

The AfriFiles

Volume III - March, 2026

We Know Africa

Women's Special Edition ■

45,700+

Newborns reached using DMF-supported medical equipment in hospitals across Tanzania

31,000+

Adolescents reached with reproductive health information through DMF programmes

2,000+

Doctors, nurses, and midwives trained to deliver better care for mothers and newborns through DMF

**TULLY-ESTHER MWAMBAPA:
A LIFE SPENT
LIFTING WOMEN**

**GRAÇA MACHEL:
LOVE, LEADERSHIP,
AND POWER
OF REPAIR**

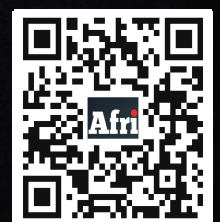
**CAN EAST AFRICA
CONQUER AFCON?**

“

Thank you, Doris, for your compassion and commitment to protecting women and children” – WHO Director General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

**DORIS
MOLLEL**

**The power of
premature hope**





DORIS MOLLEL

The power of premature hope

Cover Story:

The AfriFiles features Doris Mollel on its cover in recognition of her extraordinary work to save the lives of premature babies, support their mothers and facilitating medical practitioners. Through tireless advocacy and practical action, she is leaving a lasting mark on the fight for newborn health. Her impact is now felt far beyond Tanzania, earning global recognition, including the honour of a commemorative date on the WHO calendar.

Listen to an audio analysis- Page 7

The AfriFile Profile

The AfriFiles is the continent's flagship monthly technology-powered magazine, driven by Africa's top editors and journalists. Shared free through Emails, WhatsApp, Signal, LinkedIn, 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 today and tomorrow. Is printed by special request.



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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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6.1 births

Niger has Africa's most fertile women, with an average fertility rate of 6.1 births per woman, the highest on the continent.

1.4 births

Mauritius has Africa's least fertile women, with a total fertility rate of 1.4 births per woman, the continent's lowest level.

Pope Leo deplores Iran war

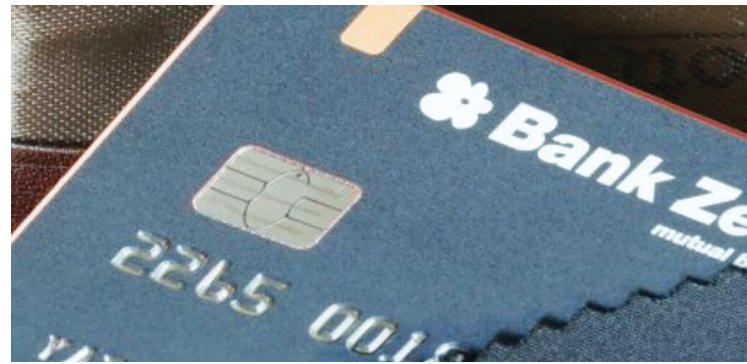
POPE Leo XIV has sharply criticised the ongoing war involving Iran, the United States and Israel, describing the bloodshed as "a scandal to the whole human family" and urging an immediate ceasefire.

In recent appeals, the pontiff said the conflict is "getting worse and worse," warning that peace cannot be built through threats, bombs or ever-deadlier weapons.

Vatican News reported that he called on all sides to remember their moral responsibility to choose dialogue over destruction, while Reuters said he voiced deep sorrow for civilians caught in the violence.

As the war continues to destabilise the Middle East, Pope Leo's message has remained consistent; stop the attacks, reopen diplomacy and put human life before military ambition.

Global Beats



Bank Zero turns 0 fraud

SOUTH Africa's digital lender Bank Zero says it has maintained zero successful card fraud since launch, even as fraud attempts against customers' cards have occurred.

The bank attributes that record to patented anti-skimming technology and a system that requires customer authorisation for every online card transaction, including on less secure websites.

Public reporting has also cited Bank Zero's claim of zero losses to fraud while the bank continued to grow its customer base. In a banking environment where fraud remains a serious risk, that record has become more than a security boast.

It is now one of Bank Zero's clearest market differentiators and a powerful part of its identity

Kim's daughter takes turret

NORTH Korean leader, Kim Jong Un has again pushed his daughter into the public spotlight, this time by appearing with her aboard a military tank during an offensive tactical drill involving a new type of tank.

The teenager, widely identified by outside analysts as Kim Ju Ae, was photographed driving the tank with her father seated behind her, a striking display that has renewed speculation she is being groomed for a future leadership role.

Her appearance came amid Pyongyang's continued effort to showcase military strength and modernise its conventional arsenal alongside its nuclear programme.

In North Korea, symbolism matters, and this carefully staged image appeared designed to project both dynastic continuity and military confidence.



Billionaires dream beyond earth

DESPITE the popular fantasy, there is no credible public evidence that large numbers of the world's wealthiest people are preparing to move permanently into outer space.

What is happening is narrower but still significant; a handful of billionaires are funding rockets, private stations and long-term settlement ideas.



Blue Origin says its vision is for millions of people to live and work in space, while SpaceX speaks of eventually building a self-sustaining city on Mars.

Axiom Space, meanwhile, has sold private trips to orbit at prices reported at at least \$55 million per seat. But these are still short missions, not relocation.

Cartoon by Gado



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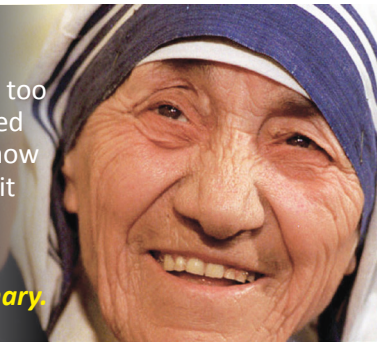


We welcome your voice. Share your views, opinions, suggestions, queries or reflections with our Editor. Your letters / message help enrich dialogue and broaden perspectives for our readers worldwide. **Send to editor@theafrifiles.com**



The work of a mother is hard, too often unheralded work. Please know that it is worth it then, now, and forever -

Mother Teresa, missionary.



Letters to the Editor

Our wealth must serve Africans

Hello Editor,

AFRICA is one of the richest continents in natural wealth, yet too many of its people remain poor while investors and politicians reap the biggest rewards.

This injustice cannot continue. Our minerals, oil, gas, forests and land must first serve the people of Africa through jobs, schools, hospitals, roads and dignified livelihoods.

Foreign investment is welcome, but it must not become a licence to drain our wealth while communities live in suffering. Leaders must negotiate in the public interest, not for private gain.

Africa's resources are a blessing. They should build African lives, not merely enrich a powerful few.

**Sheikh Idrissa Balewa,
Lagos, Nigeria
Via email.**

Where are Africa's giants?

Hello Editor,

ONE cannot help but ask; when will Africa produce another Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah and leaders of that moral weight? Our continent today appears painfully short of statesmen who think beyond themselves and place Africa's dignity above personal comfort, political survival and endless praise singing.

Too many leaders seem consumed by power, privilege and self-preservation while ordinary citizens struggle under poverty, unemployment and broken public services.

Africa does not lack resources or talent; it lacks visionary leadership anchored in sacrifice, honesty and continental purpose.

We need leaders who will dream boldly for Africa again, and live for its people, not for themselves.

**Osisol M,
Via WhatsApp**

Why others should learn from Kagame

Hello Editor,

PRESIDENT Paul Kagame's leadership has helped turn Rwanda from a nation shattered by the 1994 genocide into one of Africa's most disciplined and closely watched recovery stories.

Rwanda's economy grew by 8.9 per cent in 2024, according to the World Bank, while women hold about 64 per cent of seats in the lower house, the highest share in the world.

That progress reflects vision, order and a seriousness of purpose too often missing elsewhere.

Other African leaders should study that model; build institutions, back women, demand results and put national renewal above personal comfort and empty politics.

**Omukulu Kangesi,
Kigali, Rwanda.
Via email.**

Africa's strength wears a woman's face

THIS March, as the world marks International Women's Day 2026 under the theme "**Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls,**" Africa has every reason to do more than celebrate women in speeches and social-media captions.

It is time to say plainly what has long been true; women are not a side note in Africa's development story. They are among its chief authors.

The African Union's own 2026 commemoration, focused on honouring women's voices, work and community, points in the same direction. Recognition is not a favour to women; it is an overdue correction of the record.

Across the continent, women hold families together when economies tremble. They keep farms alive, markets moving, children in school and communities functioning, often while carrying unpaid care work that remains invisible in national accounts.

Africa has grown accustomed to praising resilience while undercounting the hands that produce it. Yet prosperity does not begin in presidential palaces or boardrooms alone.

It also begins in market stalls, classrooms, clinics, fishing communities, design studios, laboratories and small businesses where women stretch little into enough and enough into progress.

If Africa wants honest economics, it must start by acknowledging women not merely as beneficiaries of growth, but as producers of it.

This recognition should not be sentimental. It should be structural. To honour women properly is to widen access to credit, land, technology, safety, quality education and leadership.

It is to stop treating women's advancement as a "gender issue" floating outside the real business of statecraft. There is no serious economic freedom without women's economic freedom.

A continent cannot claim modernity while half its talent is underfunded, underprotected and underpaid. And no nation can boast of sovereignty while women still carry the heaviest burdens with the least reward.

Africa does not lack examples of women who have changed the terms of possibility. **Wangari Maathai** of Kenya did not simply plant trees; she linked environmental restoration to democracy, dignity and community survival, becoming the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became Africa's first female democratically elected head of state and later shared the Nobel Peace Prize for her non-violent work for peace and women's rights.

Their lives made one truth impossible to deny; women do not only endure history, they shape it.

Then there is **Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, the Nigerian economist who became the first woman and first African to lead the World Trade Organization. Her rise was not symbolic decoration for a global institution; it was proof that African women can stand at the centre of the world's hardest economic conversations and command them with authority.

Graça Machel of Mozambique has spent decades defending the rights of women and children, while also serving as her country's first education minister after independence.

But Africa must resist the temptation to celebrate only the famous. The continent is also built every day by the unnamed woman selling tomatoes before sunrise, the mother financing school fees, the community health worker cycling across villages, the miner, the tailor, the lecturer, the welder, the long-distance trader. These women may never receive medals, yet they are performing economic nation-building in plain sight.

The sharper truth is this; Africa's future will not be secured by praising women once a year and sidelining them for the remaining eleven months.

Recognition must move from rhetoric to resource. From applause to access. From tribute to transformation.

For all those reasons, **The AfriFiles** salutes African women not as supporting actors, but as the backbone of freedom, productivity and hope.

The AfriFiles salutes all African women who work tirelessly to keep the continent moving.



Simon Martha MKINA,
Editor-in-Chief

==== The Header =====



World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus presents an award to Executive Director of the Doris Mollel Foundation, Doris Mollel at WHO headquarters in Geneva on March 18, 2026. Photo: Courtesy.

Doris Mollel

The power of premature hope

Born at just 900 grammes, Doris Mollel grew into one of Africa's clearest moral voices for babies born too soon. Through law, hospital wards and relentless persuasion, she has helped turn prematurity from a private grief into a global cause.

DORIS Mollel, Tanzania's champion for babies born too soon, has built her public life on substance, not spectacle, a rare quality in a celebrity-obsessed world.


Her tangible achievements come from years of determined work, quiet sacrifice and results measured in lives saved, earned patiently in hospital wards, policy rooms and the fragile first hours of newborn life, where care, courage and persistence matter most.

Her story is not simply about a successful foundation she established, it is about a woman who took a fragile personal beginning and turned it into a movement of consequence.

What began in memory has become infrastructure, policy and hope for Tanzania, Africa and beyond.

That is why her work now feels larger than advocacy. It

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feels more at nation-building.

Doris did not come to this cause as an observer. She came to it through survival. Born prematurely herself, she has long treated that fact not as a detail from the past, but as the origin of a life's mission.

In 2015, she founded the Doris Mollel Foundation and set about doing something both simple and radical; giving babies born too soon a better chance to live.

The foundation's work has since combined direct hospital support, health-worker strengthening, neonatal infrastructure and national advocacy.

There is something unusually powerful about that arc. A child who entered the world at its most precarious edge grew up to defend others at precisely that same edge. In Doris Mollel's hands, biography became public service.

The early years were not glamorous. They were practical, grinding and urgent. Hospitals needed incubators. Some needed oxygen support. Others needed trained personnel and basic neonatal tools.

The foundation then responded the way serious organisations do; by identifying the gaps, raising resources, delivering equipment and returning again and again to places where the need was greatest.

What makes this work especially resonant in Tanzania is that for many newborns, survival is decided by brutally simple things; warmth, oxygen, feeding support, infection control, skilled hands and time.

When those are absent, a premature child is left to fight with too little help. Doris Mollel understood that early, and she built her model around it.

When care became policy

But Doris also understood something larger, that machines alone would never be enough to save lives.

As the work deepened, another crisis came into view, mothers of premature babies were spending weeks, sometimes months, beside fragile infants in specialised care, yet the law treated preterm birth much like any other delivery.

Leave was running out. Jobs were at risk. Families were being pushed to the brink just when their babies needed them most. That is when the mission widened from charity to systems change.

The campaign that followed required patience more than theatre. It took coalition-building, evidence, meetings, persuasion and repeated engagement with lawmakers and officials.

Over time, the case became impossible to ignore; a baby born too soon needs not only medicine, but parental presence, legal protection and time.

Then came the breakthrough, as President Samia Suluhu Hassan, declared that for mothers of premature babies, maternity leave should begin only when the child leaves special care.

Later, legal amendments extended paid maternity leave for mothers of preterm babies up to the completion of the standard 40 weeks of pregnancy, while fathers also gained longer paternity leave.

It was one of the clearest acknowledgements yet that newborn survival depends on families being allowed to care without being punished for it.

That policy change did more than ease a legal burden. It changed the national conversation. It said, in effect, that a premature baby is not an inconvenience to be managed, but a life to be protected properly.

And it marked one of Doris Mollel's most important achievements; she helped persuade the state to see prematurity not as misfortune, but as policy.

A cause that reached the world

The moral force of that work travelled beyond Tanzania.

In 2025, the World Health Assembly officially added World Prematurity Day to WHO's international health calendar. WHO now marks it on 15 November, giving formal global visibility to the urgent challenge of babies born too soon and the need for quality care.

For Doris, that moment carried a special resonance. WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus publicly wrote: "I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Doris Mollel for her remarkable efforts."

The Header



Second from left is Doris Mollel, Director of Doris Mollel Foundation, together with Dr. Alex Gasasira, WHO Tanzania Representative, exchange signed contract documents. WHO has been supporting DMF in its commitment to improving maternal and newborn health across the country.

Facts



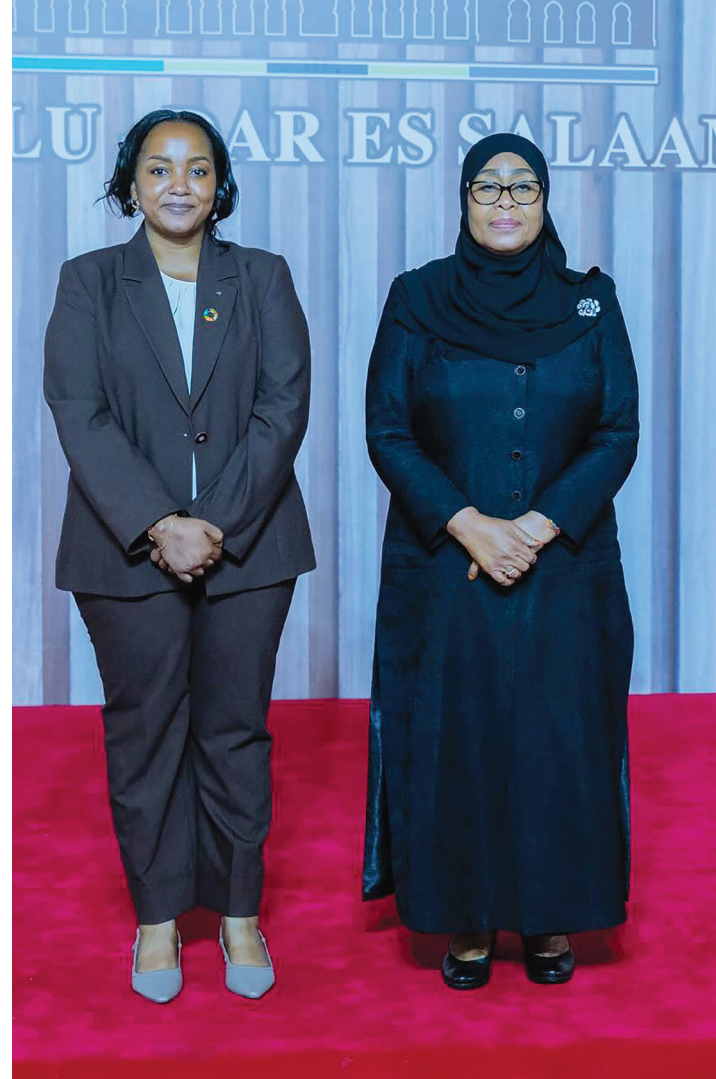
Who is Premature Baby

A premature (preterm or born too soon) baby is an infant born before 37 weeks of pregnancy. Because they arrive early, their organs are not fully developed, often requiring specialised care in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) to support survival and healthy development.



Those words mattered because they recognised what her journey had already made plain, this was no longer a local campaign around an overlooked issue. It had become part of the architecture of global health.

That kind of recognition does not come easily. It is earned through years of showing up, of making the invisible visible, of insisting that the smallest lives deserve the full weight of public concern.



Doris Mollel with President Samia Suluhu Hassan who has praised DMF efforts in rescuing born too soon babies in Tanzania. Photo: State House.

Recently, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus awarded Doris Mollel Foundation Executive Director, Doris Mollel, for her exceptional leadership in improving maternal and newborn health. The award was presented at WHO headquarters in Geneva on March 18, 2026, honouring her efforts to advance care for preterm babies

The building that changed the map

Yet the most persuasive measure of Doris Mollel's success is not found in resolutions or praise, it is found in tangible effects.

In Kwimba District, Mwanza Region, the Doris Mollel Foundation led the construction of a neonatal care unit valued at about Tanzania Shilling 2.125 billion, thanks to Keep a Child Alive (KCA), a global nonprofit co-founded by singer Alicia Keys and activist Leigh Blake.

The facility was designed to serve more than 1,300 vulnerable newborns a year in a district where around 18,000 babies are born annually and where, until recently, there had been no neonatal intensive care unit at all.

Before this, critically ill or premature babies often had to endure emergency referrals of nearly 100 kilometres to Mwanza City, delays that could cost lives.

The new centre changes that equation, it offers incubators, breathing support, warming equipment, specialised neonatal beds and Kangaroo Mother Care space. More importantly, it brings life-saving care closer to home.

That is the difference between policy and impact, whereby policy can promise while a building can deliver.

The Kwimba facility also reflects a humane philosophy of care, it was designed around the principle that mothers should remain close to their babies, even when those babies need advanced support. That kind of "zero separation" thinking recognises what science and common sense have both long suggested, survival is strengthened by care that is not only technical, but deeply human.

And the symbolism runs deep, that a woman who once stood for a neglected cause is now part of building the very institutions that make survival more likely. The argument has become a ward. The advocacy has become a structure.

Beyond one ribbon-cutting moment

Kwimba did not appear out of nowhere, it stands on years of quieter, less celebrated work.



This image was captured from above during the early stages of construction of Tanzania's first standard Neonatal Care Unit, located in Kwimba District. This is another milestone of DMF commitment. Photo: Courtecy.



A Premature babies' hospital built by DMF Doris Mollel and the USA entity, Alicia Keys Foundation in Kwimba District, Mwanza Region. Photo: DMF Courtesy

The foundation has supported hospitals with neonatal equipment and supplies, while also advancing projects that strengthen newborn care in underserved regions such as Man'yara. Its model has become increasingly clear; assess the gap, deliver the tools, build capacity, advocate for structural change, then move to the next place where the system is weakest.

That is why Doris Mollel's work now feels scalable rather than symbolic. It is not built around one speech, one donor, one viral moment or one ribbon-cutting ceremony. It is built around a repeatable idea; fragile lives deserve serious systems.

Serious institutions have noticed, as Ashoka's 2025 fellowship described Doris as building a previously non-existing comprehensive system for improving the survival and well-being of premature infants.

WHO's Africa office later noted that President Samia specifically acknowledged the Doris Mollel Foundation's leadership in mobilising resources for the Kwimba neonatal care unit. That is not token praise. It is institutional recognition.

DMF tangible feats in numbers

The Doris Mollel Foundation has recorded measurable, life-saving impact in Tanzania's newborn health sector. To date, it has supported the establishment and strengthening of over 10 Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs) across the country, including in underserved regions.

The foundation has donated more than 250 pieces of critical neonatal equipment; such as incubators and CPAP machines—benefiting over 20 hospitals.

It has also trained over 2,000 healthcare workers in specialised newborn care and reached more than 5,000 mothers through awareness campaigns on prenatal health.

Newborns 50,000 reached using DMF-supported medical equipment in hospitals across Tanzania, as well as 32,000 adolescents reached with reproductive health information.

These efforts have directly contributed to improved survival rates of premature babies and strengthened Tanzania's neonatal care system.

The quiet measure of legacy

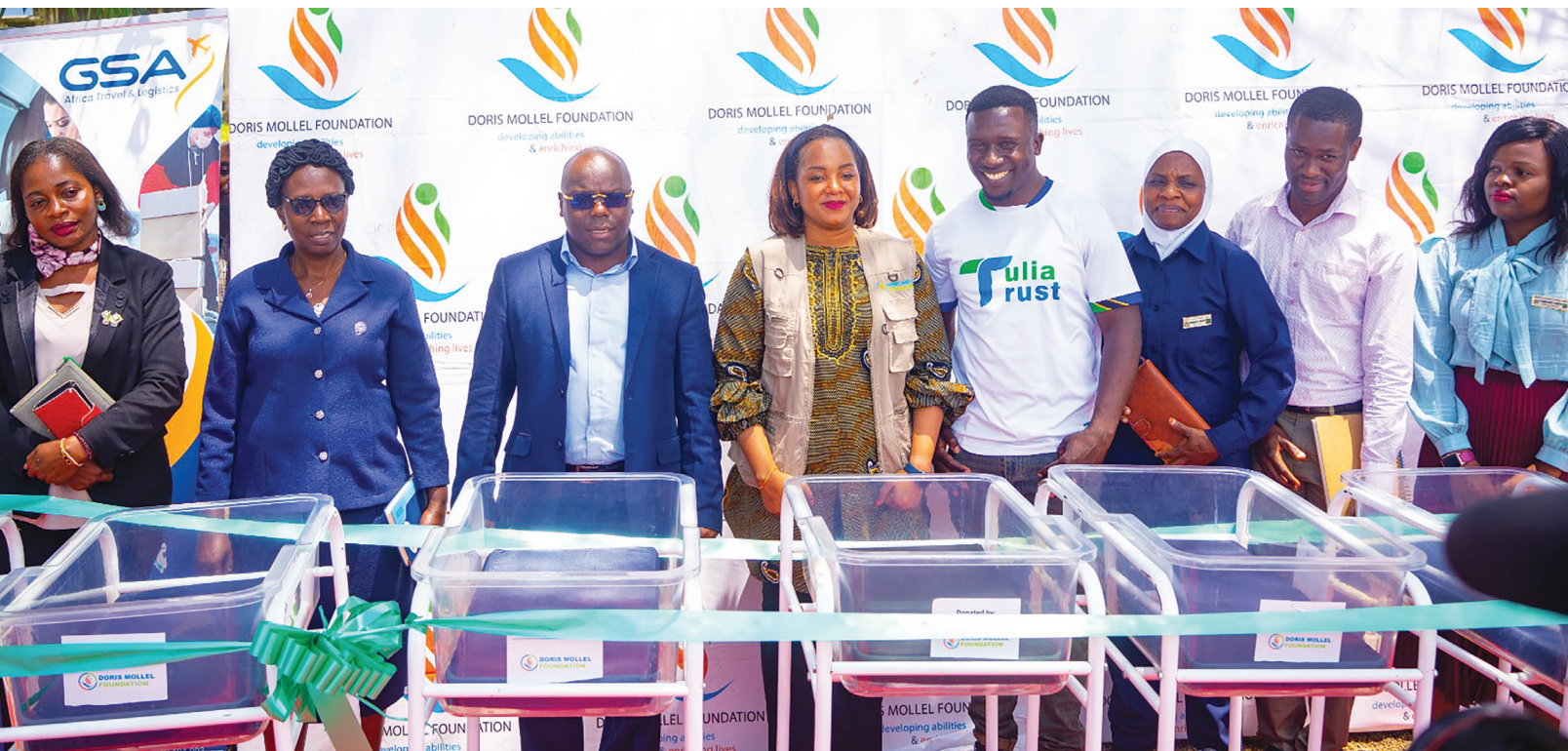
Perhaps Doris Mollel's deepest achievement is that she has helped Tanzania see a premature baby differently. Not as a sad case, not as a temporary emergency, and not as a private burden for one exhausted mother, but as a citizen whose survival depends on whether a country is willing to organise care with seriousness, law with compassion, and infrastructure with foresight.

That is no small shift, it asks a nation to value its most vulnerable lives at the exact moment those lives are least visible and least powerful.

It demands empathy, yes, but also budgets, training, transport, buildings, law and sustained political will.

For a movement born from one woman's memory of entering the world too soon, that is an extraordinary reach.

Doris Mollel did not merely raise awareness; she changed the odds. ■



On February 22, 2023, then Mbeya Regional Commissioner Juma Homera (third from left) received medical equipment worth TSh13 million from the Doris Mollel Foundation to support neonatal care at Mbeya Regional Referral Hospital. Photo: DMF courtesy.



African women and the quiet struggle for ‘instant miracles’

By Ndossi Bitte SAM

ON any given week across African cities, from Mwanza to Lagos, Nairobi to Johannesburg, someone is buying a miracle. Not metaphorically, but literally.

Among the most affected are women across generations; elderly women, young mothers, students, young professionals and even girls growing into adulthood under the influence of inherited belief systems.

In many homes, a mother introduces her daughter to the idea that success in education, work, business or marriage may depend not only on discipline and effort, but also on spiritual objects, private prayers and paid encounters with “anointed” power.

The shift is striking. Where a handbag once carried a snack, a notebook or a make-up kit, it may now hold a bottle of “anointing” oil, a sachet of “holy” salt, a spray bottle of “blessed” water, or even soil said to have come from sacred ground.

A practical skills class, such as embroidery or small business training, is sometimes replaced by a private prayer session priced just high enough to appear serious, yet still affordable to the desperate.

It is easy to dismiss this as spectacle. It is more accurate, and far more uncomfortable, to recognise it as a system.

Across Tanzania’s Lake and Western zones, a field study by experts from a Lutheran-based theological college in Mwanza revealed what many Africans already sense but rarely explain

in policy language; faith has quietly evolved into an informal marketplace.

In that marketplace belief, survival and economic aspiration meet in ways that are complex, emotionally charged and sometimes dangerous.

In this context, Tanzania is not alone. It is part of a larger African pattern.

Where urgency meets theology

In places such as Mwanza, Kagera, Tabora and Kigoma, religion is dense, vibrant and deeply woven into ordinary life.

Christianity in particular has grown rapidly over the decades, shaped by missionary legacies, charismatic revival movements and local spiritual traditions. Yet that growth has also brought fragmentation.

The study found a surge in what is described as misleading theology — a form of religious teaching that promises immediate and visible outcomes; healing, wealth, protection, power and rapid breakthrough.

It relies heavily on dramatic demonstrations, symbolic objects and highly personalised spiritual authority. Importantly, this is not taking place on the edge of society. It is happening at its centre.

The phrase “misleading theology” was coined in 2019 by the All-Africa Conference of Churches, an ecumenical body headquartered in Nairobi.



In such circumstances, “instant miracles” become attractive because they speak directly to exhaustion. A woman living under pressure does not always have the luxury of waiting for slow systems to work. She wants relief now.

It refers to teachings and practices that undermine the authority of God by placing human beings, especially self-styled “men of God,” at the centre of divine intervention.

Instead of drawing believers toward sincere worship, such systems can trap them in dependence on personalities, rituals and staged spiritual transactions.

Women, in vast numbers and across all ages, have become major victims of this conundrum.

Why women are especially vulnerable

The study found that the drivers of this surge are deeply systemic. Economic hardship, especially among women, youth and informal workers, creates demand for accelerated solutions.

Psychological stress intensifies that demand. In many African households, women remain the emotional and practical centre of family life.

They carry the burden of raising children, preserving homes, dealing with illness, enduring unstable relationships and surviving partners’ alcoholism or substance abuse. They absorb social pressure while being expected to keep the family standing.

In such circumstances, “instant miracles” become attractive because they speak directly to exhaustion. A woman living under pressure does not always have the luxury of waiting for slow systems to work. She wants relief now.

And in a worldview where the spiritual and material are inseparable, the idea of divine intervention does not seem irra-

tional. It feels natural, even necessary. The real question is not whether people will seek help. It is who is ready to offer it.

A continental pattern

What is happening in Tanzania mirrors developments elsewhere on the continent.

In Nigeria, the prosperity gospel has developed into a sophisticated religious economy. Mega-churches operate with corporate precision, charismatic leaders command huge followings, and the promise is familiar: divine favour translated into material success.

Many of these institutions also provide social services, but critics have long pointed to the heavy financial expectations placed on followers.

In Kenya, controversies involving unregulated religious groups have forced a national reckoning. Cases involving extreme practices, including deadly fasting under spiritual instruction, have triggered serious debate about the limits of religious freedom and the need for stronger state oversight.

In South Africa, the issue has often taken a theatrical form. Pastors have gained notoriety for instructing congregants to eat grass, submit to chemical sprays or perform bizarre acts in the name of healing and deliverance. Such incidents have provoked investigations and calls for tighter regulation.

Across these contexts, the pattern is consistent; charismatic authority expands rapidly, regulation struggles to keep pace, followers navigate a mix of hope and pressure, and the line between faith and exploitation becomes dangerously blurred.

This is not merely theological drift. It is structural transformation, and women again bear a disproportionate share of the burden.

Why “instant faith” works

To understand the persistence of misleading theology, it is not enough to condemn it. One must understand its logic.

First, it is responsive. Where formal institutions, religious or governmental, are slow, distant or inaccessible, charismatic ministries offer immediacy. Problems are named directly and addressed personally.

Second, it is experiential. Testimonies, visible rituals and dramatic demonstrations create the feeling of evidence. In communities where formal verification may feel distant, lived experience becomes the main measure of truth.

Third, it speaks to aspiration. In societies where upward mobility is uncertain, the promise of divine acceleration resonates deeply. Prosperity is not viewed as greed. It is viewed as justice finally arriving.

Finally, it is culturally coherent. African worldviews have long recognised interaction between visible and invisible forces. Misleading theology does not invent this idea; it amplifies and redirects it.

Where churches are losing ground

One of the most revealing findings from the Tanzanian study is not only the rise of alternative ministries, but the growing perception that established churches are failing to meet every day needs.

Women, who often form the largest share of congregations, remain in constant search of comfort, guidance and personal attention.

Respondents pointed to three major gaps; pastoral distance, transactional perception and limited social intervention.

Many churches are seen as formal and hierarchical, with too little room for close personal engagement. Institutional church leaders acknowledge the pressure.

They say pastoral responsibilities are overwhelming, combining administration, preaching, family duties and congregational care. As Scripture says, the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.

At the same time, offerings and contributions are increasingly interpreted by some believers as financial obligations that do not always come with equal spiritual support.

Church leaders dispute that view, arguing that grace is a free gift and giving is an act of gratitude, not a transaction. Yet the perception persists.

Historically, churches also offered stronger material and emotional support. Many respondents now feel that this role has weakened. Into that vacuum step charismatic ministries that may not offer better theology, but do offer better accessibility, responsiveness and personalisation.

The cost of belief

The consequences are not abstract. The Tanzanian findings point to real damage; financial depletion among already vulnerable women and families, delayed or abandoned medical

treatment, cycles of hope followed by disillusionment, family fragmentation, social isolation and, in extreme cases, loss of life.

Perhaps the most damaging feature is how failure is explained. When promised outcomes do not appear, blame is often shifted back to the believer; insufficient faith, incomplete obedience, hidden sin.

The system remains untouched. The woman bears the loss.

Ffreedom and what must change

Governments across Africa are increasingly aware of the problem, but responses remain uneven. The challenge is delicate; how to protect citizens from exploitation without violating religious freedom.

In Tanzania, as the study found, religious organisations are registered but only lightly monitored. Intervention often begins after harm has already become public.

South Africa and Kenya have begun debating tougher oversight, while Rwanda has gone further by closing some churches and requiring theological training and registration for practitioners.

A meaningful response would include verification of credentials, transparent financial practice, stronger accountability and closer collaboration between religious bodies and the state. This is not about controlling belief. It is about governing practice.

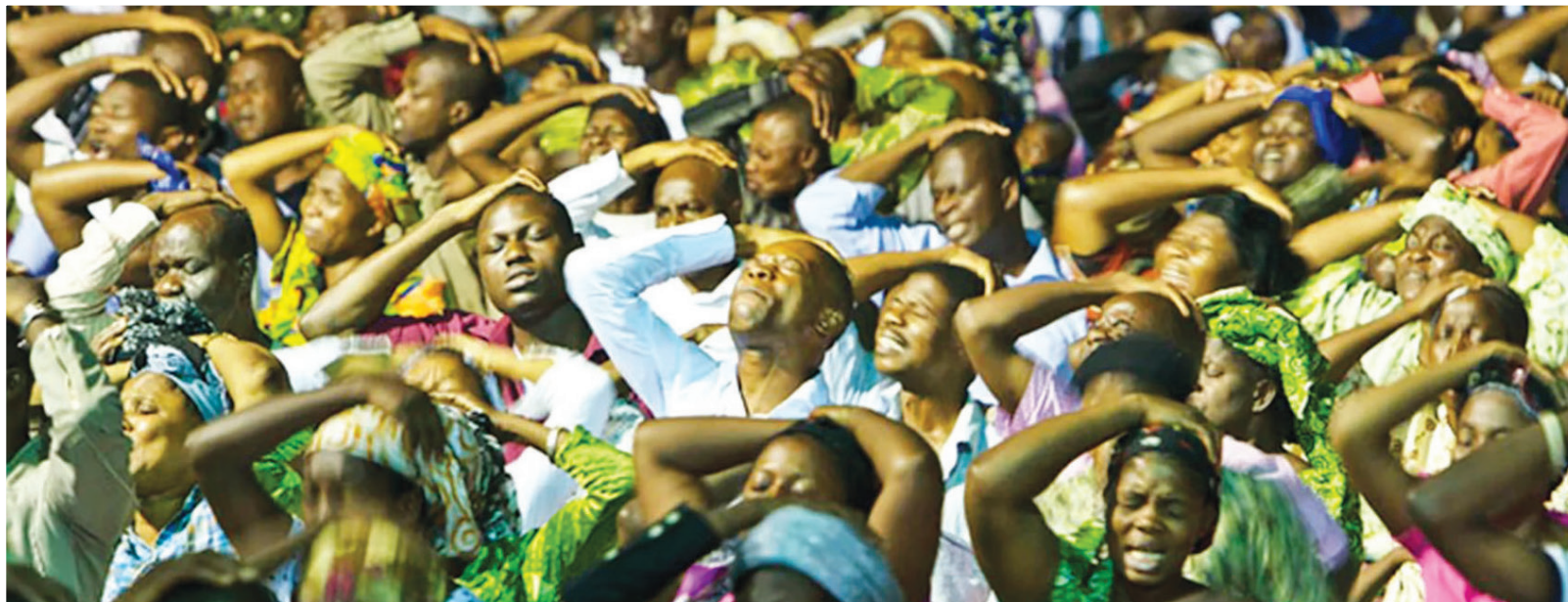
The deeper truth, however, is this; faith is not failing. Systems are. Africans are not believing too much. They are believing within unequal, under-regulated and economically strained environments.

Faith becomes both a coping mechanism and a survival strategy. When churches fail to engage closely, governments hesitate to regulate, and social systems leave millions desperate, alternative structures will rise. Some will heal. Others will exploit.

Africa will remain religious. The real question is whether its faith institutions, old and new, can evolve fast enough to match the urgency of the people they serve.

For across the continent, belief is abundant. What remains in dangerously short supply is trust.

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Graça Machel

Love, leadership, and power of repair



Graça Machel's big smile. Photo: Júlio Dengucho / Forbes.

By Branca XADREQUE

GRAÇA Machel's story is often introduced with a line that sounds like a headline; 'The woman who married two presidents.'

Yes, it is true, she was the wife of Mozambique's first president, Samora Machel, and later the wife of South Africa's first democratic president, Nelson Mandela.

But dipping her life to a rare marital distinction misses the deeper achievement; she turned proximity to power into a lifetime of public service, and she built institutions that outlast ceremonies, speeches, and titles.

She was born Graça Simbine on October 17, 1945 in what was then Portuguese Mozambique, shaped early by the constraints of colonial rule and the promise of education as an exit door.

In her adult life, she would come to embody that belief, first as a teacher, then as a liberation activist with a political party and former liberation movement that has governed Mozambique since its independence from Portugal in 1975 - Frelimo, and eventually as Mozambique's first Minister of Education and Culture after independence.

A love story inside a revolution

Her marriage to Samora Machel in 1975 unfolded in the bright, anxious dawn of a new nation.

Mozambique had just stepped into independence; the dreams were big, the wounds were fresh, and the expectations, especially for those in leadership, were immense.

What is often overlooked is that Graça did not arrive as a decorative First Lady. She arrived with a portfolio. As minister,

she helped lead a national push to expand schooling, part of a broader nation-building project aimed at turning liberation into lived opportunity.

The warmth and intimacy of that first marriage, two people building a country while raising a family, sat alongside the relentless harshness of a region on fire.

In 1986, Samora Machel died in a plane crash near the Mozambique - South Africa border, abruptly ending a partnership that had been equal parts romance, responsibility, and national symbolism.

For many, grief closes doors. For Graça, it became a doorway into a larger sense of duty.

She moved through mourning without abandoning the work, an emotional discipline that would later define her public life; love, yes, but never love that narrows the world. Love as a widening.

From State House to global backer

In the 1990s, her public voice expanded beyond Mozambique, she became widely recognised for her advocacy on children's rights, most famously through the landmark Machel Report on the impact of armed conflict on children, presented to the United Nations.

The report helped force the international system to confront realities many preferred to keep invisible; children recruited, raped, maimed, displaced, caught in wars that adults designed.

This was not advocacy as performance. It was advocacy as architecture, building the moral and policy framework that later shaped how the UN and humanitarian actors approached children in conflict settings.

Her work helped make “children and armed conflict” a sustained global agenda rather than a periodic outrage.

A different kind of spotlight

When she married Nelson Mandela on his 80th birthday in 1998, the world watched with a soft romantic fascination; two icons, two histories, two nations stitched together by love.

But the marriage also carried a quieter meaning. Graça became the only woman in modern history known to have been First Lady of two different countries; Mozambique and South Africa.

Yet even in South Africa’s intense public gaze, she resisted being turned into a symbol without substance. She kept working, across education, children’s rights, women’s leadership, and peace-building, and she continued to build institutions rather than personal mythology.

What made the Mandela marriage compelling was not celebrity. It was the sense of tenderness after long struggle, an older love, mature and unhurried, lived with humility.

Mandela’s public charisma was legendary; Graça’s power has always been more discreet, the kind that convenes people, secures commitments, and leaves systems stronger than before.

Rebuilding lives, not reputations

If you want to see Graça Machel’s most concrete legacy, look at what she built away from podiums, especially the Foundation for Community Development (FDC) in Mozambique, which she founded in 1994.

FDC emerged in a country recovering from conflict and displacement. Its mission, put simply, has been to strengthen communities by supporting and building the capacity of civil society organisations.

Furthermore, helping them become effective engines for development, social justice, and poverty reduction.

Many describes FDC as a major national social and economic development foundation, funding and operating programmes across much of the country and acting as a bridge between donors, communities, and institutions.

That bridging function matters. In many African contexts, communities are rich in resilience but poor in access to financing, to formal systems, to technical support, to policy influence. FDC’s role has been to help local organisations professionalise, scale, and deliver—so the work doesn’t collapse when a single project ends.



With President Samora Machel.
Photo: Courtesy

This is how foundations truly “transform lives;” not merely by handing out grants, but by building the muscles of community problem-solving.

A strengthened local organisation can keep girls in school, support survivors of violence, build livelihoods, advocate for services, and respond faster than distant bureaucracies ever can. That is institutional love—love with a budget, governance, and a plan.

Now the regional reach

Graça’s influence is not confined to Mozambique. Through the Graça Machel Trust, her work has also focused on women’s economic power and girls’ rights.

The Trust is supporting women entrepreneurs to grow enterprises, expand financial access, and advocating for policy reforms that make societies more supportive for women and children.

The Trust’s materials describe programmes such as Women Creating Wealth, designed to address the wealth creation gap by strengthening women’s entrepreneurship and economic agency.

Its approach is not just individual empowerment but ecosystem change -mentorship, networks, and policy advocacy that shift the conditions around women and girls, not simply their personal confidence.

Major development actors have also profiled the Trust in terms of its focus on social justice and the rights of women and children—reinforcing how her work sits at the intersection of values and practical delivery.

Love as a public ethic

To call Graça Machel’s life “smooth” is to misunderstand the terrain she crossed; liberation struggle, state-building, grief, and the intense scrutiny that comes with marrying two historic leaders.

But there is a smoothness in how she carries that terrain, an emotional steadiness, a refusal to be embittered, a discipline of compassion.

Her love story is not just romantic. It is civic. She has consistently treated society as something you can repair, if you organise, fund, train, and advocate.

That is why her foundations matter. They are the proof that her life is not merely an extraordinary personal journey, but a public project; to build communities where women can create wealth, where children can survive conflict and grow beyond it, and where civil society is strong enough to hold the future steady when politics turns loud.

And perhaps that is the most beautiful part of her story; she did not cling to power’s spotlight. She used it, briefly and strategically, to illuminate others, then returned, again and again, to the patient work of building. ■



Graça with her husband, President Nelson Mandela. Photo: Courtesy



Mariam Nabatanzi has given birth to 44 children at by the age of 40. This picture was taken in 2022. Photo: Reuters

Mariam the mother of 44 What a fighter!

By Nakazibwe MUYANJA

IN Uganda's Mukono District, Mariam Nabatanzi has become known far beyond her village not simply because she gave birth to 44 children, but because she turned that astonishing fact into an everyday struggle for survival, discipline and care.

Public reports describe her as one of the world most prolific mothers alive; she had 44 children in 15 pregnancies, and 38 of them survived.

Her births include six sets of twins, four sets of triplets and five sets of quadruplets, making her family an extreme outlier even in a country long known for large households.

But the number alone can mislead. To tell Mariam's story only as a biological marvel is to miss the harder truth.

This is also a story about child marriage, poverty, abandonment and the unpaid labour of motherhood stretched to its absolute limits.

She was married off at 12 in 1993 and gave birth to her first set of twins at 13, that time she was living in cramped cement-block homes in Kasawo, north of Kampala, after the man who fathered her children left her to support the surviving 38 largely on her own.

How did she manage? First, by necessity. Mariam's life became a system, as older children helped raise younger ones. Chores were organised on a roster pinned to the wall. Cooking, washing and care were shared because they had to be.

In the house there were bunk beds – which are crowded, some children slept on thin mattresses and others on the floor, and where a single day could consume enormous quantities of maize flour.

Later the family got a homestead which had 17 rooms, leaking roofs, too few beds, and a family still trying to stretch every room, mattress and meal. In such a home, management was not a parenting style. It was survival.

To feed her family, Mariam decided not to choose jobs, she turned her hands to hairdressing, event decorating, collecting and selling scrap metal, brewing local gin and selling herbal medicine.

The money, by all accounts, disappeared quickly into food, clothing, medical bills and school fees. What looks from afar like an unbelievable family story is, up close, an exhausting economy of constant improvisation.

What fertile womb?

There is also the medical explanation, which made her famous but did not make her life easier. After her first twins were born, doctors told Mariam she had unusually large ovaries and warned that hormonal birth-control methods could be dangerous for her.

Doctors explaining her case as a form of hyperovulation, where multiple eggs are released in a cycle, sharply increasing the chance of twins, triplets or quadruplets.

In other words, her fertility was not a spectacle she engineered. It was bound up with biology and a health system that appears to have offered her little practical room to reclaim control early enough.

Yet, the most revealing part of Mariam's story may be neither medical nor numerical. It is emotional. Her eldest child, Ivan Kibuka, saying his mother was overwhelmed and crushed by the work.

That remark says almost everything. A family that large can only function when children grow up quickly, when labour is shared, and when a mother becomes planner, provider, disciplinarian and emotional anchor at once.

Mariam's household seems to have endured because she built order inside scarcity and because the older children stepped into responsibility early, not because the burden was somehow light.

The question many people ask is simple; how old are the first and last born now? Here, the public record is not perfectly consistent, but the broad picture is clear.

Now her eldest child, Ivan, is 31, and that the last-born surviving child is eight.

Her first pregnancy was a set of twins in 1994, so strictly speaking, the "first-born" children were twins rather than a single child. Because exact birthdays are not consistently published, those present-day ages are best treated as close estimates rather than exact figures.

And what of government support? The honest answer is that public reporting suggests it has been limited and uneven rather than sustained.

An earlier report citing a local councillor said district politicians had mobilised government funds to provide maize seeds. But later reporting in 2019 still depicted Mariam as surviving mainly through her own labour and the help of her children, while in 2023 described her as still hoping for outside help to secure her home, repair roofs and buy beds.

In other words, the support visible in public reporting looks more ad hoc than institutional. Charity, donor help and personal hustle appear to have mattered more than any regular state-backed safety net.

Her story also sits inside a wider Ugandan reality. Unicef says Uganda is home to more than five million child brides and that roughly one in three young women were married in childhood.

Uganda's own national strategy notes a teenage pregnancy rate of about 25 percent, while World Bank data show that al-



Some of Mariam's children. Photo: Getty Image

though fertility has fallen over time, Uganda's total fertility rate was still about 4.283 births per woman in 2023, with adolescent fertility at 107 births per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19.

Mariam's case is extreme, but the forces around it, early marriage, pressure on girls, weak protection and economic strain, are not.

So the real measure of Mariam Nabatanzi is not the tabloid label often attached to her. It is the harder, quieter question of endurance.

She did not "manage" 44 births because she found motherhood easy or abundance plentiful, Mariam managed because each day demanded management; feeding many mouths, stretching tiny incomes, assigning chores, protecting children from despair and trying to hold dignity together in a life that gave her very little margin for error.

That is what the world should see when it looks at Mariam; not only a woman of extraordinary fertility, but a woman of extraordinary stamina. ■



Meal is ready for the family. Photo: Reuters

Truphena Muthoni

Her hug turned into a climate protest

Truphena Muthoni hugging a tree.
Photo: Courtesy

By Mukua WACHIRI

AT a time when climate activism often arrives wrapped in reports, conferences and exhausted jargon, Truphena Muthoni chose something simpler and harder: she held on to a tree.

Then she kept holding on. For 72 hours, from December 8 to 11, 2025, the young Kenyan environmental activist embraced a tree in Nyeri and turned an intimate act into a public argument about forests, memory and survival.

Guinness World Records later confirmed the feat as the longest marathon hugging a tree, beating the 48-hour mark she herself had set earlier in 2025.

She was 22 when the new record was ratified, and by then she had already become one of the most recognisable young faces of environmental advocacy in Kenya.

It would be easy to reduce Muthoni's achievement to spectacle. A young woman hugs a tree for three days, cameras gather, headlines bloom, the internet approves. But that would miss the point of what she has been trying to do.

Muthoni has been explicit that the stunt was never just about endurance. Guinness quoted her saying she wanted to "elevate and advocate for the protection of Indigenous trees" and to honour Indigenous knowledge systems as central to climate solutions.

In her telling, the first record was a statement; the second was a commitment. She wanted to push people past the romance of tree planting and toward a harder question: what are we already destroying while congratulating ourselves for planting replacements?

That distinction matters in Kenya, where forest restoration has become both a national policy priority and a moral challenge. The government's tree-growing campaign aims to plant 15 billion trees by 2032 and raise national tree cover from about 12 percent to 30 percent.

Officials and public agencies regularly frame this as central to climate resilience, water security and ecosystem recovery. Muthoni's activism fits into that larger national push, but it also sharpens it.

Her message is that reforestation cannot become an excuse for indifference to existing indigenous forests. Planting seedlings is easier politics than protecting old ecosystems, yet the latter is often more important for biodiversity, water systems

and cultural continuity.

In that sense, her protest is not against tree planting; it is against shallow environmentalism.

What makes Muthoni especially compelling is that she has fused environmental activism with emotional language that many campaigns lack. The World Organization of the Scout Movement, which profiled her after her first Guinness record, described her as a sustainability advocate and mental-health survivor whose work sits at the intersection of nature and well-being.

She has spoken about the healing power of nature and about climate-related distress, including trauma linked to droughts, floods and fires. That framing gives her activism unusual depth.

She is not only asking people to save forests because carbon matters, though it does. She is also arguing that nature is part of human repair, and that ecological destruction leaves psychological wounds as well as physical ones.

Her contribution, then, is not best measured only in the number of hours she hugged a tree. It is visible in the way she has shifted public language.

She has helped make indigenous trees a mainstream talking point in Kenya's climate conversation, and she has done it in a form that people remember. She founded an initiative called Hug the Earth, turning symbolic activism into a recognisable platform.

Guinness also reported that every detail of her appearance during the attempt was designed to send a message; the colours in her hair and clothing carried environmental symbolism, and at one point she wore a blindfold to honour people living with disabilities and their vulnerability to climate shocks.

That may sound theatrical, but activism has always needed theatre. The question is whether the theatre serves truth. In Muthoni's case, it clearly does.

There is also a concrete civic effect to what she has done. Her 72-hour record did not vanish into applause. In December 2025, President William Ruto recognised her achievement, awarded her the Head of State Commendation and named her an ambassador for Kenya's 15 Billion Tree Planting Campaign.

The role has not been fully operationalised; by February 2026, Muthoni herself said she had not yet been clearly briefed on its duties. But even that bureaucratic awkwardness tells its own story.



President William Ruto (right) and his Deputy Kithure Kindiki with environmental activist, Truphena Muthoni who hugged a tree in Nyeri for a record 72-hours. Photo: State House



It shows that a grassroots act of endurance was powerful enough to force the state to respond, even if the machinery of government has been slower than the symbolism. That is a form of impact in itself: she made official Kenya pay attention.

Her activism has also produced tangible educational recognition. Mount Kenya University awarded Muthoni a full scholarship starting in January 2026 to pursue Environmental Studies or a related field, explicitly linking the support to her work on climate awareness, forest conservation, tree planting and community engagement.

The university said the scholarship would help her turn moral passion into research, training and practical impact.

That matters because one of the weaknesses of modern activism is that it can trap young campaigners in permanent symbolism without building their long-term capacity. Muthoni's scholarship offers a different path; a chance to back courage with expertise, and public influence with technical knowledge.

Recognition has also spread beyond formal institutions. Timely Kenya included her among its Top 20 Most Impactful Women, and Citizen Digital cited her among the list's top figures in early 2026.

Kenyan media have increasingly presented her not as a novelty act but as part of a broader generation of women shaping public life through unconventional leadership.

In Parliament, MPs highlighted her upcoming travel to Brazil, where she is expected to engage with Indigenous communities and attempt another record by hugging 1,172 trees in one hour.

Whether or not she succeeds, that planned journey is significant. It shows her activism moving from national symbol to transnational conversation, linking Kenyan forest struggles to Indigenous and global climate debates beyond East Africa.

Still, Muthoni's greatest contribution may be more cultural

than institutional. She has made care look radical.

In an era that often mistakes noise for leadership, she has built a public identity around stillness, endurance and tenderness toward the living world. Guinness quoted her saying that healing the planet does not have to begin with fear or violence; it can begin with care. That line helps explain why her story has travelled.

She has found a form of protest that is visually simple, emotionally legible and morally difficult to dismiss. She is asking people not only to plant, but to protect; not only to count trees, but to love them enough to keep them standing.

For a young activist, that is already a substantial legacy, Truphena Muthoni has broken a world record twice, but the record is not the real story. The real story is that she has transformed a deeply personal gesture into public pressure.

She has widened Kenya's environmental vocabulary, drawn fresh attention to indigenous forests, connected climate action to mental wellbeing, won national and academic recognition, and given many young Africans a new picture of what activism can look like.

Not every movement begins with a march. Some begin with one person refusing to let go. ■

Chivayo faces costly split



The case is further sharpened by disagreement over the legal nature of their relationship. News reports based on the filings indicate that Madzikanda's side argues the two entered into a valid customary law marriage in 2017, while Chivayo disputes the extent of the obligations she says arise from that union.

Wicknell Chivayo and Sonja Madzikanda during their happier times. Photo: Courtesy.

maintenance of US\$40,000 and a range of luxury assets she says should form part of the settlement.

Reports based on those papers say her claims include several high-end vehicles, among them three Rolls-Royces, as well as properties in Zimbabwe and South Africa and selected business interests she considers part of the couple's shared estate.

Some reports also say she is seeking additional funds tied to lifestyle, holidays and the general upkeep of the children.

Running alongside that financial fight is a separate and equally tense dispute over child access. In an urgent High Court application filed earlier, Chivayo asked the court to grant him structured access to the couple's two minor children.

Reporting on the court papers says he wants regular alternating access, including weekends, part of school holidays, birthdays, major public or Christian holidays and virtual communication.

He argues that meaningful contact has been restricted despite repeated attempts to resolve the issue outside court.

Madzikanda has pushed back against that application, arguing through court papers that Chivayo already has regular and meaningful access to the children and that his urgent application is unnecessary.

Reports say she has described the move as flawed and superfluous, suggesting that the dispute is not as straightforward as one side alone has presented it.

The case is further sharpened by disagreement over the legal nature of their relationship. News reports based on the filings indicate that Madzikanda's side argues the two entered into a valid customary law marriage in 2017, while Chivayo disputes the extent of the obligations she says arise from that union.

That disagreement matters because it sits at the centre of the maintenance claims and the question of what, in law, can properly be treated as matrimonial property.

What gives the case its special charge is the scale of the figures and the lifestyle they imply. The filings, as reported, read like an inventory of extreme wealth; luxury vehicles, prime real estate and elite living costs.

Yet, beneath the spectacle lies a more familiar courtroom struggle, one involving the end of a relationship, the care of children and a fierce attempt by each side to define what fairness now looks like.

For now, the most important point is also the simplest; these are claims before the court, not final findings. The matter remains pending, and the High Court has yet to rule on the financial demands or the interim access arrangements. ■

By Hossian MUNYUKI

WHAT might once have lived comfortably as celebrity gossip has now moved into the harder, less forgiving arena of the Zimbabwe's High Court.

A bitter dispute involving Zimbabwean businessman Wicknell Chivayo and his former partner, Sonja Madzikanda, has escalated into a high-stakes fight over money, property and access to their children.

At issue is not only the collapse of a relationship, but a sprawling legal battle over wealth, status and parental rights.

According to court filings seen by The AfriFiles, Madzikanda is demanding a once-off payment of US\$25 million, monthly

Rose Rwabuhihi

The engine of modern gender story

By Augusta MALULI

THREE decades ago, the idea of Rwanda becoming one of the world's most closely watched examples of gender equality would have seemed improbable.

The country was shaped by deeply patriarchal traditions that often confined women to the margins of property, power and public life.

Then came the devastation of the 1994 genocide, which forced Rwanda not only to rebuild its institutions, but to rethink the architecture of citizenship itself.

Out of that painful reconstruction emerged one of the boldest gender transformations on the continent, Rose Rwabuhihi, the former Chief Gender Monitor at Rwanda's Gender Monitoring Office.

She belongs to the generation of women who worked inside the machinery of a country rebuilding from almost nothing, helping to turn gender equality from aspiration into policy, and from policy into accountability.

Her public role over the years has placed her at the centre of Rwanda's effort to monitor progress, push institutions and keep gender issues from sliding into ceremonial rhetoric.

She has also represented Rwanda in international gender forums linked to the Beijing agenda, reflecting how closely the country's domestic reforms have been tied to global commitments on women's rights.

Rwanda's achievements are now difficult to ignore. Its Constitution entrenches equality between women and men and affirms that women should hold at least 30 per cent of positions in decision-making organs.

In practice, the country has gone well beyond that benchmark. As of March 2026, Rwanda remained the world leader in women's parliamentary representation, with women holding 63.8 per cent of seats in the lower house, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. That is

not symbolic progress. It is structural power.

But the real significance of Rwanda's journey is that it has extended beyond parliament. National reviews and UN Women documentation show major reforms in land, inheritance and matrimonial law, helping women gain stronger rights to own property, inherit assets and participate more fully in economic life.

Furthermore, she championed girls' education, women's political participation and gender-responsive policymaking have all advanced through a deliberate system of laws, institutions and monitoring mechanisms.

The Gender Monitoring Office itself became part of that architecture of enforcement, ensuring that gender equality was not left to speeches alone.

This is where Rwabuhihi's contribution matters. Rwanda's gender revolution did not happen by magic, nor did it move forward on political will alone.

It required officials who understood that reform must be tracked, measured and defended. In her years in public office, Rwabuhihi repeatedly drew attention not only to gains, but to the unfinished work still facing Rwanda, especially in the private sector and in the persistence of social attitudes that outlive legal reform.

That candour matters. It suggests a reformer who understood that success is most durable when it refuses complacency.

And that may be the strongest way to understand her legacy. Rose Rwabuhihi is part of the generation that helped build a new national grammar in Rwanda, one in which women are no longer expected merely to endure history, but to shape it.

The country's gains are real, measurable and globally recognised. But they also carry the imprint of women who were there in the hard years, when nothing was guaranteed and everything had to be built from the ground up.

In that sense, Rwanda's gender story is not only about laws and rankings, it is also about women like Rwabuhihi, who helped make a more equal nation imaginable — and then worked to make it real. ■



Rose Rwabuhihi

Folorunsho Alakija

How hustle made her a powerhouse



Folorunsho Alakija

By The AfriFiles REPORTER

By THERE was a time when Folorunsho Alakija – from Nigeria, was spoken of as the wealthiest woman in the continent.

But the title, flattering as it is, tells only a fraction of her story. What matters more is how she got there.

She did not walk into wealth through inheritance. She worked for it, step by step, season by season, through jobs that looked ordinary at first and risks that later proved extraordinary.

Her life is one of Africa's clearest reminders that success does not always arrive dressed as destiny. Sometimes it begins at a desk, in a small office, with discipline, hunger and a refusal to stay small.

Alakija's journey began far from the glamour that would later surround her name. On her official biography, she traces her professional life to humble beginnings in office administration after completing secretarial training in London.

She then moved into banking, working her way through a corporate environment that taught her structure, patience and professional discipline.

These years matter because they challenge one of the laziest myths about successful people; that they were always meant for

greatness in obvious ways.

Alakija's early life suggests something more useful and more democratic — that greatness can grow out of routine work done well, long before the spotlight arrives.

Then came reinvention. Instead of remaining where she was comfortable, she listened to a different instinct and moved into fashion.

Alakija says she followed her creative calling and built a fashion house first known as Supreme Stitches, which later became the Rose of Sharon House of Fashion.

It rose quickly and became a household name in Nigeria. She also went on to serve as national president and lifelong trustee of the Fashion Designers Association of Nigeria, helping shape the country's style culture.

That chapter is important because it shows that Alakija was already building serious enterprise before oil ever entered the picture. She had learned how to create value, lead a brand and command a market.

For many people, one successful business would have been enough. For Alakija, it was preparation.

One could describe her as a woman with a taste for “uncharted territories,” and that phrase fits what happened next.

She expanded beyond fashion into printing and later into real estate, building the Rose of Sharon Group while developing the instincts of a serial entrepreneur rather than a one-industry success story.

This is one of the strongest lessons in her journey. She did not allow herself to be trapped inside one identity.

She understood that a woman can begin in one field, master it, and still have the courage to start again somewhere else.

The boldest turn came in the early 1990s, when she moved into oil through Famfa Oil.

Famfa's company secured rights to OPL 216 in the 1990s, entered a deal with Star Deep in 1996, retained a significant interest, and later saw the licence converted to OML 127.

Today, Alakija serves as Executive Vice Chairperson of Famfa Oil, helping oversee strategy and day-to-day administration. None of this was a decorative role. She entered one of the toughest, most male-dominated industries on the continent and stayed in the fight long enough to matter.

Yet the road was not smooth. Behind the headlines was a long struggle to secure and defend what she had built.

Famfa's rise was shaped not only by opportunity, but by persistence in a sector where licences, partnerships and control are constantly contested.

That reality gives her story its true texture. Too many people see wealth only at the end, when the buildings are tall and the name is famous. They do not see the years when everything could still collapse.

Alakija's journey is not inspiring because it was easy. It is inspiring because she held her nerve through uncertainty and kept moving in rooms where women were not always expected to lead.

But success, in her case, did not stop at accumulation. It widened into responsibility. Through the Rose of Sharon Foundation, established in 2008, Alakija has focused on widows, their children and orphans.

The foundation has directly touched more than 4,262 widows through vocational training, interest-free loans, accommodation support and medical access, while also providing scholarships to more than 1,971 widows' children and 322 orphans.

Those are not abstract promises. They are tangible interventions in real lives. They show a woman who understands that success means little if it cannot open doors for others who have been shut out.

She has carried the same philosophy into women's enterprise through Flourish Africa. The initiative, founded by Alakija, was built to support female entrepreneurs through training, coaching, mentoring and funding.

The grant scheme was designed as a multi-year fund to empower at least 2,500 female-owned enterprises, with a minimum of 500 women trained each year and the top performers eligible for grants of up to 2 million.

Flourish Africa also announced partnerships with Google, PwC and EloH Consulting to train women in management, digital skills and tax compliance. This is not charity in its laziest sense. It is investment in women's capacity to build, scale and survive in business.

That is why Folorunsho Alakija matters so much to young African girls and women. Her story is not simply about becoming rich. It is about refusing limitation.

Her life argues, powerfully, against the idea that women must wait for permission, family privilege or perfect conditions before they dream big.

It says a woman can begin with skill, grow with discipline, take risks with intelligence and build something large enough to outlive doubt.

There is a sentence on her philanthropy page that captures the spirit of her journey: she wanted to tell as much of her life as she could "to encourage people."

That is exactly how her story should be read. Not as a fantasy of easy wealth, and not as a fairy tale. It is a work story.



Folorunsho Alakija shakes hands with the then Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. Photo: RRF

A hustle story. A reinvention story. It tells young women that the road to success may begin in an entry-level role nobody applauds.

It tells them that learning is never wasted, that courage matters, that the shift from one industry to another is possible, and that resilience is often the bridge between obscurity and influence.

For Africa's young women, the lesson is clear. Do not despise small beginnings. Do not assume that your first job is your final destiny. Do not let the size of a male-dominated industry frighten you out of ambition. Build skill. Build credibility. Build patiently. Then keep going.

Folorunsho Alakija's life does not promise that every woman will become as wealthy as she did. It offers something more important; proof that a woman can rise from ordinary work into extraordinary impact through grit, reinvention and vision.

In a continent full of gifted girls, that may be the most valuable inheritance of all. ■



Folorunsho Alakija (red headwrap on) with some of the women benefited from her philanthropic entity. Photo: FA



The AfriFiles honours African women - the strength, vision and labour behind the continent's progress. Our Africa rises because its women do.

Pamella's story of courage and compassion

By Kamesi LUGYEM

IN many societies, becoming a single mother at a young age is often met with judgment, uncertainty and overwhelming pressure.

For Pamella Mubeza, it was a defining moment, one that could have limited her future, but instead became the foundation of her strength, purpose and impact.

Pamella's journey began with challenges familiar to many young women: navigating motherhood while still finding her own path in life. The weight of responsibility came early, raising a child, managing limited resources and confronting social stigma.

Yet, rather than retreating, she chose to rise. She embraced her reality not as a setback, but as a call to grow stronger.

What makes her story remarkable is not just her resilience, but her decision to extend that strength to others. Recognising that many young mothers faced similar struggles in silence, Mubeza began reaching out, offering encouragement, sharing her experiences and creating a sense of community among women who often felt isolated.

What started as simple conversations evolved into a network of support, where single mothers could find both emotional and practical strength.

Through her efforts, Pamella has become a source of hope. She reminds women that their circumstances do not define their worth or limit their future.

Her message is clear and consistent: being a single mother is not a weakness—it is a testament to courage, responsibility and love. In choosing to stand firm for their children, these women are already demonstrating extraordinary strength.

Her advocacy goes beyond words. She encourages young mothers to pursue education, develop skills and seek opportunities that can improve their lives and those of their children.

She emphasises the importance of financial independence, self-belief and mutual support. By fostering a culture of encouragement rather than judgment, she is helping to shift perceptions and build confidence among women who might otherwise feel left behind.

Pamella's story also highlights a broader truth: resilience grows stronger when it is shared. By bringing women together, she has created a space where experiences are validated, challenges are understood and solutions are explored collectively.

In this space, no one feels alone, and that sense of belonging becomes a powerful tool for transformation.

For many of the women she has supported, the impact is life-changing. They begin to see possibilities where they once



saw barriers.

They learn to navigate difficulties with confidence, to set goals and to believe in their ability to achieve them. In lifting others, Pamella has amplified her own journey, turning personal struggle into collective empowerment.

Her story is a powerful reminder that hardship does not have to lead to defeat. It can lead to purpose. It can inspire action. It can create leaders.

To young women facing similar paths, her message resonates deeply; your story is not over, it is just beginning. With determination, support and self-belief, it is possible to build a future that is not defined by circumstance, but by choice.

In Pamella Mubeza's journey, we see the true meaning of strength, not in standing alone, but in standing together and helping others rise. ■

Tully-Esther Mwambapa

A life spent lifting women



By Elizabeth HOMBO

TULLY-ESTHER Mwambapa is helping to define a modern East African story of leadership, inclusion and corporate purpose.

As Managing Director of CRDB Bank Foundation, she occupies a rare space where institutional influence meets social impact. At a time when finance is often discussed in hard numbers alone, her public work has helped frame banking in more human terms: as a tool for dignity, enterprise, confidence and access.

That matters even more now, as CRDB continues to widen its footprint beyond Tanzania into Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Dubai, carrying with it an increasingly visible message about women's economic power.

What makes Tully's profile especially compelling is that her rise appears to have been built through steady professional growth rather than instant prominence.

Tully joined CRDB Bank on 6 August 2001 after working as a Marketing Officer at Tanesco – Tanzania's power entity, inside CRDB, she moved through practical and demanding roles, including relationship manager and marketing manager, before rising into senior leadership.

It is the kind of progression that speaks quietly but powerfully to young women; influence is often built one assignment, one skill and one season at a time.

In that sense, her humble beginnings are visible less in public mythology than in the discipline of her career path. She did not arrive at the top of one of Tanzania's largest banks as a symbolic figure.

She came through marketing, client relations and business development, the sort of roles that teach a person how institutions really work, how customers think and where opportunity is either created or lost.

That grounding seems to have shaped her public style. She speaks

about empowerment not as a slogan but as something practical; access to capital, financial literacy, entrepreneurship support, market linkages and long-term growth. The language is not ornamental. It is operational.

That philosophy is perhaps most visible through the iMBEJU programme, the CRDB Bank Foundation's flagship initiative for women and youth.

CRDB has described iMBEJU as a platform designed to empower women and young entrepreneurs economically by providing capital, training and business development support.

In official foundation messaging, the programme is presented not as charity, but as an engine of self-reliance and growth, helping women and youth expand businesses, become financially stable and contribute to wider national development.

Under Tully's leadership, iMBEJU has become one of the most recognisable financial inclusion platforms in Tanzania.

The scale of that work is now difficult to ignore. In February 2026, Tully said the foundation had provided entrepreneurship and financial literacy training to more than one million women and youth since its establishment in 2023, with some beneficiaries receiving start-up capital exceeding Sh20.4 billion nationwide.

In the same announcement, she said youth and women are "not just beneficiaries" but "key partners in economic growth." That sentence captures the larger idea behind her work.

She is helping to push women out of the old development language of vulnerability alone and into a more serious economic frame; as producers, founders, employers and drivers of value.

The wider CRDB ecosystem reinforces that message. In March 2026, the bank had disbursed more than Shilling 560 billion to over 100,000 women entrepreneurs through a dedicated business window aimed at increasing women's participation in economic activity.

More recently, CRDB chairperson Prof. Neema Mori said the bank had invested more than Shilling 800 billion in women-led businesses and reached over one million women through products such as the Malkia proposition and foundation-led inclusion initiatives.

Tully is not the sole architect of these figures, but she is one of the clearest public voices translating them into meaning. Through her dual role, she helps connect the strategy of the bank with the lived ambitions of women trying to grow businesses in markets that have historically denied them equal access to capital.



Her contribution becomes even more significant when one looks beyond financing alone. CRDB's women-centred programmes have increasingly been framed around sustainability, trade readiness and broader enterprise resilience.

Public statements around the bank's women-focused strategy emphasise not just loans, but also training, mentoring, financial education and access to market opportunities.

That matters because many women entrepreneurs do not fail for lack of ambition; they fail because systems around them have long denied them formal support, patient capital and strategic guidance.

Tully's public work helps close that gap by insisting that inclusion must be built into the design of finance, not added later as a gesture.

There is also a human depth to the story that numbers alone cannot capture. The foundation's work has reached women who are often excluded twice over; first by poverty or limited opportunity, and again by the structures of formal finance.

In partnership initiatives highlighted by development agencies and CRDB-linked programmes, support has extended to vulnerable young women, including young mothers, through entrepreneurship training, financial literacy and practical pathways into business.

In these spaces, empowerment is not an abstract concept. It can mean the first bank account, the first working capital, the first small shop, the first time a woman is treated by a financial institution not as a risk to be avoided, but as a future to be backed. That is the kind of shift that changes households as much as balance sheets.

Tully's goals, as reflected in her public remarks, are consistent and clear. She wants women and youth to be recognised as central actors in economic transformation.

She wants them to gain the skills, confidence and financing needed to start and sustain enterprises. And she wants that support to reach beyond the major cities into wider communities where talent often exists long before opportunity does.

When she speaks about unlocking potential, she is talking about building a pipeline; from literacy to enterprise, from informal hustle to formal business, from marginalisation to participation. It is a development vision anchored



President Samia Suluhu Hassan with Tully-Esther Mwambapa and Abdulmajid Nsekela, Managing Director of CRDB Bank.

in
access and
scaled through partnership.

What gives that vision additional weight is the timing. CRDB is no longer simply a large Tanzanian bank; it is an increasingly regional institution.

The bank's public materials now describe its core markets as Tanzania, Congo DRC and Burundi, while its Dubai Representative Office, launched in early 2026 after receiving its licence in late 2025, is explicitly positioned as a bridge between East and Central Africa and global financing networks.

This expansion matters because it enlarges the stage on which Tully's ideas about inclusion can travel.

As CRDB grows outward, the question is no longer only what kind of bank it wants to be in Tanzania, but what values it wants to carry into the region and beyond.

In that wider story, her emphasis on women's enterprise, visibility and economic agency becomes part of the institution's identity.

Recognition has followed. In 2025, Tully received continental recognition as an Iconic Empowerment Personality, a reflection of the growing visibility of her work in advancing women and youth through inclusive financial solutions.

Awards, of course, are never the whole story. But in her case, they underline something more substantial; that her work is resonating beyond Tanzania because it sits at the intersection of issues many African economies are now grappling with — women's access to finance, youth entrepreneurship, sustainable growth and the social purpose of large institutions.

In public comments after receiving the recognition, she framed the work not as a personal triumph but as a reminder that investing in people's potential builds stronger communities and a more inclusive future. That instinct, to keep the focus on people rather than prestige - is one of the reasons her public image feels grounded rather than manufactured.

For young girls and women in Tanzania and beyond, her story carries a practical lesson. One does not need to begin with title, influence or fanfare to become a force.

One can begin in ordinary professional roles, learn deeply, rise steadily and still shape national conversations.

Tully's path from government entities to senior leadership at CRDB Bank suggests that success is often a matter of discipline meeting vision over time. But her larger significance lies in what she is doing with that position. She is using institutional power to widen the circle of opportunity for others.

That is why her story matters beyond corporate biography. It is about more than a woman in a senior banking role.

It is about what happens when such a woman uses her influence to help other women become bankable, visible, ambitious, economically secure, and as CRDB Bank expands across borders, that philosophy of inclusion has the chance to travel too.

Tully-Esther Mwambapa stands as part of a new generation of African corporate leadership; fluent in strategy, credible in execution and serious about impact.

Her work says something simple but powerful, when women are trusted with tools, capital and opportunity, they do not merely participate in growth. They multiply it. ■

Lindiwe Masuku

The power behind tracking system



Lindiwe Masuku

By The AfriFiles REPORTER

IN business, some entrepreneurs sell visible things; clothes, food, buildings, furniture, glamour. Others build the systems that keep economies breathing.

Lindiwe Masuku belongs to the second category. Her work is not the kind that always makes noise, but it moves through the bloodstream of commerce; trucks on highways, fuel in depots, goods in transit, vehicles in service, decisions made from dashboards rather than guesswork.

As founder and CEO of Frotcom Botswana, she has built a business around a simple but powerful proposition; if you can see your fleet clearly, you can run your business better.

Masuku leads Frotcom Botswana from Gaborone, but the company's reach extends across the country, serving clients in different sectors and at different scales.

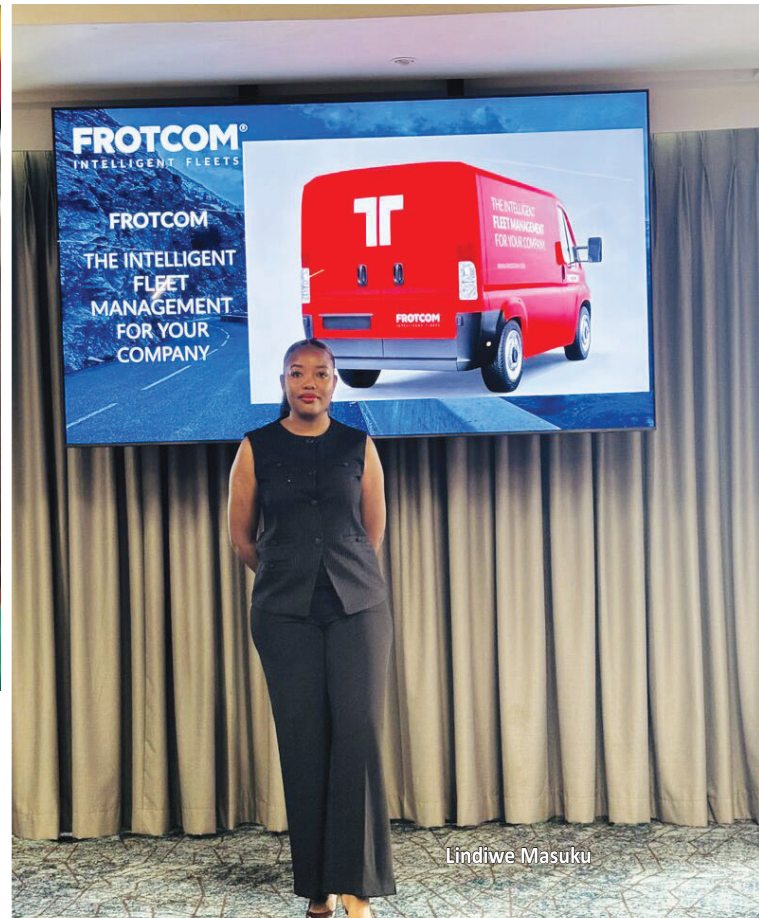
A 2024 profile describes her as a business professional with a degree in Business Administration, then pursuing a master's in business administration and management with the University of East London.

By that point, she also brought 16 years of experience in business management, including work in finance and administration before launching her own company.

Those details matter, because they explain why her move into entrepreneurship does not read like a leap of fantasy.

It reads like a calculated step by someone who had already spent years understanding how organisations lose money, where inefficiencies hide, and why operational blind spots can quietly erode a company from within.

Her journey into entrepreneurship began in 2019, just before the world changed. Frotcom's own international network announced Botswana as a new certified partner in December



Lindiwe Masuku

that year, with Masuku at the helm.

Then came Covid-19. For many young businesses, the pandemic was not merely a disruption; it was a near-death experience.

Yet, Masuku's story is striking precisely because she entered the market at the edge of that storm and still managed to build.

In her own account, the early years brought both difficulty and growth. She had entered a male-dominated industry, taken on the risks of shifting from employee to employer, and done so at a time when many companies were shrinking, retreating or freezing decisions.

Frotcom Botswana survived that moment and then grew into a post-pandemic solution used by reputable organisations across the country.

To understand why the company found traction, it helps to understand the problem it solves. Frotcom Botswana offers fleet management tools built around real-time visibility and control. Deals in vehicle tracking, fuel management, driver management, security management and broader telematics solutions designed to reduce operational costs, improve productivity and strengthen customer service.

In plain language, it helps companies know where their vehicles are, how they are being used, what they are costing, and where waste or risk may be creeping in.

Masuku's own finance background appears to have shaped that focus. When Frotcom welcomed Botswana into its partner network in 2019, it said she had seen firsthand the pain of high motor maintenance costs and the inability to track the exact location of vehicles.

That experience did not merely inform her business. It gave it urgency.

There is something quietly radical in that. Across much of Africa, transport inefficiency is often treated as a background problem rather than a central business issue.

Delays, poor monitoring, avoidable fuel loss and weak asset control are accepted as if they are part of the landscape. Masuku's approach pushes against that fatalism.

Her company's language is full of control, data, efficiency and decision-making. The promise is not magic. It is management.

And that, in many African markets, is often where the real revolution lies; not in spectacle, but in systems that help businesses work with less waste and more intelligence.

Frotcom's own materials say the Botswana operation serves small, medium and large entities and prides itself on a solution that functions around the clock.

Masuku's ambition, however, seems to go beyond selling software. One of the clearest signs of her broader influence is the annual Fleet Management Convention that Frotcom Botswana has now hosted repeatedly.

In late 2021, as businesses were still adjusting to the long tail of the pandemic, the company organised a convention on sustainable fleet management strategies in the Covid-19 era in Gaborone, drawing government participants, industry professionals and media attention.

By 2023, the convention had become a forum for training, presentations, roundtable discussions and collaborative problem-solving across the transport value chain.

In 2024, the fourth annual edition in Kasane focused on helping operators navigate the transition from traditional to modern fleet management. Then in May 2025, the fifth edition brought together fleet professionals, regulatory experts and technology providers around the theme of the "Fleet Management Ecosystem."

This is more than event management. It is sector-building. It shows a business leader trying not only to grow a company, but to shape a conversation.

That may be the most interesting thing about Masuku's rise. She did not walk into an easy lane. Fleet technology and transport operations remain deeply male-coded spaces across much of the continent, associated with engineering, heavy machinery, logistics and executive control.

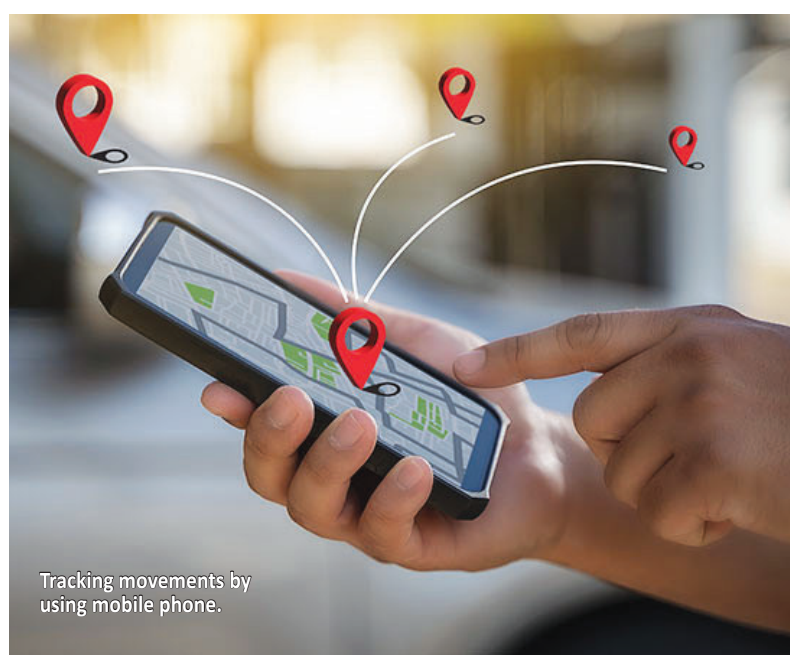
Frotcom's 2019 announcement explicitly noted her excitement at leading a company in a traditionally male-dominated industry. But her significance is not simply that she is a woman in the room.

It is that she has chosen to lead in a field where competence has to be visible and measurable. Fleets either become more efficient or they do not. Costs go down or they do not. Service improves or it does not. There is little room for soft symbolism there. Performance is the language.

Her story also carries another important lesson for African entrepreneurship. Too often, the narrative of innovation is narrowed to apps, fintech and consumer platforms. Masuku's work expands that picture.

She is operating in what might be called applied business technology; tools that sit behind the scenes but produce practical value for companies that move goods, manage vehicles and depend on efficiency.

It is not glamorous innovation, but it is durable innovation. It addresses daily operational pain, and that is often where



Tracking movements by using mobile phone.



Tracking vehicles

strong businesses are born.

BW TechZone's 2023 profile showed her describing the move from conventional employment into being an employer and investor, with all the responsibility that came with protecting and growing the company.

That is the language of someone who understands enterprise not as a buzzword, but as stewardship.

There is also a human scale to her success that should not be lost. Frotcom Botswana had created jobs - though Frotcom as a brand operates through an international partner network.

That distinction matters because real entrepreneurship is measured not by inflated mythology, but by concrete impact.

What emerges, then, is a portrait of a founder who has built credibility the hard way; through experience, timing, resilience and problem-solving.

Lindiwe Masuku did not wait for perfect conditions. She entered business on the eve of a global crisis, in an industry not typically associated with women founders, and turned visibility into value.

In Botswana's business landscape, that is no small achievement. In a continent increasingly defined by movement, trade and logistics, her work points to a larger truth; economies do not run on ambition alone. They run on systems, discipline and people who know how to keep things moving.

Masuku has made a business out of that insight. And in doing so, she has made herself part of Botswana's modern entrepreneurial story. ■

Litti Lerti Kidanka

The ‘bee queen’ who defied the Germans

By The AfriFiles REPORTER

LONG before anti-colonial struggle in Tanzania was reduced to a gallery of mostly male names, there was Litti — or, in some accounts, Litti Lerti Kidanka.

Litti, a woman from a Nyaturu tribe in Singida Region in Tanzania, whose story has survived less through imperial paperwork than through memory, oral tradition and local commemoration.

The broad outline is consistent across Tanzanian accounts; she led resistance to German colonial intrusion in what is now central Tanzania, used bees as a tactical weapon, fought alongside close allies including her husband Nyalandu Mtinangi, and was ultimately killed after betrayal.

But even the dates differ across sources, a reminder that African history was often recorded by powers more interested in conquest than in preserving the names of those who resisted it.

One account places her struggle between 1903 and 1908; a Tanzanian government history book places it between 1908 and 1910.

That uncertainty is not a weakness in her story, it is part of its meaning. Litti Kidanka comes down to the present not as a fully archived imperial subject, but as a figure preserved by local historical consciousness.

The Nasser Youth Movement profile says she was likely born around 1860 in Unyang’ombe, near present-day Ilongero in Singida, and later married into Matumbo village.

The same account says she inherited knowledge of healing and spiritual practice from her parents, and that this knowledge became part of the aura surrounding her military resistance.

Whether one treats every detail literally or as part of a layered oral tradition, the central fact remains; she was remembered as a woman who refused colonial entry into her land and who led from the front.

Her fame rests, above all, on method. In Tanzanian historical memory, Litti Kidanka did not simply fight; she fought differently. The official government history volume *Muongano wa Tanganyika na Zanzibar* describes her as a Singida heroine who drove German forces back twice using “nyuki wakali” — fierce bees — released into battle as a last weapon.

The Nasser Youth account similarly describes bees as her signature tactic and the reason she became known as the “Queen of the Bees.”

That image has endured because it carries several meanings at once; ingenuity against superior firepower, intimate knowledge of landscape, and the ability of a woman leader to convert what colonisers would have dismissed as primitive into a highly effective form of defence.

Her death, too, lives in Tanzanian history not as private



Bee Queen Litti.
Sketch: Cloud Chatanda

tragedy, but as colonial pattern. Both the Tanzanian government volume and other contemporary retellings say she was eventually defeated after betrayal from within her circle, captured with her husband and killed.

Her head, according to these accounts, was then severed and taken to Germany. That detail matters beyond biography. It places her inside a wider history of colonial violence in East Africa in which decapitation, display and racialised collecting were not aberrations but part of the machinery of conquest and so-called scientific extraction.

In the same government history, Litti is listed alongside chiefdom figures such as Mangi Meli and Songea Mbano as anti-colonial leaders whose remains were taken away and, in her case, have not been returned.

This is where Kidanka’s impact reaches beyond Tanzania.



Inside Tanzania, meanwhile, her memory is no longer confined to folklore. The Singida regional authorities announced in April 2025 plans to build a bee-training college in her honour — a strikingly literal memorial to the tactic that made her legendary.

The same report said the region would secure land associated with her legacy for historical purposes. This is not just heritage branding. It shows an attempt to turn memory into civic infrastructure; to root local pride, education and even apiculture in the name of a woman who has too

often lived at the margins of national consciousness.

Culture has also become one of the most important vehicles of her afterlife. A Tanzanian dance production, *Nguvu Iliyoganda* (Frozen Power), has used Litti Kidanka's story as the basis for a contemporary performance blending Taarab and urban styles.

According to various sources, the production has been taken to schools and community hubs in rural Tanzania with the explicit aim of celebrating the role of Tanzanian women in history and inspiring women to remain active in struggles against injustice.

In other words, Kidanka's legacy is not being preserved as a dead relic; it is being reactivated as argument, pedagogy and artistic energy.

That cultural reach has also crossed borders. At the 2024 Dance Life Festival in Nairobi, Kenya, Goethe-Institut's festival press release described *Frozen Power* as inspired by "Tanzanian ruler, Litti Kidanka, who used bees to protect her land from colonial forces."

The institute said it hoped such performances would expand dancers' networks beyond national boundaries. That may sound modest, but it marks a significant shift in scale.

A woman once omitted from most mainstream historical canons, is now travelling through East African performance circuits as a symbol of female leadership, anti-colonial imagination and artistic reinvention.

What, then, is Litti Lerti Kidanka's real impact? In Tanzania, she enlarges the country's anti-colonial archive. She complicates any lazy version of history that places women at the edge of struggle rather than at its centre.

She offers Singida a heroine whose symbolism is at once regional and national. And she has become part of a living poLittics of memory — one that includes gravesites, proposed institutions, public storytelling and debates over remains still held abroad.

Beyond Tanzania, she has entered international conversations about restitution and found new life in cross-border arts programming, proving that memory can migrate even when justice has not yet fully arrived.

Litti Kidanka survival in public memory tells us something precise about African history; the archive is often incomplete, but significance is not.

Colonial systems tried to conquer territory, control bodies and curate remembrance, yet more than a century later, a woman from Singida still speaks across those silences — through oral tradition, public history, art, and unfinished demands for restitution.

That is impact of the deepest kind; not only to have resisted in one's own time, but to keep reshaping the moral imagination of the future. ■



Litti Lerti Kidanka

In 2023, a workshop organised by the National Museum of Tanzania and the University of Göttingen on human remains in Göttingen collections explicitly named Litti Kidanka among anti-colonial fighters killed and decapitated during colonialism.

The conference report shows how her case now sits inside a broader international debate about provenance, restitution and justice. Participants argued that restitution is not a matter of benevolence from former colonial powers, but of claim-making, dignity and repair.

In that conversation, Litti Kidanka is no longer only a local heroine from Singida; she is part of a transnational argument about who gets remembered, who gets returned, and who has the right to narrate the past.



Beijing and the unfinished fight against sex intuition

By Marium-Elly MAHBOOB

INTERNATIONAL Women’s Day, observed globally on 8 March 2026, arrived with a powerful historical echo.

It came just over three decades after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the landmark United Nations framework agreed by 189 governments at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995.

That document remains one of the most ambitious global blueprints ever written for the advancement of women’s rights.

It called, plainly and forcefully, for women’s full enjoyment of human rights and for the elimination of discrimination that continues to limit women’s lives in the family, the workplace, politics, education, health and public life.

Its urgency has not faded. If anything, the passing years have made its message sharper. The official theme for International Women’s Day 2026—“Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls”—was a reminder that legal promises are not

enough on their own.

Across the world, women still face unequal pay, unpaid care burdens, exclusion from leadership, sexual violence, harmful stereotypes and discriminatory laws.

UN Women said clearly this March that no country in the world has yet achieved full legal equality for women and girls. Beijing, then, is not merely a monument to a historic conference. It is an unfinished assignment.

Yet Beijing also raises an important intellectual question, one that has become more pressing in recent years; what exactly do we mean when we speak of sex discrimination, gender equality, women’s rights and human dignity?

The issue is not academic hair-splitting. Language shapes law, policy and public debate. CEDAW - the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, defines discrimination against women as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex that impairs women’s equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

That definition remains foundational. It anchors women's rights in the reality that women have historically been disadvantaged because they are female in societies structured by unequal power.

At the same time, modern institutions have become more careful in distinguishing related but different terms.

The World Health Organization (WHO) explains that sex refers to biological and physiological characteristics, while gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours and norms associated with women, men, girls and boys.

WHO also notes that gender identity is not the same thing as either sex or gender roles. These distinctions matter because debates about equality can become confused when biological sex, social expectations and personal identity are treated as if they were interchangeable. Precision does not weaken women's rights; it strengthens them.

That precision is especially important when discussing patriarchy. Patriarchy is not simply a private attitude or a matter of individual prejudice. It is a social order in which power, authority and legitimacy have historically been coded as male, while women have been assigned secondary status.

In such systems, women are often judged not as full citizens first, but as daughters, wives, mothers or dependants. Their access to land, education, income, inheritance, bodily autonomy and public authority is filtered through male approval.

Beijing challenged exactly that world. It did not ask for women to be treated kindly within an unequal system. It asked for the system itself to change.

For centuries, many societies, including societies in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas, organized themselves around assumptions that men should lead and women should follow.

Those assumptions were often defended as natural, religious or culturally fixed. But history tells a different story. The more women gain access to education, property, political office and economic opportunity, the more clearly it becomes evident that exclusion was never proof of incapacity.

Biology, properly understood, does not rescue sexism. It is true that male and female bodies differ in reproductive anatomy, hormone patterns and some average physical traits.

It was proof of gatekeeping. The claim that male dominance is inevitable because of biology has always been one of patriarchy's most durable arguments. Yet the modern world has repeatedly exposed its limits.

Women have led governments, run companies, transformed research, built social movements and sustained economies. The barriers were political and cultural before they were biological.

This is where the Beijing vision remains so important. Its core strength lies in the fact that it is grounded not in the denial of difference, but in the affirmation of equal dignity.

Men and women are not identical in every biological respect - That is obvious, but equality has never depended on sameness. Human rights do not belong only to those who are physically alike, emotionally alike or socially alike. They belong to persons because they are persons.

The political language of constitutions and human-rights treaties is built on that idea. It is why modern law speaks of the equal dignity of all human beings. It is why discrimination cannot be justified merely by pointing to difference.

Biology, properly understood, does not rescue sexism. It is true that male and female bodies differ in reproductive anatomy, hormone patterns and some average physical traits.

But it is equally true that men and women share overwhelmingly similar human needs and capacities. Both breathe, eat, sleep, think, learn, reason, feel pain, form relationships, pursue meaning, create institutions and participate in social life.



Gertrude Mongella, the first female president of the Pan African Parliament, also served as the Secretary-General of Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

Happy WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Both inhabit the same human condition. That is why medicine, law, citizenship and morality all begin from a common human foundation. We do not build hospitals, schools, courts and democracies on the assumption that women are a lesser species.

We build them on the assumption that women and men alike belong fully within the moral community. The existence of sex differences does not erase that fact.

A humane and intellectually serious defence of women's rights must therefore avoid two errors. The first is to pretend

that sex does not matter. It does matter, because many forms of discrimination against women are tied to female biology, reproduction, social expectations around femininity, and long histories of male power.

The second error is to defend women's rights by stigmatizing other people whose sex characteristics, sexual orientation or gender identity do not fit dominant norms.

United Nations human-rights bodies and OHCHR have made clear that people must also be protected from violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

That principle does not cancel women's rights. It belongs to the broader human-rights framework in which no one should be demeaned, excluded or harmed because of who they are.

This is an important point, because contemporary debates often become unnecessarily polarised. Some fear that protecting gender-diverse or sexual-minority persons will weaken the legal basis for women's rights.

Others assume that any insistence on the importance of sex is automatically reactionary. Both instincts can lead public discussion into confusion. A wiser position is possible.

It is possible to say, at once, that women have been historically oppressed as women, that sex-based discrimination remains real, and that all people deserve protection from violence and humiliation.

One does not have to deny the reality of women's oppression in order to affirm the humanity of others. Nor does one have to deny the equal dignity of others in order to defend women's freedom.

That is why the deepest promise of Beijing still lies in its humanism. It insists that women are not an auxiliary category of humanity. They are not marginal citizens, not supporting actors in history, not beneficiaries of male generosity. They are rights-bearing persons. They are ends in themselves.

In legal terms, that means equality before the law. In political terms, it means representation, participation and voice.

The War Within: A Study of Internal Duality

A Figure Locked in Desperate Struggle

The figure represents the "cold, sharp light of reason," characterized by strained muscles and raw exhaustion as they claw away from the abyss.

Physicality of the Internal Fight

The intensity of the weight and pressure is so great that the floor beneath the combatants is visibly cracked.

The Shadow as Primal Instinct

Transformed into a "seductive yet suffocating tether," the shadow is an active participant that pulls the figure toward a dimly lit, velvet-draped abyss.

A Sensory Mixture of Static and Flora

The air in the scene is described as thick, filled with a tactile and olfactory combination of static electricity and rose petals.

The Velvet-Draped Abyss

This represents the destination of the shadow's pull, a dimly lit space that contrasts with the "cold light" sought by the figure.

The Paradox of the Opponent

The climax reveals a terrifying truth: the opponent is invincible because it is an inherent part of the individual's own self.

"The Opponent Cannot Be Defeated"

The struggle is framed as an eternal, mid-climax loop where the self fights the self without the possibility of a final victory.



Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Namibia's president.
Photo: Simon Maina/AFP via Getty Images

In economic terms, it means equal access to resources, decent work and financial autonomy.

In cultural terms, it means dismantling traditions that romanticize women's sacrifice while denying women power. And in personal terms, it means allowing women to live not as shadows of prescribed roles but as full subjects of their own lives.

The same principle can be seen through philosophy as well as law. Across many traditions, a human person is understood not merely as a body, but as a being capable of reason, will, relationship and moral agency.

That understanding matters because it shifts the discussion away from crude hierarchies and toward a deeper account of human worth.

Women are not equal because they can imitate men. They are equal because they are fully human. Their dignity is not borrowed. It is intrinsic. And once that point is accepted, the logic of discrimination begins to collapse. If women are persons, then the denial of their education, property, safety or political voice is not tradition. It is injustice.

Religious language, too, has often supported this broader moral vision, even if religious communities have not always lived up to it.

Across major traditions, there are strong currents of belief that human beings share a common origin, a common moral status and a common accountability before God. In Christian thought, the idea that humanity is made in the image of God has long underwritten arguments for equal worth.

In Islamic thought, too, human dignity and moral responsibility are not reserved for one sex alone. These traditions have often been interpreted through patriarchal structures, yes.

But they also contain resources for resisting patriarchy. Properly read, they can support the idea that women are not lesser beings but equal bearers of dignity.

That is why Beijing still matters in 2026. It is not important because it settled every conceptual debate. It did not. It is important because it named a historic wrong and demanded that the world act against it. It recognized that women's inequality

In that sense, the Beijing Declaration remains one of the clearest moral statements of the modern era. It begins from a simple truth; women are fully human, and societies that deny them equality are morally diminished.

is not accidental. It is produced by laws, customs, institutions and mindsets that must be changed.

It understood that discrimination is not only a matter of open hostility. It is also embedded in structures that treat women's labour as natural, women's suffering as private, and women's exclusion as normal. Beijing refused that normality.

The task now is not simply to commemorate Beijing, but to think with greater clarity and moral seriousness about what it requires. It requires us to defend the category of women strongly enough to address the specific injustices women face.

It also requires us to speak with enough humanity to avoid reproducing new forms of cruelty in the name of old struggles. The fight against sex discrimination should not be reduced to confusion, nor should it be hijacked by contempt. Its true object is justice.

In that sense, the Beijing Declaration remains one of the clearest moral statements of the modern era. It begins from a simple truth; women are fully human, and societies that deny them equality are morally diminished.

Everything else follows from there. Thirty-one years on, the document still asks the world a question it has not yet answered well enough; if women are equal in dignity, why is so much of public life still built as if they are not? Until that contradiction is confronted honestly—in law, in culture, in religion, in economics and in politics, Beijing will remain unfinished business. ■

The writer is a human right defender based in Dakar, Senegal.

Success has no gender at all



By Dr Isabellah KAMULE

FOR generations, societies across the world have been shaped by a quiet but powerful assumption; that a woman's place is in the home, often symbolised by the kitchen.

It is an idea so deeply rooted in culture and tradition that it has, at times, been mistaken for truth. Yet, as history continues to unfold, that assumption is steadily being dismantled, not by rhetoric, but by results.

The modern reality is clear; success has no gender, and the emancipation of women is not confined to domestic spaces but extends across every sphere of human progress.

To challenge the notion that women belong only in the kitchen is not to dismiss the value of domestic roles. Homes are the foundation of societies, and caregiving is essential work.

However, the problem arises when domesticity becomes a limitation rather than a choice, when it is imposed as the only acceptable path for women. Emancipation, in its truest sense, is about freedom of choice. It is about allowing women to define their own roles, ambitions and contributions without being boxed into outdated expectations.

The argument for women's equality is often framed as a moral one, and rightly so. Every human being deserves dignity, opportunity and the right to pursue their potential. But beyond morality, there is a compelling practical case for women's full participation in society.

Nations that invest in women's education, health and economic empowerment consistently outperform those that do not. When women are educated, families are healthier, children are more likely to attend school, and communities become more resilient. When

women earn, they reinvest in their households, creating a ripple effect that strengthens entire economies.

Across Africa, this transformation is already underway, though unevenly. Women are breaking barriers in sectors once dominated by men—leading businesses, driving innovation, influencing policy and shaping public discourse.

From entrepreneurs building enterprises from the ground up to professionals excelling in medicine, law, engineering and technology, African women are demonstrating that capability is not determined by gender. Their contributions are not symbolic; they are substantive, measurable and transformative.

Yet, despite these gains, structural barriers persist. Cultural norms still dictate expectations about what women should or should not do. In some communities, girls are denied equal access to education. In others, women face legal and economic systems that limit their ownership of property, access to finance or participation in decision-making. These constraints are not only unjust—they are economically and socially counterproductive. A society that sidelines half its population cannot achieve its full potential.

The persistence of these barriers often stems from a misunderstanding of equality. Equality does not mean sameness; it means fairness. It recognises that while men and women may have different experiences, their value and potential are equal.

It also acknowledges that creating a level playing field sometimes requires deliberate action, policies, investments and cultural shifts that address historical imbalances.

One of the most significant misconceptions surrounding women's emancipation is the belief that it threatens family structures. In reality, the opposite is true. Empowered women strengthen families.

Naseem Lahri

The quiet power of Naseem



By Halemine MAXCEL

IN a world where success is often measured by personal milestones, Naseem Lahri has built her legacy on something far more enduring - the success of others.

In Botswana, her name has become synonymous with purpose-driven leadership, a woman whose journey reflects not only ambition, but a deep commitment to uplifting fellow women and opening doors that were once firmly shut.

Naseem's path has not been defined by privilege, but by persistence. Like many African women navigating professional spaces, she faced structural barriers, limited opportunities and expectations that often underestimated her potential.

Yet, rather than allowing these challenges to define her, she turned them into motivation. Through discipline, resilience and a clear vision, she steadily carved out her place—earning respect not only for what she achieved, but for how she achieved it.

What sets Naseem apart is her belief that success is not complete unless it is shared. Across her work in Botswana's business and social development spaces, she has consistently championed women, mentoring young professionals, advocating for inclusive workplaces and creating platforms where women can thrive.

Her efforts have contributed to shifting mindsets, encouraging organisations to recognise the value of women not as participants, but as leaders and decision-makers.

Her influence is visible in the growing number of women stepping into roles that were once considered out of reach. From boardrooms to entrepreneurial ventures, many women credit Naseem's guidance and example as a source of inspiration.

She has shown that leadership is not about dominance, but

about empowerment—lifting others as you rise.

Beyond mentorship, Naseem has been instrumental in promoting practical support systems for women. She understands that empowerment is not just a slogan; it requires access, to knowledge, networks, finance and opportunity.

By fostering connections and encouraging collaboration, she has helped women move from potential to performance, from ideas to impact.

Her story carries a powerful message for the continent; progress is accelerated when women support each other. Too often, competition is framed as the only path to success.

Naseem challenges this narrative, demonstrating that collaboration creates stronger, more sustainable outcomes. When women invest in one another, they build ecosystems of growth that extend far beyond individual achievement.

For young women across Africa, her journey is both a mirror and a map. It reflects the realities of struggle, but also illuminates the possibilities that come with determination and purpose.

It is a reminder that hard work, consistency and courage can open doors, even in the face of resistance.

But perhaps her most important lesson is this: no one rises alone. True leadership is measured not by how high one climbs, but by how many others are lifted along the way.

In choosing to mentor, support and advocate for others, Naseem has created a ripple effect, one that continues to transform lives and reshape the narrative of women's success in Botswana.

As Africa continues its journey towards inclusive growth, voices like Naseem Lahri's are not just important, they are essential. They remind us that empowerment is not an individual pursuit, but a collective responsibility. ■

Gorée Island – the memory, resilience, living legacy





Tourists in Goree Island

By The AfriFiles REPORTER

JUST off the coast of Dakar, Senegal, lies Gorée Island, a small, serene landmass whose quiet streets hold one of the most powerful and painful histories in the world.

With its pastel-coloured houses, narrow alleys and sweeping Atlantic views, Gorée appears almost idyllic at first glance. Yet, beneath its beauty lies a legacy that has shaped global consciousness: it stands as one of the most symbolic sites of the transatlantic slave trade.

Recognised as a Unesco - World Heritage Site, Gorée Island is more than a destination, it is a place of memory, reflection and education.

For centuries, it served as a key departure point where millions of Africans were forcibly taken from their homeland and shipped across the ocean into slavery.

Today, it stands as a solemn reminder of that history and a powerful symbol of resilience and reconciliation.

At the heart of the island's historical significance is the House of Slaves, a preserved structure that once held enslaved Africans before they were transported through the infamous "Door of No Return."

Visitors who walk through its narrow corridors and cramped holding rooms often describe the experience as deeply emotional and transformative.

The building, now a museum, provides a vivid and haunting glimpse into the realities of human suffering, while also offering a space for collective remembrance.

Despite its painful past, Gorée Island has become a place of renewal and opportunity. The local community has embraced heritage tourism as a means of economic empowerment.

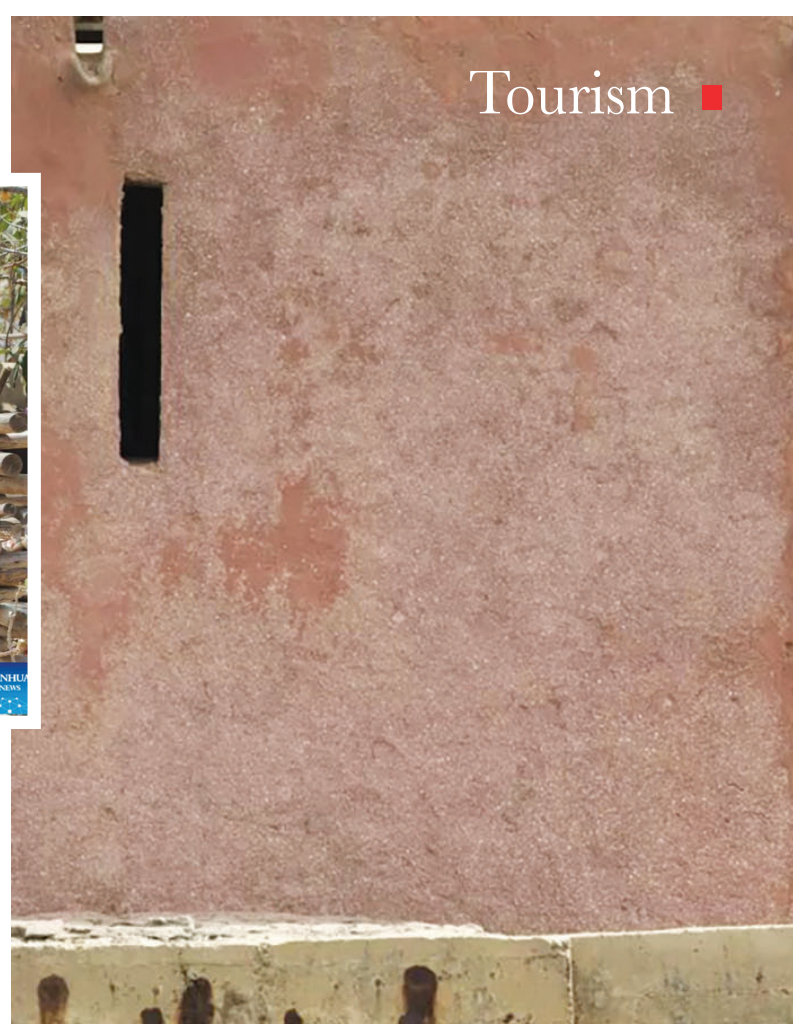
Residents run guesthouses, restaurants, artisan shops and guided tours, creating a sustainable local economy rooted in history and culture. Craftspeople sell handmade goods, musicians perform traditional rhythms, and storytellers pass down narratives that keep the island's legacy alive.

For the Senegalese government, Gorée is both a national treasure and a strategic cultural asset. Investment in preservation, infrastructure and tourism promotion has helped position the island as one of West Africa's most visited heritage sites.

Revenue generated from tourism contributes to local development while supporting conservation efforts to maintain the island's historical integrity.

Schools, cultural programmes and partnerships with international organisations ensure that Gorée continues to educate future generations about the importance of human rights and dignity.

The island's global significance has drawn some of the world's most influential figures. In 1992, Nelson Mandela visited Gorée



Island and described it as a place that stirred deep reflection on the suffering endured by African people.

His visit symbolised a bridge between past and present struggles for freedom and justice.

In 2003, US President George W. Bush toured the island, calling the slave trade one of the greatest crimes in history and acknowledging the need for remembrance and reconciliation.

His visit brought global attention to Gorée's significance and reinforced its role as a site of international reflection.

Similarly, Barack Obama visited Gorée Island in 2013 alongside his family. Standing at the Door of No Return, he described the experience as deeply humbling, noting that the island serves as a reminder of humanity's capacity for both cruelty and redemption.

His words resonated globally, highlighting the importance of confronting history while striving for a more just future.

Other global figures, including religious leaders, artists and activists, have also made pilgrimages to the island.

Their visits often carry a shared message; that remembering the past is essential to shaping a better world. Gorée has thus become a place where history, diplomacy and humanity intersect.

Beyond its historical and political significance, Gorée Island is also a vibrant cultural hub. Art galleries showcase works inspired by African identity and history.

Festivals and cultural events celebrate music, dance and storytelling. The island's unique blend of history and creativity attracts scholars, artists and tourists from around the world, making it a centre of both reflection and inspiration.

For many visitors, the journey to Gorée is deeply personal. Members of the African diaspora often come seeking connection, identity and healing.

Walking through the same spaces where their ancestors once stood creates a powerful emotional link across generations. It transforms history from something distant into something deeply human and immediate.

The impact of Gorée Island extends far beyond its physical boundaries. It has become a global symbol of remembrance, resilience and the enduring fight for human dignity.

Educational institutions, human rights organisations and



President Obama stands facing out to sea at the “Door of No Return” at a slave house on Goree Island in Dakar, Senegal, from which Africans were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean into slavery. Photo: Rebecca Blackwell/ AP

cultural bodies frequently reference the island in discussions about slavery, colonialism and their lasting effects. It serves as a reminder that history must be acknowledged, not forgotten.

Yet, the island is not frozen in time. It continues to evolve, balancing preservation with progress. Efforts are ongoing to improve infrastructure, enhance visitor experiences and protect the environment.

Sustainable tourism practices are being encouraged to ensure that the island’s growth does not compromise its heritage.

In many ways, Gorée Island represents the broader African story; a history marked by pain and injustice, but also by strength, resilience and renewal.

It shows that even in the face of unimaginable suffering, communities can rebuild, reclaim their narratives and create new opportunities for future generations.

As the sun sets over the Atlantic, casting golden light across the island’s historic buildings, Gorée stands as both a memorial and a message.

It reminds the world of what must never be repeated, while also celebrating the enduring spirit of a people who refused to be defined by their past.

For travellers, historians and global citizens alike, Gorée Island is not just a place to visit, it is a place to understand. And in understanding, there is the possibility of change. ■



Goree entrance



“We are still digging,” says Museum Curator, Jacob Phiri (left)

Revisiting crash site of Hammarskjöld’s plane – II

Ndola, in Zambia’s Copperbelt, was yanked to global prominence overnight in September 1961, when the *Alberlina*, crashed there. Eyewitnesses who dared to speak endured bitter whipping by the Brits. By the time António Guterres bows out, the mirage will still be a metaphor for the UN’s false promises.

By Shoks Mnisi MZOLO

GUTERRES’ distant predecessor Dag Hammarskjöld had travelled to Ndola to meet exiled Congolese rebel Moïse Tshombe.

The world organization, now 80 (and still featuring an exclusive five-some club of the Security Council’s Permanent Members), hadn’t been impartial. Look at what’s happening even now. Separately, Congo is a victim of its riches, with foreigners fingered for stoking chaos to enable looting.

The crew, soldiers and UN staffers were aboard the plane, including Alice La Lande, William Ranallo and Heinrich Wischhoff. The victims’ remains were found on Monday afternoon (18 September). So was an injured Harold Julien, who died in hospital ten days later.

While on his deathbed, he recalled that Hammarskjöld had moments before the crash shouted to the pilot: “Turn back”. Alas, explosions followed. Locals from Ndola’s Twapia put the subsequent bang way before midnight. Edvard Persson’s body (with mysterious bullet wounds) was recovered on Tuesday.

The first year of the DRC’s freedom was tragic: the central government had fallen, the country balkanised, millions

displaced, and atrocities synonymous with Belgium’s bloody years returned.

Scores of patriots were killed. Some among the droves who fled their mineral-rich homeland, like Laurent Kabila, joined forces with Víctor Dreke-led Cuban guerrillas, including Che Guevara (known here as Tatu, Kiswahili for Three).

Patrice Lumumba, the country’s first – and, for years since, only – elected leader, was ousted, jailed, and assassinated all within months of the nation’s independence. The liberation project soon foundered. Photographer Chris Tsui Hesse, now immortalized in *The Eyes of Ghana*, was there to film the genesis of the crisis.

While Belgium propped Tshombe and Katanga’s rebels and South Africa supplied mercenaries, fighters from Britain and the United States – countries, like South Africa (then an apartheid state led by Nazi sympathizer Hendrik Verwoerd), accused of foul play – were officially absent.

Britain’s Harold Macmillan is often feted for a speech dubbed *Wind of Change*, delivered in Accra and, later, in Cape Town. Juxtapose that with his government’s jailing, killing and exiling freedom of fighters in Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and beyond for fighting for their birthright: liberation.

UN's zigzag, inconsistencies

Back to the Albertina – seven secretaries-general, all male, and six decades later – all there is are promises of a new probe when fresh evidence arises.

No single soul has been held to account to date. Digging and siftings have been zigzagging, meanwhile. UN boss António Guterres has recommended that countries “appoint an independent and high-ranking official to conduct a dedicated and internal review of their archives.”

Disparities remain, now nine years into Guterres' shift. By the time he leaves, in December, the mirage will still be a metaphor while the Hammarskjöld Inquiry Trust continues to dig or grope in the dark. Just why no UN boss has ever visited this site remains is too loud in its silence.

The UN's former chief Ban Ki-moon had inspired new hope too, 12 years ago, when he remarked; “It is my assessment that the documentation presented by the Hammarskjöld Commission includes new evidence.” Where to now? The half-hearted UN's zigzag continues.

None of that has deterred the families of the Albertina victims and people like Jacob Phiri, of the memorial site in Ndola, from digging.

He describes his discovery of village eyewitnesses as fortuitous as we walk about the sprawling garden towards the ant-hill where Hammarskjöld's body was found (100 metres from the wreckage).

That spot is marked by a plaque signed by Kofi Annan in 2001. For clarity, Annan, like his predecessors and successors, didn't set foot in Ndola.

Today, the wreckage, items and documents from the crash, or official records on it – meant for public viewing – have not arrived in Ndola—cue reluctance.

Just days after the crash, nephew Knut Hammarskjöld, who'd flown in from Sweden, was struck by the British authorities' unwillingness to hand his uncle's personal effects over. His uncle's briefcase “showed no signs of charring despite the inferno that had engulfed the Albertina when it crashed”.

Inconsistencies abound. “In 2000, still new at the interpretative centre, showing farmers and businesspeople around and telling them about the memorial site and how the Albertina crash had happened,” remarks Phiri.

“I was startled when one of the guests, Mr. Ngongo, said; ‘No, that's not how it happened. I saw the crash. I'd always

thought that the Albertina was by itself, but for the first time now, I heard that there were two planes nearby. I also heard that the Albertina circled three times before crashing. None of that evidence is in the UN report.”

Thus, Phiri made it his task to test John Ngongo's stake through further witness interviews; Margaret Ngulube, Dickson Mbewe and Custon Chipoya, a charcoal burner in the forest preparing his kiln. “Chipoya saw it all: he was within 500m of where the Albertina hit the ground and saw the second plane.”

Eyewitness accounts align with what the Ndola airport room observed and colonial officer Adrian Begg recollected. He cited a cover-up in his blog in 2011.

Airport controls had observed Hammarskjöld's plane flying overhead at 22h10 on Sunday to align with the runway. Then away it flew.

However, a search party was called on Monday morning and stumbled on the scene as late as 15h30 that day. That's the official line.

Perplexed to be sent home late at night on Sunday, 17 September, officers asked their senior about the much-anticipated aircraft. Referring to “Supt. Bob Read if memory serves me correctly,” Begg added; “he just shrugged and said that ‘apparently Hammarskjöld had changed his mind and gone elsewhere.’”

Cuthbert Alport, the British High Commissioner, had set that official line. Begg questioned the state of the body of a UN soldier. “[It] had what appeared to be bullet wounds, and my recollection is there was a 9mm sub-machinegun in the wreckage nearby.”

For their part, Ndola eyewitnesses had held back out of fear, explains Phiri. Some villagers recalled being driven as far as Salisbury (as Harare was colonially named) and endured “bitter whipping” by the Brits. “People were still fearful even after so many years,” he adds, then singles Moses Chimema's account.

“He'd first said that he saw what happened that night but took too long to talk,” Phiri says. In propping their misrule, colonialists clamped down on outspokenness.

That was then. Yet, the truth about the 1961 crash remains in shackles. Why would the UN stand that fog? The Cold War is long over but the mist lives on.

This two-part story was first published by Premium Times. This is the second and final part. Shoks Mnisi Mzolo now contributes to The AfriFiles.

Dag Hammarskjöld,
Secretary-General of
the United Nations.
Photo: UN/JO





Siviwe Gwarube

Siviwe Gwarube

A minister stands against corruption in education

By Sibosisi MANTASHE

IN a continent where education systems often carry the weight of history, inequality and political pressure, South Africa's Minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube, has struck a tone that is both urgent and uncompromising.

Her vow to dismantle corrupt networks within the education sector is not merely a policy statement—it is a declaration that the future of more than 13 million South African children cannot be negotiated, diluted or stolen.

Corruption in education is rarely abstract. It manifests in missing textbooks, inflated procurement contracts, ghost suppliers, poorly built classrooms and under-resourced schools.

It quietly robs children of opportunity while rewarding a small network of insiders. In this milieu, Gwarube's stance signals a shift from tolerance to confrontation.

It recognises that protecting education is not just about budgets and curriculum reforms, but about safeguarding integrity within the system itself.

Her commitment matters because education is the single most

powerful equaliser in any society. When corruption infiltrates it, inequality deepens, and entire generations are left behind.

South Africa, with its complex socio-economic landscape, cannot afford such losses. By openly confronting corrupt practices, the minister is placing accountability at the centre of educational reform, a move that many systems across Africa have long avoided.

But beyond South Africa, her position offers a broader lesson for the continent. Too often, African leaders speak passionately about youth empowerment, innovation and development, yet fail to address the structural leakages that undermine these goals.

Grand speeches about the future ring hollow when classrooms lack basic materials, when funds disappear without consequence, and when systems meant to serve children are captured by private interests.

What sets this moment apart is the emphasis on action. Words alone cannot dismantle entrenched networks. It requires political will, institutional courage and a readiness to confront powerful actors who benefit from dysfunction.

It also demands transparency mechanisms, stronger procurement oversight and protection for whistleblowers within the system. These are not easy reforms, but they are necessary ones.

For other leaders across Africa, the message is clear; courage in governance must be measured by decisions taken, not statements issued.

Protecting education requires more than policy frameworks; it requires a willingness to challenge the very systems that perpetuate inequality.

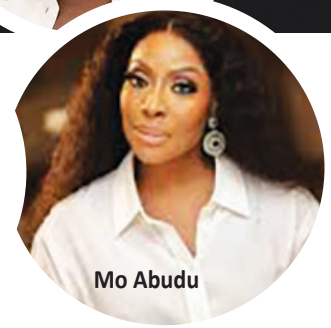
It means ensuring that every dollar allocated to education reaches the classroom, every contract serves the public good, and every child has a fair chance to learn and succeed.

Ultimately, the fight against corruption in education is a fight for dignity, opportunity and the future itself. By drawing a firm line, South Africa's education minister is reminding the continent that leadership is not defined by rhetoric, but by resolve.

If replicated across Africa, such resolve could begin to restore trust in public systems and, more importantly, secure the future of millions of children whose dreams depend on it. ■



Women rewriting Africa's newsroom future



By The AfriFiles REPORTER

THE future of women in African newsrooms is no longer a question of possibility, it is a reality being actively shaped by a generation of bold, accomplished and resilient media leaders.

Across the continent, women are not only occupying editorial spaces once dominated by men; they are redefining the standards, ethics and direction of journalism itself.

Editors such as Lydia Namubiru, currently leading editorial work at The Continent, represent a new wave of sharp, analytical journalism that speaks to African audiences with depth and clarity.

Her work has strengthened long-form storytelling and cross-border reporting, making complex issues accessible while maintaining editorial integrity.

Veteran journalist Ferial Haffajee continues to shape public discourse in South Africa through investigative reporting and commentary, while Mo Abudu – of Nigeria through EbonyLife Media, has built a globally recognised media enterprise that amplifies African stories with scale and influence.

On the international stage, a Nigerian, Stephanie Busari has demonstrated the impact of African journalism on global agendas, notably through her role in the #BringBackOurGirls coverage.

In East Africa, Zubeidah Kananu at The Standard Group of Kenya, continues to champion editorial independence and newsroom leadership.

Pioneers like Ghanaian, Elizabeth Ohene paved the way decades ago, breaking barriers in political reporting and public service.

Meanwhile, Lina Attalah of Egypt through her online media, Mada Masr remains a powerful voice in independent journalism, often operating under significant pressure, yet maintaining editorial courage and credibility.

In Tanzania, Joyce Shebe stands out as a transformative newsroom leader at Clouds Media Group. Through her editorial leadership, she has helped shape dynamic, youth-driven content while maintaining professional standards in a fast-evolving media landscape.

Her work has contributed to nurturing young journalists, strengthening newsroom discipline and encouraging innovation in storytelling formats, particularly in broadcast and digital media.

Figures such as Josephine Chinele of Malawi and others across the continent continue to mentor young journalists, expand newsroom diversity and reinforce ethical reporting practices.

Collectively, these women have delivered tangible achievements; stronger investigative journalism, globally recognised storytelling, expansion of independent media platforms, mentorship of the next generation and a steady dismantling of gender barriers in editorial leadership.

They have proven that newsroom excellence is not defined by gender, but by vision, courage and consistency.

The future of African journalism is being written in real time—and women are not just part of that story; they are leading it. ■



Bernice Kariuki



She cooked her way into Arsenal

By The AfriFiles REPORTER

IN elite football, the most decisive work is not always done on the pitches. Some of it happens long before kick-off, in the private ritual of preparation; in recovery plans, in nutrition charts, in kitchens where every gram matters.

That is where Bernice Kariuki built her reputation, a Kenyan chef from Nairobi's Jericho estate who rose into London's luxury hospitality scene and then into Arsenal's high-performance orbit.

Bernice is Arsenal's head chef, first-team chef or first-team private chef; she worked with the club's first-team set-up and turned food into part of the club's competitive machinery.

Her story does not begin in glamour. It begins in Jericho, one of Nairobi's most storied neighbourhoods, where she was born and raised. Kenyan profiles trace her early life through local schools before a restless ambition pushed her outward.

She was not among the many young East Africans who looked abroad not because home had nothing to offer, but because the world seemed to be calling louder.

That ambition mattered, because Kariuki's route into elite kitchens was not inherited, curated or handed down through famous family networks. It was built by movement, reinvention and nerve.

How did she land in London? Not directly, and that is part of what makes the story interesting. According to multiple pro-

files, Kariuki first left Kenya for Sweden at 17, where she enrolled in culinary school for about 18 months.

But Sweden was not the final destination. She found the cuisine uninspiring, changed direction, and moved to the United Kingdom, where she initially pursued psychology rather than cooking.

She later worked in that field for years before abandoning the safety of that path and returning to the discipline she seems to have trusted most; food.

It was a crooked road, but often the crooked roads are the ones that produce the strongest professionals.

That return mattered. In London, Kariuki trained at Westminster Kingsway College, one of Britain's better-known hospitality institutions, then sharpened her craft in some of the capital's most prestigious hotels, including The Lanesborough, The Dorchester and The Waldorf Hilton.

These were not just kitchen jobs. They were finishing schools in pressure, pace, discretion and refinement.

Luxury hotels train chefs to work at speed without losing accuracy, to plate for demanding clients, and to understand that food in elite spaces is never merely about taste; it is about timing, trust and consistency. Those skills would prove crucial later, when football entered the picture.

The precious opportunity came, as many great career turns do, through a moment that could easily have passed unnoticed.

In late 2020, at a Christmas event in London, Kariuki met Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, then one of Arsenal's most recognisable stars.

By several accounts, she did not wait for luck to perform miracles. She asked whether there might be space for a chef at Arsenal. More importantly, she cooked.

Reports say Aubameyang was impressed by her rice, described variously as 'pilau', biryani or jollof-style rice, and hired her as his personal chef.

That first act of trust changed everything. In elite industries, talent matters; so, does proximity. Kariuki had both, and she was ready when the door opened.

From there, the jump to Arsenal followed. Citizen Digital reported in 2021 that she had joined the club as first-team private chef, working under executive chef Darren Taylor and cooking for first-team players, management and the technical bench.

Other coverage says her responsibilities extended beyond plates and presentation into daily nutrition, pre- and post-match recovery, and menus for travel. At London Colney, food was not ornamental; it was infrastructure.

Kariuki's job sat at the intersection of hospitality and performance science, where flavour still matters, but fuel matters more.

That is also why Arsenal, specifically, makes sense. The easy answer is Aubameyang. He was the bridge. But the fuller answer is that Arsenal was the club where Kariuki's profile made immediate sense.

She arrived with luxury-hotel discipline, formal culinary training, and enough nutrition knowledge to work alongside sports scientists and specialist staff.

It is reported that she later described a protein-focused breakfast routine for players and a deliberate shift toward carbohydrate loading before matches.

That level of detail tells you this was not celebrity catering. It was performance catering.

If Arsenal rather than another club became her stage, it was because Arsenal was where trust first met fit. That is an inference, but it is a grounded one.

There is another layer to the question of "why The Gunners?" Recent interview promotions in Kenya have even framed her story as a journey from Arsenal supporter to Arsenal chef.

But even if one strips away the romance of fandom, the professional logic remains stronger than sentiment.

Football clubs do not recruit chefs the way they scout wingers. They recruit for reliability, chemistry and discretion.

Kariuki had already proven she could cook at the highest private level, and Arsenal had a trusted internal connection to her work.

In such worlds, one excellent meal can carry more weight than a hundred unsolicited CVs.

What makes Kariuki especially compelling is that her story did not stop at Arsenal. Since that chapter, Kenyan media have tracked her move into even broader elite circles.

In 2025, she was widely reported to have prepared a bespoke pre-race meal for Lewis Hamilton at Silverstone while working with Scuderia Ferrari's nutrition team.

Her public Instagram profile has also described her as a private chef and sports nutritionist with credits including Arsenal's first team, Real Madrid and Formula 1.

Whether one calls that celebrity, luxury or high-performance cuisine, the point is the same; Kariuki has moved beyond a single club into a rarified European ecosystem where cooking is both craft and strategic service.

There is also something distinctly modern about her rise. This is not the old culinary story of a chef tied to one restaurant, one city, one cuisine or one dining room.

Kariuki belongs to a new class of global culinary professionals; mobile, private, highly specialised, moving between hotels, athletes, travel schedules, recovery menus and elite clients who demand performance as much as pleasure.

She carries East African food memory into spaces often dominated by European codes, and some of the reporting around her Arsenal years notes that she introduced players to Kenyan staples such as 'ugali' and 'sukuma wiki,' adapted for the nutritional logic of elite sport.



That detail matters. It suggests she did not succeed by erasing where she came from, but by refining it for the highest table.

Perhaps that is the deepest appeal of her story. Kariuki did not arrive in London as a ready-made symbol. She became one by taking risk seriously.

She left Kenya young, changed countries, changed disciplines, abandoned a stable profession, retrained, worked in exacting kitchens and then had the courage to ask a football star for a chance.

The resulting career now reads with the clean inevitability of a success story, but it was built from choices that must have looked uncertain at the time.

That is what separates aspiration from ambition; aspiration admires the summit; ambition keeps climbing after the path disappears.

So why Bernice Kariuki, and why Arsenal? Because a chef from Jericho learned that elite worlds still open for people who are prepared when opportunity arrives.

Because London gave her the technical stage, but not the hunger. Because Aubameyang tasted something memorable and trusted the person who made it.

And because Arsenal, for one important stretch, became the place where her precision, nerve and high-end training aligned.

In football, supporters remember goals. Clubs remember margins. Kariuki built a career in those margins, and turned them into a name that now travels far beyond the touchline. ■

Kesh Legacy gives pain a public voice



By Julius KAWESI

KESH Legacy is one of those rare young artists whose work does more than move audiences; it unsettles comfort, names pain and demands change.

Born Ewi Faith Ndzegha on October 10, 2003, Kesh Legacy has quickly become one of Cameroon's most arresting young creative voices; a spoken-word poet, actress and content creator whose art carries the emotional force of protest.

From Wum in the Northwest Region of Cameroon, she is emerging not simply as a performer, but as a messenger of a wounded generation.

Her work reminds us that music, rhythm and spoken art are not only for pleasure. They can also become tools of resistance, truth and social awakening.

That is what makes Kesh compelling. She does not approach performance as decoration. She uses it as confrontation.

Her words are charged with urgency, shaped by the realities of war, poverty, family struggle and emotional survival. In her hands, performance becomes more than sound; it becomes pressure. The listener is not allowed to remain distant. You feel the ache, the fear and the frustration. And that is precisely how art begins to matter politically and socially; when it refuses to let suffering stay invisible.

Kesh Legacy's strength lies in her storytelling. She has mastered the ability to turn private wounds into public language. Her pieces feel lived, not manufactured. They carry the tone of a young woman who has listened closely to the streets, to homes under strain, to children growing up too fast and to communities carrying more pain than they can explain. She speaks in a way that feels immediate and human, and that emotional honesty is what gives her performances their power. Her use of Cameroonian Pidgin is central to that impact. It grounds her work in the language of ordinary people, making her poetry feel intimate, local and authentic. She does not hide behind polished distance. She speaks in the voice of the people she is describing. That choice matters. Real change often begins when language stops sounding official and starts sounding familiar.

Kesh understands that art speaks loudest when people hear themselves in it. Her standout works, including *Wusai we di go*, *Father of my son* and *Cry for help*, show just how effectively she uses performance as social commentary. These are not soft pieces made to drift past the ear. They are

emotional interventions. They ask hard questions. They expose wounds. They force audiences to confront realities that many would rather ignore.

In that sense, Kesh is part of a long tradition of African artists who understand that music and spoken art can become a mirror, a warning and a demand.

This is where her significance deepens. Music, in its broadest sense, has always done more than entertain societies. It has mobilised people, challenged power, preserved memory and given language to the oppressed.

Kesh Legacy belongs to that tradition, even as she brings it into a digital generation. She is proving that a performance delivered through a phone screen can still hit like a public rally. A spoken line can travel like a protest chant. A monologue can stir conscience across borders.

That reality became impossible to ignore when her piece *Mummy Please Pray for Me* went viral on TikTok. The work found strong resonance across different countries, not because it was trendy, but because it touched a nerve.

The title alone carries fear, vulnerability and longing. In performance, it becomes a cry from young people living through anxiety, instability and emotional pressure.

Its success showed something important: audiences are still hungry for art that says something real. Viral attention, in this case, was not built on spectacle alone. It was built on truth.

Yet Kesh's rise is not only a matter of virality. Behind the emotion is discipline. She is a student at the University of Bamenda, studying Theatre, Television and Film Studies, and that training sharpens her stagecraft.

She understands pause, delivery, emotional build and the physical weight of performance. She does not simply recite words; she inhabits them. That is why her pieces land with such force. She performs with the conviction of someone who knows that art can do social work.

Her achievements reflect that seriousness. She has won two awards representing the University of Bamenda in UNIFAC for slam poetry and folktales, recognition that points to both talent and craft.

These wins matter because they confirm that she is not only visible, but formidable. She is building a body of work that commands attention in both popular and competitive spaces.

Even controversy has highlighted her growing influence. In early 2026, reports emerged that one of her monologues had been used by a Nigerian actress without credit to win a competition.

The incident was troubling, but it also revealed how far her words had travelled. Her work had crossed borders because it was powerful enough to be borrowed, imitated and claimed.

It exposed both the reach of her voice and the fragility of protection for young African creators in the digital age.

Still, what stands tallest about Kesh Legacy is her purpose. She represents a generation of artists refusing to separate creativity from conscience.

She shows that performance can be beautiful and disruptive at once. That rhythm can carry truth. That poetry can challenge systems. That music, however raw or stripped-down, can move hearts before it moves society.

Kesh Legacy is not merely rising. She is pushing. Pushing listeners to feel, to think and to confront the human cost of silence.

In doing so, she makes a larger argument without ever preaching it directly; art is not powerless.

Music can push for change. And sometimes, change begins with one fearless voice daring to turn pain into sound, and that is what Kesh Legacy is doing. ■

Can East Africa conquer Afcon?



By Yassin LUPATU

WHEN Africa Cup of Nations 2027 kicks off across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, it will mark more than a historic co-hosting moment.

It will be a test of whether East Africa's long-awaited football awakening can translate into continental dominance. The question is bold: can any of the host nations realistically win Africa's most prestigious football trophy?

Historically, the odds are not in their favour. Afcon has largely been dominated by North and West African giants such as Egypt, Cameroon, Nigeria and Senegal.

These nations boast deep talent pools, strong domestic leagues and a consistent pipeline of players competing at the highest levels in Europe. By contrast, East African teams have often struggled to move beyond the group stages.

However, hosting changes everything.

For Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, Afcon 2027 presents a rare convergence of opportunity: home advantage, massive investment in infrastructure, and heightened national focus on football development.

Historically, host nations tend to outperform expectations. The energy of home crowds, familiarity with conditions and reduced travel fatigue can shift momentum in crucial matches.

Tanzania national football team has shown gradual improvement in recent years, with more players gaining exposure in competitive leagues abroad.

Yet, inconsistency and limited experience at elite tournament levels remain concerns. For Tanzania to become a serious contender, it must build tactical discipline and squad depth well before the tournament.

Uganda national football team arguably has the strongest recent Afcon pedigree among the three. Uganda has qualified multiple times in the past decade and demonstrated defensive organisation and resilience.

However, translating qualification into title ambition requires attacking creativity and the ability to compete against Africa's elite teams in knockout football.

Kenya national football team, on the other hand, carries immense potential but has been hindered by administrative instability and inconsistent performances.

If governance issues are addressed and talent is properly nurtured, Kenya could emerge as a dark horse, especially with the backing of home support.

Beyond individual teams, the broader challenge lies in structural readiness. Winning Afcon is not just about passion; it is about systems, youth development, professional leagues, coaching quality and investment in sports science. East Africa is improving, but the gap with established football powerhouses remains significant.

Still, football is not played on paper.

Recent tournaments have shown that tactical discipline, unity and belief can upset even the strongest teams. Morocco's historic run at the 2022 World Cup is a reminder that African football is evolving, and traditional hierarchies can be challenged. For East Africa, Afcon 2027 is not just about participation, it is about rewriting perception.

Realistically, the chances of Kenya, Uganda or Tanzania lifting the trophy remain slim—but not impossible. A semi-final appearance for any of the hosts would already signal a major breakthrough.

A final appearance would redefine the region's football identity. And a victory, however unlikely, would be one of the greatest underdog stories in African football history.

Ultimately, Afcon 2027 is less about immediate triumph and more about long-term transformation. If the three nations use this moment to strengthen their football ecosystems, invest in youth and build competitive squads, the dream of lifting the trophy may not be realised in 2027, but it could be within reach in the years that follow.

For East Africa, the journey to greatness may be just beginning. ■



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