This dual experience transforms a visit into something holistic, an exploration of nature's layers, both visible and hidden.

For photographers and visual storytellers, Kizimkazi offers extraordinary contrast.

The luminous blues and greens of turtle-rich waters give way to earthy tones and dramatic shadows inside the cave.

The resulting imagery feels cinematic, capturing a Zanzibar that goes far beyond beaches and sunsets.

For travelers seeking meaning, the experience resonates deeply. The turtles embody continuity of life and resilience against odds.

Salaam Cave represents endurance of the land itself, shaped by forces unseen yet unstoppable.

Experiencing both creates an emotional arc that lingers long after departure.

Safety and sustainability are woven carefully into every aspect of Salaam Cave Tours.

Cave exploration is managed with precision, ensuring visitor comfort while preserving the site's integrity.

Marine activities emphasize non-intrusive observation, reinforcing Kizimkazi's standing as a destination committed to conservation rather than exploitation.

This approach aligns closely with the values of today's international traveler.

Increasingly, visitors are looking beyond luxury defined by excess. They seek ethical experiences, educational depth, and genuine local connection. Salaam Cave in Kizimkazi meets these expectations with quiet assurance.

The benefits extend beyond visitors. Local guides, conservation workers, and small businesses form the backbone of the tourism ecosystem here, ensuring that economic gains remain rooted in the community.

This shared ownership adds authenticity, making the experience feel participatory rather than transactional.

As Zanzibar continues to evolve on the global tourism map, places like Kizimkazi stand apart precisely because they resist overexposure.

Salaam Cave does not compete with beaches or resorts. It complements them by offering depth—literal and symbolic.

A day here might begin with the meditative calm of swimming alongside ancient turtles, move into the contemplative stillness of underground chambers, and end with the sun sinking quietly into the Indian Ocean.

Few destinations offer such balance, such coherence, such quiet power.

Salaam Cave in Kizimkazi is not about ticking attractions off a list. It is about immersion, into nature, into time, into a Zanzibar that reveals itself slowly and rewards curiosity.

For international travelers seeking a destination where marine biodiversity, ancient geology, and authentic local storytelling converge, Salaam Cave offers something rare.

It invites visitors to look beneath the surface, to engage with the island as a living landscape shaped by water, stone, and life itself.

In Kizimkazi, the turtles still swim their ancient paths, and Salaam Cave still holds Zanzibar's quiet secrets.

Together, they define a new kind of travel—one rooted in wonder, respect, and memory that endures long after the journey ends.

Alexandra township in Johannesburg is one of the most severely under-serviced townships in South Africa. Photo: Madelene Cronje/ The Observer

Johannesburg: Reviving a city on the edge

By Ismail LAGARDIEN

JOHANNESBURG stands today in a profound state of decay, a city once vibrant now characterized by widespread destruction, disrepair, rampant crime, and pervasive waste.

This grim reality serves as a stark, reflective mirror of broader societal issues within South Africa. A pervasive sense of collective mourning envelops the city, akin to a near-cult of sorrow, as its residents grieve for the lost splendour that once made Johannesburg a beacon of progress and hope.

Instead of confronting the challenging truth of the city's decline, many seem to divert their focus elsewhere, resisting self-reflection.

Fuelled by a strong sense of pride and identity, South Africans often proclaim their greatness and heritage, sometimes overshadowing the very struggles that need addressing for genuine progress.

It's a nation grappling with the dichotomy of self-image and reality, where the narrative of past glory sometimes obscures the pressing needs of the present.

In the suburbs surrounding Johannesburg, as well as in areas situated at its periphery, families and communities valiantly strive to lead fulfilling, meaningful lives.

Yet, with each passing day and week, residents increasingly struggle to appreciate their surroundings amidst growing challenges. Water shortages have become a common occurrence, energy supply disruptions strike frequently, and vital infrastructure—such as roads, walkways, crosswalks, traffic signals, and signage—systems fail with alarming regularity.

The entire physical landscape bears a striking resemblance to a body afflicted with chronic, festering wounds, each adding to the collective narrative of a slow, tragic decline.

Emotionally and physically, the city appears drained, devoid of the necessary resources and energy required to bring it back to a functional, thriving state. It is a metropolis caught in the grips of exhaustion, paralysed by the enormity of the task that lies ahead and the lack of a clear, achievable path towards revitalization.

The factors underlying Johannesburg's current predicament are multifaceted. Mismanagement, poor governance, and a lack of foresight have undoubtedly contributed significantly to its present state.

Additionally, there is the perspective that the city has simply reached the denouement of its natural lifecycle, with its original purpose diminishing over time. This echoes a broader existential question: has Johannesburg's raison d'être simply faded with time, or should there be an aspiration to redefine what the city can become?

Founded in the late 19th century by European settler colonists around 1886, Johannesburg arose principally to exploit the vast gold reserves hidden beneath its surface.

Over time, however, this finite resource is increasingly expensive and challenging to mine, questioning the sustained viability of the city as it ages. The very foundations upon which this once-bustling city was established may not hold forever, prompting a difficult reckoning with its finite economic lifeline.

Gold continues to be a valued commodity across various sectors, including electronics, medical applications such as dentistry, and automotive manufacturing.

Furthermore, nearly 90% of the world's gold finds purpose in the jewelry industry. However, technological advancements could lead to the discovery and development of alternative materials, gradually replacing gold's traditional roles in these industries.

When one examines the historical narrative that birthed Johannesburg, it becomes clear that the allure of gold was central to its existence. There was little else in terms of geographical advantage to draw people to this location far removed from natural water sources and set atop a geological ridge.

In light of these circumstances, it seems fair to suggest that the city, in its current form, appears not just stagnant but lifeless—a stark and somewhat ironic contrast against the backdrop of its historically vibrant past.

Several poignant reports, most notably by respected journalist Ferial Haffajee, have underscored the stark reality of Johannesburg's ongoing decline, remarking that the city is "collapsing in front of everyone's eyes." This sentiment has reached audiences on a global scale, including through reports by international media such as the BBC.

Once a bustling center of economic activity, Johannesburg's inner city has suffered grievously over the past two decades. Formerly beloved green spaces and bustling streets are now tarnished by a pervasive reputation for crime, litter, crumbling infrastructure, and an increasingly unreliable access to essential resources like water and electricity.

The city's rapid population growth has only served to exacerbate these issues, with foreign media outlets like France24 documenting Johannesburg's distressing transformation.

A recent commentary in the Sowetan from March 6, 2025, echoed these grave concerns: "Johannesburg's inner city is under siege—not just from decay. Criminal syndicates are brazenly looting critical infrastructure.

Cable theft and sabotage have surged, prompting City Power to issue alarming warnings regarding the rise in attacks. Traffic lights regularly fail, endangering motorists and pedestrians alike... The streets are filthy, potholes proliferate, and sewage spills into neighbourhoods, contaminating water supplies with unchecked ease. Years of neglect have transformed once-thriving areas into vivid symbols of dysfunction, leaving residents in a state of powerlessness."

The city finds itself in a harrowing cycle of self-destruction, where the very foundation upon which it was built is being drained of its vitality. As we grapple with this grim reality, some envision a new city rising from the rubble of decay, a phoenix metaphorically soaring from the ashes of what once was.

Historical precedents abound of civilizations that have been built upon the remnants of their predecessors, and one could speculate whether, in the centuries to come, Johannesburg will echo the ancient sites like Çatalhöyük or Derinkuyu in Turkey, places where the new emerged from the ruins.

However, perhaps such musings are too fantastical, a departure from the immediate concerns faced by Johannesburg today. The question remains: has the city succumbed to its fate through deliberate neglect, or has it been unknowingly swept into this gradual decline, losing its critical functionality as it devours its own resources to stay afloat?

What is apparent, nonetheless, is that the city's golden era, the period of its greatest prosperity and influence, has dissipated—perhaps relocating to more prosperous areas like Sandton and Soweto.

The view from the top of Ponte Tower, which is one of the tallest residential buildings in South Africa. Photo: BBC. com

As we look to the future, the lessons from Johannesburg's past and present should inform a collective vision grounded in inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation. Only by embracing these principles can the city hope to overcome its current challenges and rekindle the dynamic spirit that once defined it.

As time continues its relentless march forward, there is a growing risk that Johannesburg might leave behind nothing more than a relic, a memory of its once-glorious existence, fading into the annals of history.

Amidst this backdrop of decline, there are still stories of resilience and hope. Grassroots movements and community organizations continue to strive for improvements, working tirelessly to revive the spirit of Johannesburg.

Their goals are ambitious—rebuilding infrastructure, reducing crime, reviving the economy—but they persist with the belief that even in the face of overwhelming challenges, transformation is possible.

Moreover, there's an emerging discourse surrounding urban renewal and sustainable development. Experts and policymakers debate potential paths forward, ranging from infrastructural investments to comprehensive policy overhauls.

The vision for Johannesburg's future involves not just patching up existing issues but fundamentally rethinking urban planning to ensure resilience against future adversities.

Concepts like smart cities and green technologies are being explored as part of integrated solutions that could help transition Johannesburg into a more sustainable and livable urban area.

Education and innovation are also seen as critical components of this transformative agenda. By investing in educational opportunities and fostering an environment that nurtures entrepreneurship and creativity, Johannesburg could lay the groundwork for a new economic paradigm—one that is less reliant on finite resources and more attuned to the emerging digital and ecological landscape.

Ultimately, the story of Johannesburg is still being written. It is a narrative interwoven with challenges and opportunities—a testament to the complexity and resilience of urban life in the face of adversity.

While acknowledging the city's struggles, there remains a steadfast belief among many that with concerted effort, Johannesburg can once again become a thriving metropolis, redefining itself for future generations.

As we look to the future, the lessons from Johannesburg's past and present should inform a collective vision grounded in inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation. Only by embracing these principles can the city hope to overcome its current challenges and rekindle the dynamic spirit that once defined it.

In this journey of transformation, the spirit of the people—resilient, proud, and determined—remains Johannesburg's greatest asset. While the path ahead is fraught with difficulties, it is this very spirit that offers hope for a better tomorrow, a testament to the enduring human capacity to adapt, rebuild, and thrive, even against all odds. ■

This article was first published by South Africa's Daily Maverick – with a title: Johannesburg: The slow death of a city that may have outlived its purpose. It has been edited to suit The AfriFiles standards.

Dirty almost everywhere.
Photo: BusinessTech

The Farmers Bank branch in Manzini, Eswatini's commercial center. Photo: ICIJ Eswatini

Businessman target journalists with $9.9M lawsuit

By Micah REDDY

THE founding director of Eswatini's Farmers Bank has accused Swazi Bridge, a news outlet operating in exile, of defamation in a nearly $10 million lawsuit press freedom advocates have labelled "abusive."

In the lawsuit, Farmers Bank and its founder, John Asfar, claim that Swazi Bridge published a series of defamatory articles about alleged irregularities in the acquisition of the bank's licence "with absolutely no evidence" and "without hearing the Plaintiffs' side."

Asfar is a real estate developer and the former owner of the Canadian hotel chain Travellers Inn, which filed for bankruptcy in 2009. He featured in ICIJ's 2024 Swazi Secrets investigation, a collaboration with seven media partners based on a leaked trove of documents from the Eswatini Financial Intelligence Unit.

Asfar has been at the centre of a battle for control of Farmers Bank, which struggled to get off the ground amid a tussle with the Central Bank of Eswatini over its license and alleged political pressure to force the regulator's hand. Swazi Secrets revealed that officials at the central bank were concerned about who ultimately controlled the new venture and its source of funds.

Swazi Bridge's reporting, published between 2023 and 2025, includes details of the same licensing dispute. Asfar has accused the outlet of "exhibiting an ulterior motive" and seeking to prevent Farmers Bank from operating in the tiny landlocked country, according to court records.

In a June letter, sent less than two months after the lawsuit was filed at a court in Eswatini's capital of Mbabane, lawyers for Asfar and Farmers Bank proposed a settlement in which ownership of Swazi Bridge would be transferred to their clients. They also demanded the outlet retract the series of articles.

The lawyers warned that if Swazi Bridge did not agree to those terms, they would seek an injunction "followed by other punitive relief and costs." They also threatened to have Swazi Bridge investigated for "domestic and/or foreign terrorism," claiming "the commercial banking sector is a matter of national security."

Swazi Bridge's lawyers rejected the settlement terms, writing: "Our client would like to make it unequivocally clear that it is not for sale and will not, under any circumstances, surrender its institutional identity, editorial independence, or ownership rights."

The outlet's editor Manqoba Nxumalo told ICIJ he stood by the accuracy of its reporting, adding that Asfar had "picked on Swazi Bridge because it does not have the financial resources to fight him in court all the way."

Nxumalo said the case was "a clear [SLAPP] suit and an abuse of the court process," referring to costly litigation brought by powerful people or entities to intimidate and silence critics.

At the time of ICIJ's Swazi Secrets reporting, Asfar accused the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit of "financial terrorism" and threatened to sue.

In response to ICIJ's questions about the litigation against Swazi Bridge, Asfar sent a 2,000-word letter accusing ICIJ of spreading a "false narrative" and being the "tip-of-the-spear" in a Masonic plot to install an international government.

He claimed that Swazi Bridge published "narratives and malicious defamatory articles at will, and without investigating the facts/truth, they rather perpetuated lies from the other rouge [sic] activist publications."

In a joint statement, two regional press freedom groups, the Southern Africa Litigation Centre and the Media Institute of Southern Africa, said the legal action "has the hallmarks of a SLAPP suit" and "targets speech concerning a matter of public interest."

"Now is the moment to strengthen our legal frameworks and foster a culture of responsibility so meaningful public discourse can flourish," the statement said.

The write is a reporter and Africa coordinator of www.icij.org

A Nation on the edge of promise, peril

By Esther MILLEN

SOMALIA, often portrayed through the lens of conflict, poverty, and chaos, is standing at a crucial juncture in its history.

As it emerges from a prolonged period of civil strife, the country faces both substantial challenges and unprecedented opportunities that could dictate its future trajectory.

This analysis seeks to unpack Somalia's current situation, exploring its social dynamics, political landscape, economic potential, and the looming threats that could hinder its progress.

Since the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, Somalia has grappled with political instability. However, recent years have witnessed a shift towards re-establishing governance structures.

The efforts to create a federal system have allowed for the emergence of regional administrations, suggesting a move towards decentralization.

The 2022 presidential elections marked a pivotal moment in the country's political journey, showcasing a degree of electoral participation and democratic engagement previously unseen.

Despite these advancements, the political landscape remains fraught with challenges. The threat of extremist groups like Al-Shabaab continues to undermine governance and security.

Frequent attacks disrupt civic life and hinder investment, while rampant corruption within political institutions erodes public trust. Moreover, the ongoing negotiations regarding power-sharing between the federal and regional governments need careful management to avoid exacerbating tensions and divisions.

Somalia's strategic location along the Indian Ocean positions it as a potential maritime hub, especially given the increasing global emphasis on trade routes.

The nation is rich in natural resources, including hydrocarbons, fisheries, and agriculture. With significant undeveloped reserves of oil and gas, foreign investment could transform the economy. The establishment of a legal framework for resource management and investment is crucial to attract international partners while ensuring local communities benefit from these resources.

Agriculture, traditionally the backbone of Somalia's economy, remains a vital sector, employing a majority of the population.

However, recurrent droughts and climate change pose significant threats to food security. Strengthening climate resilience through innovative agricultural practices and infrastructure development will be paramount for ensuring a stable food supply and economic resilience.

Bridging divides through unity

Somalia's social fabric is woven from a rich tapestry of ethnicities and clans, but deep-seated divisions have historically fueled conflict. The youth demographic, comprising over 70% of the population, holds immense potential for change if effectively engaged.

Educational initiatives and skill development programs targeting young people can foster a sense of unity and shared purpose, challenging extremist narratives and promoting national cohesion.

The role of women is also critical in shaping Somalia's future. Empowering women through education and participation in the workforce can enhance societal resilience and drive economic growth.

Initiatives that promote gender equality and combat gender-based violence are essential for creating a more inclusive society.

While strides have been made in rebuilding the national army and establishing security collaborations with international partners, Somalia's security situation remains precarious. The ongoing insurgency by Al-Shabaab represents a significant hurdle to stability.

Enhancing the capabilities of the Somali National Army (SNA) through training and resources is imperative. Additionally, engaging local communities in security initiatives can provide a counter-narrative to extremist ideologies and build trust in national institutions.

International support is vital for Somalia's aspirations for peace and development. The African Union, United Nations, and bilateral partnerships have played pivotal roles in providing humanitarian aid, facilitating dialogue, and assisting with military training.

However, the international community must balance its approach, recognizing Somalia's sovereignty while fostering accountable governance.

Somalia stands at a crossroads, balancing the weight of its tumultuous past with the promise of a better future. The path ahead is fraught with challenges, yet the resilience of its people, underpinned by strategic reforms in governance, economic empowerment, and social inclusion, can forge a brighter trajectory.

As Somalia embarks on this critical journey, the stakes are high, but so too are the possibilities for recovery and growth.

The international community's role, alongside strong internal leadership, will be pivotal in shaping a future where Somalia can thrive rather than merely survive. ■

Samiro, grandmother to 7 grandchildren, took her grandchild Calaso (pictured). Photo: Ed Ram/Concern Worldwide

Resilience rising amidst fight against Boko Haram

By Maryam FIKELEL

IN the sun-soaked plains of northeastern Nigeria, where the relentless rhythm of life is punctuated by the haunting legacy of violence, one name evokes fear and sorrow; Boko Haram.

Boko Haram, which translates to "Western education is forbidden," is not merely a terrorist group; it is a symbol of a struggle, an intense battle against not just armed insurgents, but the deeper socio-economic and political challenges that plague this region.

Once upon a time, in the early 2000s, a charismatic preacher, Mohammed Yusuf gathered a following around his vision of purity.

His message resonated among the disenfranchised, the disillusioned, and the desperate. Young men, yearning for meaning amid a backdrop of poverty and neglect, flocked to his side.

But what began as a peaceful movement advocating against Western influences quickly transformed into a violent insurgency after a brutal confrontation with Nigerian security forces claimed Yusuf's life in 2009.

This moment catalysed a decade-long nightmare, as Boko Haram emerged from the shadows to unleash terror on innocent lives.

As we travel through the rugged landscapes of Borno State, it is difficult to ignore the pervasive sense of hopelessness. The scars of conflict are etched into the lives of its people.

Schools, once a source of knowledge and hope, have been reduced to rubble. Markets, bustling with life, stand abandoned, echoing the sadness of families torn apart.

Unemployment looms large, particularly among the vulnerable youth who fill the streets. Their frustration festers, creating a fertile ground for Boko Haram's insidious recruitment strategies.

In their desperation, many find solace in the promises of belonging, financial reward, and purpose offered by a group that thrives on despair.

Political corruption adds another layer to this complex narrative. In a country rich in resources yet plagued by inequality, local communities often feel abandoned by those in power.

Money that could bolster military operations or provide crucial services is lost in the labyrinth of bureaucracy, poorly managed, and embezzled by those tasked with protecting the nation.

The military, overwhelmed and underfunded, struggles to combat an enemy that morphs and adapts within the shadows. Distrust festers.

When government forces enter villages, they are not greeted with relief; instead, they are met with skepticism, a palpable belief that the government's interests lie far from the well-being of the people.

In this chaotic environment, Boko Haram's reign of terror expands beyond Nigeria's borders. The porous nature of the borders around the Lake Chad Basin allows militants to flit between countries, weaving a larger web of insecurity throughout the region.

Alliances with other terrorist factions, spurred by ideology or ambition, only complicate this picture further. The fragmentation of Boko Haram into various factions, each with its unique objectives, creates a chilling unpredictability, making the prospect of peace elusive.

Yet, in the midst of despair and destruction, stories of resilience begin to emerge. Community members, weary from years of conflict, rally together in defiance of the turmoil.

Local leaders work tirelessly to provide education and opportunities, seeking to prevent the next generation from falling into the clutches of extremism.

Women in particular emerge as key players, taking initiatives to build stronger, more resilient communities. They advocate for education, health care, and the empowerment of youth, all while nursing the emotional wounds left by conflict.

International efforts have also made strides, albeit with their complexities. Support from global partners has been crucial in providing resources and training, yet these interventions sometimes come cloaked in conditions that do not always align with Nigeria's interests.

The partnership between Nigerian forces and neighbouring countries remains fraught, beset by differing strategies and objectives that often dampen the chances of effective collaboration.

Still, the question hangs in the air; can Nigeria find a path to stability? The road ahead is daunting, riddled with obstacles that run deeper than military might.

It requires comprehensive efforts that address the socio-economic roots of extremism, reinvigorate community trust in governance, and pave the way for lasting peace.

Some of the Boko Haram armed insurgents.

My prediction for journalism in 2026

By Julia ANGWIN

FOR the first time in 2025, more people in the United States accessed news primarily through social-media text posts and short-form videos than through television broadcasts or traditional news websites, according to the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

What was once a gradual fragmentation has become a defining shift in how journalism is produced, distributed, and consumed.

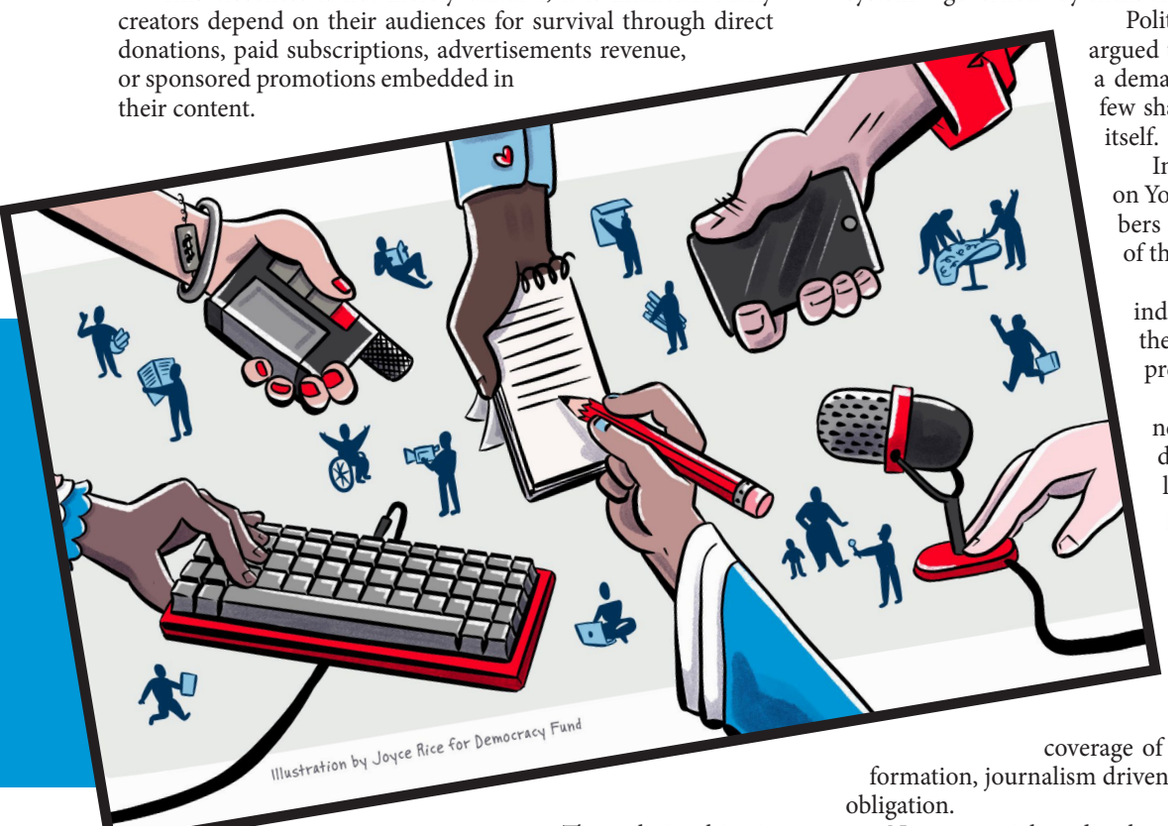
These new media outlets are typically run not by large institutions but by individuals or small teams.

Their audiences can range from tens of thousands to tens of millions, often concentrated around a specific worldview, identity, or interest.

Unlike legacy newsrooms, these creators rely on constant interaction with their followers.

They respond directly to comments, follow story ideas suggested by viewers, and routinely adjust their reporting based on audience reactions and engagement metrics.

This closeness is not merely cultural; it is financial. Many creators depend on their audiences for survival through direct donations, paid subscriptions, advertisements revenue, or sponsored promotions embedded in their content.



The relationship is reciprocal: creators supply content that resonates deeply with their followers, and audiences reward that alignment with attention and money. In this ecosystem, loyalty is currency.

There are clear benefits to this model. Creators are often more likely to engage in what might be called service journalism, content that is immediately useful, relatable, and responsive to everyday concerns.

They frequently experiment with creative storytelling techniques, including skits, satire, and comedy, to explain complex or abstract issues.

Importantly, these creators often cover communities, subcultures, and niche topics that legacy media historically ignored or undervalued.

Because their success depends so directly on trust, creators may also be more accountable to their audiences.

Many are quicker to acknowledge mistakes, offer corrections, or issue apologies when they get things wrong.

In this sense, there is much that traditional media institutions could learn from how creators cultivate trust and maintain sustained engagement with their audiences.

Yet this same closeness can also be deeply distorting. A news environment driven almost entirely by audience demand risks narrowing rather than broadening public understanding.

Audiences who seek conspiracy theories will find endless confirmation. Those who crave outrage will receive a constant supply of it.

Topics that are essential to civic life but lack mass appeal, such as municipal budget audits, regulatory oversight, or complex corporate tax practices, may struggle to gain attention in a system governed by clicks and shares.

Political scientist Kevin Munger has argued that this dynamic has produced a demand-driven news landscape with few shared values beyond engagement itself.

In his analysis of political content on YouTube, he observes that "YouTubers are not 'Creators' but Creations of their audience."

In this formulation, editorial independence is constrained by the expectations, preferences, and pressures of the crowd.

Of course, legacy media has never been free of distortion. Traditional news organizations have long been entwined with the political, economic, and social elites they cover, shaping coverage in subtle but significant ways.

However, those institutions also benefited from monopoly-era profits that allowed them to subsidize coverage of vital but unglamorous civic information, journalism driven not by popularity, but by public obligation.

Now, as social-media channels overtake legacy outlets, the demand-driven feedback loop is becoming the default model across the entire media ecosystem.

The logic of constant audience response no longer belongs only to creators; it defines the industry as a whole.

In other words, the audience has taken the wheel, and everyone else is riding in the passenger seat. ■

The writer is founding director of a new program at Harvard's Shorenstein Center studying the independent media landscape. This article was first published by niemanlab.org

Afcon revolutionizing African football

By Yassin LUPATU

THE Africa Cup of Nations (Afcon) 2025, hosted in Morocco, is revolutionizing the landscape of football across the continent.

As nations are converging for this prestigious tournament that started on December 21, the implications are extending beyond the pitch, touching upon technology, player development, and infrastructure.

Morocco's infrastructure, including modern stadiums and training facilities, is setting a benchmark for hosting international events.

The country's investment in football aligns with a vision to elevate the standard of the game in Africa. With state-of-the-art facilities, Morocco is providing a unique environment for teams to train and perform at their best.

This setting is not only enhancing the playing experience but also fostering a spirit of professionalism and competitiveness that is encouraging other nations to upgrade their own facilities.

Furthermore, the tournament is offering a pivotal platform for integrating technology into the sport. With advancements in data analytics and sports science, Afcon 2025 is presenting an opportunity to showcase how empirical data can influence training methodologies and game strategies.

Teams are analysing player performance in real-time, leading to informed decision-making that optimizes player health and performance. As African football continues to gain recognition, the adoption of technology for training and recovery is leading to a renaissance in how the sport is approached across the continent.

The visibility provided by Afcon is also stimulating investment in football academies and grassroots programs. Young talents from across Africa are having the chance to be scouted on an international stage.

With successful role models and increased media coverage, aspiring footballers in less developed countries are finding greater motivation and opportunities, leading to a more competitive and talented pool of players.

Moreover, this Afcon is galvanizing national pride and unity, highlighting the unifying power of football in Africa. As nations are supporting their teams, a sense of camaraderie is emerging, reinforcing local communities and fostering a passion for the sport.

In conclusion, Afcon 2025 in Morocco is not just a tournament; it is a pivotal moment in African football's evolution.

By leveraging technology, showcasing talent, and improving infrastructure, Morocco is positioned to change the trajectory of football in Africa, setting new standards for excellence in the sport.

Mbwana Samatta (Tanzania)

Riyad Mahrez (Algeria)

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (Gabon)

Mohamed Salah (Egypt)

Ramada Resort Dar launches fashion show to spotlight local designers

By Our Fashion REPORTER

IN a vibrant celebration of creativity and culture, the Ramada Resort by Wyndham Dar es Salaam has launched a quarterly fashion show dedicated to showcasing the talents of local Tanzanian designers.

The inaugural event held in late December drew a diverse crowd, eager to witness the flair and innovation of the country's fashion scene.

Ramada's Creative Director Candy Irving spoke exclusively to The AfriFiles about the inspiration behind this exciting initiative. "Our aim extends beyond merely showcasing the designers' creativity; we want to elevate their work to new heights, helping them reach audiences beyond Africa," she explained.

This event represents a commitment to nurturing homegrown talent and providing a platform for designers to gain visibility in a competitive industry.

The fashion show featured a rich tapestry of styles, reflecting the vibrant heritage and contemporary influences that shape Tanzania's fashion culture. From stunning traditional garments to avant-garde pieces, the runway came alive with color, texture, and design brilliance.

Each collection told a story, celebrating the artistry and craftsmanship of the nation's designers while engaging attendees in a meaningful dialogue about fashion.

Candy Irving

In addition to promoting local talent, the Ramada Resort aims to boost tourism by positioning itself as a hub for cultural events.

As Candy noted, such initiatives are vital in fostering a sense of community and support among creators. The hotel plans to invite industry experts and fashion enthusiasts from around the globe, further amplifying the exposure of Tanzanian designers.

The Ramada Resort is proud to be at the forefront of this movement, aiming to inspire a new generation of designers and transform the local fashion landscape. With more shows on the horizon, the hotel is set to become a beacon of creativity in Tanzania.

All Photos: Joshua Ntungili

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