

AfricaRenewal

April 2018 - July 2018

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**YOUTH DEMAND:
A seat at
the table**

**Africa's young
achievers**

**Bringing rural women
to the frontline**

**Mission accomplished:
Peacekeeping success in Liberia**



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Cover photo: Tanzanian youth activist, Rahma Mwita Abdallah makes a point at an international youth forum at the UN headquarters in New York. Africa Renewal/Shu Zhang

Africa Renewal (ISSN 2517-9829) is published in English and French by the Strategic Communications Division of the United Nations Department of Public Information. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or the publication's

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Women promote non-violence during the 2011 elections in Liberia. UNMIL/Emmanuel Tobey

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Africa Renewal is published by the United Nations, New York, on recycled paper.

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ISBN: 978-92-1-101391-7

eISBN: 978-92-1-045128-4

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A farmer harvests wheat in Chichaoua Province, Morocco. © Alamy/Jake Lyell

Morocco: Climate change efforts bear fruit

By Yinying Lin

Morocco's climate change adaptation plan, launched in 2008, is now bearing fruit, says the United Nations.

The UN's special rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, says that the plan Maroc vert (PMV) or the Green Morocco Plan has resulted in an increase in agricultural productivity, although she urged the country to provide more widespread support for small-scale farmers.

The PMV focuses on modernizing large-scale farms with high added value, supporting small-scale farms and combating rural poverty. Since 2008, Morocco has invested about 150 billion dirhams (\$16.3 billion) in more than 700 projects on mechanization, irrigation and soil fertilization, while it is expected to invest another 20 billion dirhams (US\$2.1 billion) over the coming years in 550 community projects, according to data from the country's Ministry of Economy and Finance.

"The Plan Maroc Vert has created an irreversible momentum without precedent," says Michael Hage, the former Food

and Agricultural Organization (FAO) representative in Morocco and the current coordinator of the FAO Subregional Office for North Africa. "It has played a determi-

see page 34

Migration within Africa

International migration, especially from Africa to Europe and elsewhere, usually gets negative publicity. Can anything good come out of migration?

mmYes, according to a new report to be launched in May 2018 by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Intra-African migration, if properly managed, can contribute greatly to the continent's development by boosting trade, generating jobs, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation and reducing poverty.

The *Economic Development in Africa Report 2018*, subtitled *Migration and Structural Transformation*, focuses on how host and home countries on the continent can better harness the economic benefits of intra-African migration.

According to the UNCTAD report, most migration in Africa occurs within the continent—and yields significant benefits for the continent and its people. ●



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Women and youth are the pathbreakers and pillars for the realization of the African Union's vision for an 'integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa.'

Bience Gawanas, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Special Adviser on Africa

No one loses when women and girls experience equality and empowerment.

Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda

We must rid ourselves of this colonial mentality that demands we rely on other people's currency.

Cyril Ramaphosa, President of South Africa

If you don't have a seat at the table, you will sit on the floor.

Gogontlejang Phaladi, Botswanan youth activist

We hope that 2018 will be the year when Africa makes history because it signed the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Vera Songwe, executive secretary, Economic Commission for Africa



African youth are relying on technology and improved leadership and organising skills to mobilise for social change and to demand a seat at the table. In this edition, we explore the factors driving the continent's emerging young leaders and why they are increasingly influential in society.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP

African youth participate at an international youth forum at the UN headquarters in New York.  Africa Renewal/Shu Zhang

African youth demand a seat at the table

Voices of young Africans are becoming difficult to ignore

BY BUSANI BAFANA

A new wave is sweeping across Africa. Elections on the continent are increasingly yielding younger leadership than ever before. From presidents to ministers and governors, senators to members of parliament, Africa's young people are demanding a seat at the political table.

The youth are using their large numbers to vote in younger leaders or leaders they feel will be sympathetic to their plight.

In Uganda, Proscovia Oromait was only 19 in 2012 when she became the world's youngest MP, representing Usuk County in the Katakwi District. "What I said when I was younger was that in years to come, I will become the president. It's just been my dream to become a leader of Uganda.

And here I am, the youngest MP. And I'm so proud of what I am," Ms. Oromait told the UK's Independent newspaper in an interview.

In South Africa, Lindiwe Mazibuko, 37, was elected leader of the opposition in parliament in 2011, representing the Democratic Alliance. She became the first black woman to hold that position. "There is no prosperity for our continent without a vibrant, diverse and truly competitive politics, founded upon excellence, transparency and commitment to the public good," Ms. Mazibuko said in a TEDxEuston talk in January 2016.

There are more young leaders coming up in parliaments in Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt,

Tunisia, Morocco, Cameroon, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda and others. And the August 2018 presidential election could give Zimbabwe's political leadership a youthful makeover.

Forty-year-old Nelson Chamisa, the new leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, is angling to be Zimbabwe's new leader. Were Mr. Chamisa to win, he would be one of Africa's youngest democratically elected presidents.

Sixty percent of Zimbabwe's 5.3 million registered voters in the watershed elections are under 40, according to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. It is a show of commitment by the youth to deciding a new course of governance after the leadership of Robert Mugabe.

Mr. Mugabe, 94, was Africa's oldest leader until he resigned as president in November last year, having ruled for 37 years.

A young voice

In a recent interview with the German radio station Deutsche Welle, Mr. Chamisa said, "It is young people who are the movers and shakers. We want to also see that in politics. We want our continent to be painted young. We want our continent to have a young voice."

In a 2015 article for CNN, David E. Kiwuwa, an associate professor of international studies at Princeton University in the US, notes that "the average age of the ten oldest leaders [in Africa] is 78.5 compared to 52 for the world's ten most-developed economies."

On average, according to Mr. Kiwuwa, "only between 15% and 21% of [these African countries] citizens were born when these presidents took the reins."

Some Africans argue that "with age and longevity in office come wisdom, foresight and experience," Mr. Kiwuwa writes. He further posits that, given opportunities in politics and other sectors, Africa's youth can transform the continent. He regrets that the long tenures of older politicians continue to stifle the emergence of credible youthful successors.

Innocent Batsani Ncube, a 39-year-old Zimbabwean political scholar, echoes Mr. Kiwuwa's sentiments, stressing that youth rarely get the attention of Africa's political leaders, who do not believe young people can lead.

Older political elites believe they have all the solutions to development challenges, Mr. Ncube told *Africa Renewal*. "An example is the approach that those in leadership use to solve young people's job problems. Their solutions mostly suit the elites, rather than the young people. There is limited consultation in ideation between the youth and the older leaders."

Youth need a seat on the transformation train because of their energy and passion, argues Kuseni Dlamini in a paper published in 2013 by Ernst & Young, a UK-based professional services firm.

"The single most important factor for continental growth is the energy and passion of young Africans who have a palpable sense of positive energy and optimism,"

adds Mr. Dlamini, who is the chair of Times Media Group of South Africa and head of Massmart, a retailer affiliated with Walmart in the US.

"They [youth] are young entrepreneurs, innovators, scientists, academics, engineers, professionals. They do not want aid or charity. They want to unleash their full potential," said Mr. Dlamini, who was named "Young Global Leader" in 2008 by the World Economic Forum, a recognition accorded "higher-performing leaders" who mentor other youth.

Africa's population will be 1.6 billion by 2030, according to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the rapidly growing youth population will



Lindiwe Mazibuko, 37,
was elected leader of the Democratic
Alliance in 2011 in South Africa



Proscovia Oromait of Uganda was only
19 in 2012 when she became the
world's youngest MP

constitute 42% of that number. The youth will need opportunities to participate in politics, jobs and overall inclusion in development.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) says that one-third of Africa's 420 million youths (those ages 15–35) are unemployed, another third are vulnerably employed and only one in six young people is gainfully employed.

"While 10 to 12 million youths enter the workforce each year [in Africa], only 3.1 million jobs are created, leaving vast numbers of youth unemployed. The consequences of youth unemployment in Africa are pervasive and severe: unemployment

translates to poorer living conditions, fuels migration out of Africa, and contributes to conflict on the continent itself," notes the AfDB.

The AfDB adds that "the desired long-term outcome is expanded economic opportunity for both male and female African youth, which leads to improvements in other aspects of their lives."

The bank therefore aims to create 25 million jobs through its Jobs for Youth in Africa Strategy (2016–2025) and spur economic growth by empowering the youth to realize their full potential.

Disrupting the status quo

African youth are demanding a seat at the political table, but the agribusiness sector, which could be worth \$1 trillion by 2030, according to the World Bank, is the low-hanging fruit.

The African Agribusiness Incubator Network (AAIN), a business development company based in Accra, Ghana, wants youth to innovate and lead the continent's economic transformation.

Ralph von Kaufmann, an agribusiness mentor and consultant with AAIN, says that "agribusiness presents opportunities for youths and women, but there is a need to create the right policies that facilitate their participation."

Nthabiseng Kgobokoe, a young livestock and horticulture farmer in South Africa, told *Africa Renewal* that the first step must be to "include the youth in policy making. Education alone cannot address all our issues; there is a need to create conducive political and economic conditions for us to be successful young entrepreneurs."

Ms. Kaobokoe said young entrepreneurs across Africa face similar challenges, including a lack of access to financing and other resources, red tape and inadequate policies to foster inclusive growth.

Policy makers forget that youth are the backbone of any socioeconomic and political development, stresses Ms. Kgobokoe.

Talented young people must step forward and be part of decision making, says Ms. Mazibuko. "We [in Africa] are emerging from that stereotype of a dark continent, the hopeless continent.... We must run for office, we must work in the civil service and we must disrupt the political status quo." 🍌

The hashtag revolution gaining ground

Africa's millennials are using technology to drive change

BY ELENI MOURDOUKOUTAS

When some 276 teenage girls were kidnapped from their boarding school in northeastern Nigeria in April 2014, Oby Ezekwesili, a civil society activist and former World Bank vice president, was disheartened by the lacklustre response of her government and local television stations.

Ms. Ezekwesili and others decided to take to social media to demand action from the government. They emphasized their point with a march to the national assembly in the capital, Abuja.

Within three weeks, the “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign put the girls’ kidnapping front and centre on the world stage: the Twitter hashtag had been used over one million times, including by notable influencers former US first lady Michelle Obama and girls’ rights activist and Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai. The grassroots movement proved instrumental in pressuring the Nigerian government to acknowledge the kidnapping and to commit more resources to rescuing the girls.

Technology and young people

Beginning with the Arab Spring in 2011, young Africans have been using technology to mobilise around issues affecting them. Images of young Africans assembled in protest, mobilising around hashtags, are now commonplace on Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms.

Professor Alcinda Honwana, inter-regional advisor on social development policy at the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, cites the immediacy of social media as a key factor in mobilising large numbers of people and catalysing change.

“Without the internet and social media, it would be very difficult to organise a huge rally in 48 hours,” Prof. Honwana told *Africa Renewal* in an interview. Social media enables organizers to have a major impact on society, she said, “because you can assemble

large numbers of society very quickly and differently from what you would do when you had to go to the streets or knock on doors or put up flyers.”

Young people’s political activism probably safeguarded the integrity of the 2016 election in The Gambia. They began using the hashtag #GambiaHasDecided when former president Yahya Jammeh refused to vacate his office and hand over power after suffering electoral defeat. In addition to spreading the word over Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the anti-Jammeh campaign also encouraged citizens to wear T-shirts bearing the slogan.

“Social media has forever changed the dynamics of politics in Africa,” Raffie Diab, one of the campaign’s founding leaders, told *Africa Renewal*.

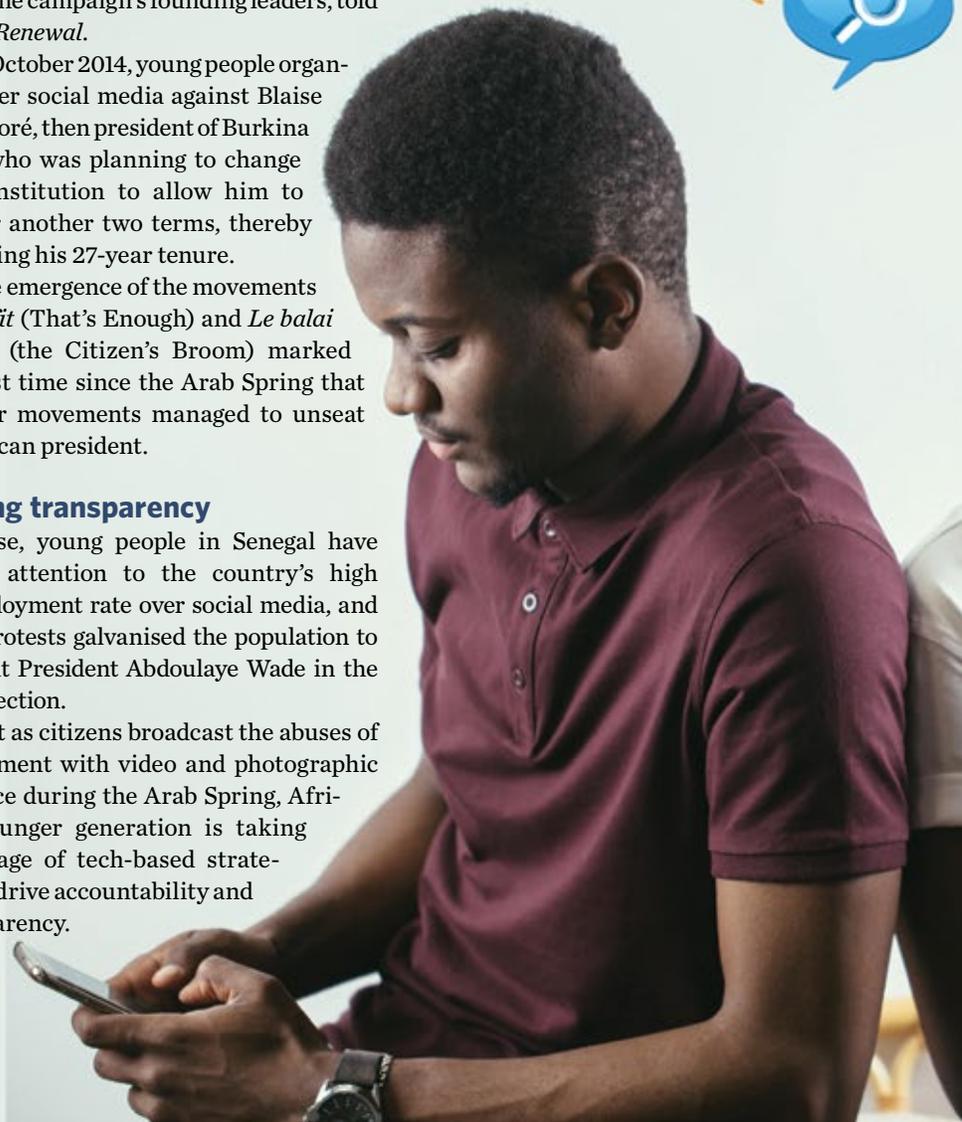
In October 2014, young people organised over social media against Blaise Compaoré, then president of Burkina Faso, who was planning to change the constitution to allow him to run for another two terms, thereby extending his 27-year tenure.

The emergence of the movements *Ça suffit* (That’s Enough) and *Le balai citoyen* (the Citizen’s Broom) marked the first time since the Arab Spring that popular movements managed to unseat an African president.

Driving transparency

Likewise, young people in Senegal have drawn attention to the country’s high unemployment rate over social media, and their protests galvanised the population to vote out President Abdoulaye Wade in the 2012 election.

Just as citizens broadcast the abuses of government with video and photographic evidence during the Arab Spring, Africa’s younger generation is taking advantage of tech-based strategies to drive accountability and transparency.



One example of this is Livity Africa, a South Africa-based nonprofit organisation whose aim is to amplify authentic youth voices and concerns, in part through its nationwide media channel, “Live Magazine” SA. Launched in 2011, the channel highlights issues that are overlooked by mainstream media, and it encourages government accountability via its weekly “Live from Parliament” segment. Similarly, the Nigeria-based SMS and web platform “Shine Your Eye” facilitates public engagement with parliamentarians and other elected officials by providing access to their track records. By sending a free SMS message to the platform’s dedicated number or visiting its website,



anyone can get detailed information on the record of a public official.

African leaders themselves are also now using technology to attract young people to their campaigns.

Voters under the age of 35 made up 51% of the entire electorate in the 2017 election in Kenya, and the number of voters in the 26–35 age range had more than doubled since 2013, according to data from the electoral commission.

Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta maintains active Facebook and Twitter accounts, and his supporters say his modern communication tactics are “demystifying the presidency.”

In an unprecedented break from his predecessor Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe’s new president Emmerson Mnangagwa has wasted no time in engaging directly with Zimbabweans over social media, regularly posting comments on Facebook that address concerns raised by his constituents. Mr. Mugabe famously did not own a smartphone.

Mr. Mnangagwa is gaining popularity for posting short videos on his Facebook and Twitter accounts in which he encourages citizens to message their thoughts as part of a “new national dialogue,” maintaining that leadership is a “two-way street.” The digital approach is exciting many Zimbabweans who are eager to get the president’s attention.

While young people in recent years have become the most politically engaged on the continent, their involvement has been primarily through protests and activism rather than voting.

Negative effects

Youth engagement with social media also has its negative effects. “Sadly, [social] media is not often used wisely by youth,” notes the Africa Alliance of the Young Men Christian Association, a

leading pan-African youth development network. It adds that, “Instead, increasing reports reflect that young people use these virtual spaces as platforms for cyber bullying, violence and intimidation.” The association maintains that this is “an age of unprecedented access to explicit images and videos” that can have a harmful influence on the youth.

In 2016, the African Development Bank, a multilateral development finance institution, reported that by 2050 Africa will be home to 38 of the 40 youngest countries in the world, and that all 38 will have median populations under 25 years of age. Experts believe that the youth vote will determine election outcomes in a few years.

Campaigns encouraging young people to vote span the continent. In 2014, South Africa’s electoral commission launched the “I Voted” campaign, which encouraged voters to take a picture of their marked thumb and post on social media with the hashtag #IVoted. The hashtag boasted more than 30,000 uses on Twitter.

Not a cure-all

However, Prof. Honwana warns that social media is not a cure-all for apathy. In the case of South Africa, the national South African statistical service reported that young people accounted for only 18% of total voters in the 2016 local government elections, despite those under the age of 35 making up 66% of the total population.

She asserts that while social media can be a useful tool for conveying the importance of voting, young people will not take up ballots over mobile devices unless they believe that their votes will bring about real change in their lives.

In the 2016 presidential election in the Gambia, for instance, young people largely supported Adama Barrow, who challenged Mr. Jammeh, because they thought Mr. Barrow would bring about a change in governance. “I just know Barrow will be different. He’s listening to us,” 25-year-old Gambian voter Haddy Ceessay told *The Guardian*, a UK-based newspaper.

Still, Prof. Honwana does not see social media as just a trend. “If we are talking about young people, I think everything that will happen from now on is going to be through social media. That’s where they live,” she said. 🇳🇵

Young people are using technology to change society. 📱 Alamy/Shakirov



YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Students at the African Leadership University in Mauritius.  ALU website

MO IBRAHIM FOUNDATION WINNERS

Nurturing young leaders

Training young African leaders can take societies to great heights

BY FRANCK KUWONU

Thanks to a unique fellowship at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) as an Ibrahim Leadership Fellow, Marian Yinusa is making an impact in the lives of school-age girls in her birthplace of northern Nigeria.

Currently a senior financial economist at the Africa Development Bank (AfDB), Ms. Yinusa also runs the GENN Initiative (Girls Education in Northern Nigeria) foundation, which pays for young girls to go to school.

She would probably say her many accomplishments were a surprise—even to her!—yet she was strongly motivated to help girls break the barriers keeping them from school. “I wanted to do something about it,” she told *Africa Renewal*.

While at the ECA in Addis Ababa, she followed keenly the day-to-day work of senior officials, which led to more responsibility and a promotion at her job.

According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, sponsor of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation Leadership Fellowship Program, the purpose of the program is to mentor future African leaders by offering them an opportunity to work at the highest levels of the AfDB, the ECA or the International Trade Centre (ITC).

Ms. Yinusa is one of 18 fellows so far to benefit from the leadership programme. She describes her experience as “learning by observation.”

Eddy Oketch, the seventh of eight siblings, who dropped out of school to provide for his family, parlayed his intuitive organizing ability into an Ibrahim fellowship in 2017.

Carl Manlan, who was a fellow in 2014, remembers, “I shadowed [the work of senior officials] and was in most of the ECA executive secretary’s meetings.”

Mr. Manlan currently heads the Ecobank Foundation, the charitable arm of the West African retail and investment bank with headquarters in Lomé, Togo. After his fellowship, Mr. Manlan served as executive secretary of the Africa against Ebola Solidarity Trust, a charity that partnered with the African Union between 2014 and 2015 to mobilise funds to train and deploy African health workers to help fight Ebola in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Aside from the Ibrahim leadership fellowship, prominent leadership training initiatives for young Africans include the African Leadership Initiative, the African Leadership Institute, the Young African Leaders Initiative, the African Leadership Development Program, the Africa Science Leadership Programme and the African Leadership Academy (ALA).

ALA is a pan-African high school based in Johannesburg, South Africa, where more than 700 students from 45 countries have received training in the past 10 years.



Ellen Sirleaf (2018)



Hifikepunye Pohamba (2014)

“Africa does not need leaders who are 75 or 65 years old. We need leaders who are young, vibrant, innovative and who the continent’s youth can relate to,” declared Graça Machel, widow of South Africa’s iconic anti-apartheid fighter Nelson Mandela, at the celebration of the 10th anniversary of ALA in Johannesburg in February.

The Sudanese billionaire entrepreneur and philanthropist Mo Ibrahim has decried the entrenchment of aging African leaders who sideline younger generations, fighting tooth and nail to hang on to power when they’re past their prime.

Fred Swaniker, a leadership development expert and cofounder of ALA, says he established the academy because his experience growing up in countries such as his native Ghana, the Gambia, Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe made him realize the difference that educated leadership makes in a country.

Leaders of tomorrow

He chastises post-independence leaders who “brought nothing but havoc to Africa,” but praises leaders such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda and the late Nelson Mandela of South Africa who he says have provided purposeful leadership for their countries.

Mr. Swaniker envisions a generation of young African leaders who will be able to create prosperity.

The Mo Ibrahim Foundation’s Leadership Fellowship and ALA address leadership training differently. The six-year-old fellowship doesn’t involve academic training or seminars.

With a goal of making the youth of today the leaders of tomorrow, ALA is setting up a network of leadership colleges across the continent, and hopes to train three million young African leaders over the next 50 years, Mr. Swaniker says. The first campus was opened in Mauritius in 2015 and the second in Rwanda in 2017.

Those discussing Africa’s

problems usually put the spotlight on the continent’s inadequate electric power, deep and entrenched poverty, insufficient or underpaying jobs and slow pace of industrialization—and on ways to mobilize resources to address these challenges. There is a need for good leadership, said Sam Adeyemi, a leadership consultant, during an online debate at the World Economic Forum on Africa 2017.

Educate, observe and learn

Contributing to the same debate, Mr. Swaniker remarked that “great leaders aren’t born—they’re made,” and added that the deliberate training of “leaders who take societies to great heights” is what makes most nations successful. Both speakers repeatedly mentioned a need to ramp up leadership training for young Africans.

In retrospect, both leadership training beneficiaries, Ms. Yinusa and Mr. Manlan, believe that hands-on experience at multinational organizations benefited them as young professionals. Mr. Manlan says the fellowship equipped him with the requisite knowledge and experience to shoulder increasing managerial duties at the international level. He would therefore like other institutions to provide more such programmes.

Jacqueline Musiitwa, who received a fellowship at ITC in 2012, now heads the Ugandan branch of Financial Sector Deepening, a UK government-funded financing programme for reducing poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. Having previously attended many short leadership programmes and seminars, she “immediately jumped” at the opportunity to go to ITC. “Of all the training that I attended, this was the only one that offered real-life professional experience, and it’s the best so far,” she says.

Ms. Musiitwa had trained as a lawyer and in 2007 founded the Hoja Law Group, a legal consultancy on corporate governance, commercial and public law issues that operates



Pedro Pires
(2011)



Festus Mogae
(2008)



Joaquim Chissano
(2007)

in Kigali and New York. She participated at the World Economic Forum in 2011 as a Young Global Leader, and now juggles legal practice with other jobs. Yet she feels Africa does not provide enough leadership development opportunities for young professionals.

Nudging the elders

In addition to formal leadership training programmes, Africa’s current leaders also need to contribute to the development of the young by demonstrating good leadership skills, analysts say.

In February former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership for leading her country’s recovery, through reconciliation and nation-building, after years of bloody conflict.

Launched in 2006, the prize is meant to promote good governance and peaceful political transitions by recognizing and celebrating African presidents who, according to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, “have developed their countries and strengthened democracy and human rights” and are “exceptional role models for the continent.”

Ms. Sirleaf handed over power to 51-year-old George Weah in January.

But there appears to be a dearth of exceptional political leadership; over a decade of its existence, except for Mr. Mandela, who was given an honorary award, only five leaders have met the prize’s criteria: Ms. Sirleaf (2018), Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique (2007), Festus Mogae of Botswana (2008), Pedro Pires of Cabo Verde (2011) and Hifikepunye Pohamba of Namibia (2014).

Between academic training championed by ALA and real-life experience advanced by the Ibrahim leadership fellowship, there appears to be “room for a lot more” efforts at training young leaders, Ms. Musiitwa says. 🍌

INTERVIEW

Youth can be agents of positive change

— Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN youth envoy

Jayathma Wickramanayake, 27, from Sri Lanka, is the new UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. Her role is to expand the UN's youth engagement and advocacy efforts. She also serves as an adviser to the Secretary-General. Shortly after her extensive tour of the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa in February, she sat down with *Africa Renewal's* Zipporah Musau to discuss her mission. Excerpts:

Africa Renewal: You have just come back from a mission to five countries in Africa. How was it?

Jayathma: It definitely exceeded my expectation! I did not have much exposure to Africa before I took up this job, because my work was mainly in my home country [Sri Lanka], working with youth. So, I never really before now had the opportunity go to Africa and interact with young people, even though I have friends from the region.

Why did you choose Africa and how did it start?

UNFPA - the United Nations Population Fund, approached me with this wonderful proposal of a multi-country mission to Africa. Then a few days before I travelled, my office sent out a tweet announcing the trip and the response was amazing. Upon arrival to each country, the welcome, the level of energy, and the love extended to me was unbelievable. I may be Sri Lankan by birth, but part of me is definitely African by choice.

What were your impressions of the young people you met?

The amount of resilience the young people in the continent have surprised me. You might have seen pictures of us laughing and dancing together, but just before that, we were sitting under a tree talking about issues and challenges these youth face, even to the point of sometimes crying together. I met some who have gone through situations incomprehensible for us sitting here in New York.

What did they tell you were their main concerns?

Young people voiced concerns about lack of access to education, unemployment, migration, and young women's sexual and reproductive health. These were the core issues discussed in all five countries I visited.

Can you expound a bit on these issues?

On education: the main concern is access to education, but not just any education, but quality education. There is a study that shows that about 30% of the skills acquired in 2015 will not be relevant by 2020. So, in such a rapidly changing world, what should we teach in our schools? Do we teach the usual subjects or do we focus more on skills-development? Young people require skills that are adaptable and can be useful in multiple professions and fields.

On digital divide: Unlike young people living in the urban areas, those in rural areas are left behind in terms of information and technology. There are also girls who do not even have a chance to get basic education, let alone technological education.

On issues affecting girls: Girls face various barriers as they seek education. Often it becomes an issue when they are on their menstrual cycles because they don't have pads or their schools don't have adequate sanitary facilities. Some girls' education is often disrupted to take care of their younger siblings, while others are married off at a very young age or drop out



YOUTH LEADERSHIP

due to teenage pregnancy. Female genital mutilation is another big issue.

On migration: Due to lack of opportunities for young people, many of them risk their lives crossing the Sahara and Mediterranean Sea to get to Italy or other countries to look for better opportunities. Many die in this process of trying to take this extreme path.

What is your office doing to help these young people in Africa?

In my position, I am tasked with bringing the UN closer to young people, and young people closer to the UN. As a representative of the Secretary General, I meet top government officials and other stakeholders and use such opportunities to raise awareness of the issues young people are facing and then urge the officials to address them.

What would you say you achieved during this trip?

The biggest outcome of my mission to Africa was being able to act as a bridge to bring the young people's concerns to the attention of decisionmakers, urging them to make a difference in young people's lives and holding them accountable. Having those one-on-one interactions with the



young people I meet, some of whom have gone through really tough situations, enables me to bring their voices to the discussions here at the UN. I talked to marginalized young people, as well as innovators, and social entrepreneurs, who inspired me to raise their issues in my meetings with government ministers, parliamentarians, UN Country Teams, and the media in every country I visited.

Any immediate results?

I saw some remarkable results! For instance, the UN Country Team in Nigeria will set up an advisory mechanism for youth to be consulted on its work on the ground.

What are the young people themselves doing to improve their lot?

The mission offered a great opportunity to highlight the amazing contributions these young people themselves are making to improve their communities. For example, in Nigeria I met this young woman - a survivor of rape - who has developed a mobile phone app that can help other young women to report gender-based violence to the nearest police station. This shows that young people are not just victims,

Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Youth Envoy.

📷 Africa Renewal/ Shu Zhang

they can also bring solutions to the table. And when talking to decision-makers, I was able to highlight this role of young people as agents of positive change, so that they can treat youth as assets, rather than liabilities.

How will you amplify this message?

One of the things I am trying to do is to bring some of these young change-makers to the UN Headquarters for the forthcoming High-Level Political Forum and UN General Assembly to showcase, not just the issues they face, but also the solutions that they bring to the table. I have also tried to amplify this through the UN country teams in various countries.

Do you have any special programmes or campaigns targeting young people in Africa?

Indeed, we do. In fact, one of our biggest campaigns is “Not Too Young to Run,” started in Nigeria and aimed at lowering the legal age required to run for office from 40 to 35. We have now made it a global campaign that advocates for the rights of

young people to run for elected office. We are working with the interparliamentary union, OHCHR, UNDP, and some other partners on scaling it up. During my trip I also called for youth affirmative action within political parties, urging the official to remove existing barriers to youth participation in decision-making.

What are your views on youth taking seeking positions, not just in politics but also in business and other spheres?

It’s been amazing! Some of the brightest young minds that I’ve met on this job are from Africa. I say that without any bias. I am very impressed by the work young Africans do, they are so creative. On this trip I met young innovators, for example, one of them has invented a three-wheeler which uses solar power, another one had developed an online platform to help candidates running for office to design and organize their political campaigns.

What challenges do young people pushing for space, a seat at the political table, face?

We have identified several layers of barriers that hinder young people from participation. The first layer is at the personal level - having no confidence or belief in themselves. The second layer is social - family and friends around a young person, who may sometimes discourage them from venturing into politics. And third is political party structures. Young people are under-represented in political parties. The same for the women too.

What’s your advice to young people who get into leadership?

When you get to a position of power, always remember why you are in that position in the first place. Thousands of young people look up to you. Also, don’t forget to create a space for other young people to come onboard.

What values should they live by?

They should live up to the values that we, as young people, have been demanding all along - integrity, transparency, saying no to corruption and standing up for democracy. This could mean sometimes doing things in unconventional ways, maybe changing systems completely upside down - we need transformational change. 🌱

Music: Nigeria's new export

Naija beats topping international charts, but dividends are “scattered”

BY FRANCK KUWONU

It is a cold evening in Antwerp, Belgium's second-largest city, famous for diamonds, beer, art and high-end fashion. Inside a small restaurant, a mix of the latest American pop and rap—clearly enjoyed by diners—is playing on a radio.

Nigerians Olalekan Adetiran and Adaobi Okereke, enjoying a kebab dinner, are startled when the radio begins playing the unmistakable “Ma Lo”—a catchy, midtempo and bass-laden song by popular Nigerian artistes Tiwa Savage and Wizkid.

The song, currently a hit in Nigeria and across Africa, awakens thoughts of home; they cannot stop smiling at the pleasant surprise. They are visiting Belgium as part of a tour of European countries and their cultural landmarks.

A week earlier, barely two months after its release, the eye-popping video of the song had been viewed on YouTube more than 10 million times—and counting.

For Mr. Adetiran, hearing “Ma Lo” on a Belgian radio station not known to cater to African communities confirms that music from Naija (as Nigerians fondly refer to their country), is going places. It reflects the greater reach of a new generation of Nigerian artists.

Just like the country's movie industry, Nollywood, Nigerian music is drawing interest from beyond the borders, showcasing the vitality of a creative industry that the government is now depending on, among other sectors, to diversify the economy and foster development.

Greater recognition

Last November, Wizkid won the Best International Act category at the 2017 MOBO (Music of Black Origin) Awards held in London, the first for an Africa-based artist. He beat back competition from more established global celebrities such as Jay-Z, Drake, DJ Khaled and Kendrick Lamar.

At the same MOBO Awards, Davido, another Nigerian artist, took home the Best

African Act award for “If,” one of his hit songs—a love-themed ballad with a blend of Nigerian rhythms and R & B.

Since its release in February 2017, the official “If” video has racked up more than 60 million views on YouTube, the highest number of YouTube views for any Nigerian music video and one of the highest ever recorded for a song by an African artist.

Across the African continent, other musical groups, such as Kenya's boy band Sauti Sol, Tanzania's Diamond Platnumz and South Africa's Mafikizolo, have collaborated with or featured Nigerian top stars in attempts to gain international appeal. Reuters news service calls Nigerian music a “cultural export.”

The Nigerian government is now looking to the creative industries, including performing arts and music, to generate revenues.

A billion-dollar industry?

In rebasing or recalculating its GDP in 2013, the Nigerian government included formerly neglected sectors, such as the entertainment industries led by Nollywood. As a result, the country's GDP increased sharply, from \$270 billion to \$510 billion, overtaking South Africa that year as the continent's biggest economy, notes the Brookings Institution, a US-based nonprofit public policy think tank. Brookings reports, however, that the GDP rise didn't show an increase in wealth and that a recent crash in the price of oil, the country's main export, is slowing economic growth.

Nigerian music sales revenues were estimated at \$56 million in 2014, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), an international accounting and auditing firm. The firm projects sales revenues to reach \$88 million by 2019.



Globally, the creative industry is among the most dynamic economic sectors. It “provides new opportunities for developing countries to leapfrog into emerging high-growth areas of the world economy,” the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), a UN body that deals with trade, investment and development issues, said in a 2016 report.

Over the last decade, Europe has been the largest exporter of creative products, although exports from developing countries are growing fast too, UNCTAD reported.

According to PwC, lumped together, annual revenues from music, movies, art and fashion in Nigeria will grow from \$4.8 billion in 2015 to more than \$8 billion in 2019.

Nigeria’s National Bureau of Statistics reports that the local music sector grew “in real terms by 8.4% for the first three months of 2016” and that in the first quarter of 2017, the sector grew by 12% compared with the same period one year prior.

The growth may be attributed to a reversal in music consumption patterns, according to local media reports. Up to the early 2000s, the music in clubs and on the radio in Nigeria was dominated by British and American hit songs. Not anymore. Reportedly, most Nigerians now prefer songs by their local artists to those by foreigners, even the big ones in the West.

“When I go out, I want to hear songs by Davido or Whizkid or Tekno; like other people, I cannot enjoy myself listening to songs by foreign artistes anymore,” says Benjamin Gabriel, who lives in Abuja. With a population of about 180 million, Nigerian artists have a huge market to tap into. The big ones like Whizkid and Davido are feeling the love—maybe the cash too!

The new oil

“We are ready to explore and exploit the ‘new oil,’” Nigeria’s minister of information and culture, Lai Mohammed, commented ahead of a creative industry financing conference held in Lagos last July.

“When we talk about diversifying the economy it is not just about agriculture or solid minerals alone, it is about the

creative industry—about the films, theatre and music,” Mr. Mohammed said.

He was reacting to UNCTAD’s findings that the creative industry contributed £84.1 (about \$115.5) billion to the British economy in 2014 and \$698 billion to the US economy that same year. “Nigeria cannot afford to be left behind,” Mr. Mohammed declared.

The Nigerian government is already providing incentives to investors in the sector, including a recent \$1 million venture capital fund to provide seed money for young and talented Nigerians looking to set up business in creative industries. The government is also allowing the industry “pioneer status,” meaning that those investing in motion picture, video and television production, music production, publishing, distribution, exhibition and photography can enjoy a three- to five-year tax holiday.

Other incentives, such as government-backed and privately backed investment funds, are also being implemented.

Yet as hopes of a vibrant industry rise, pervasive copyright violations could stunt its growth.

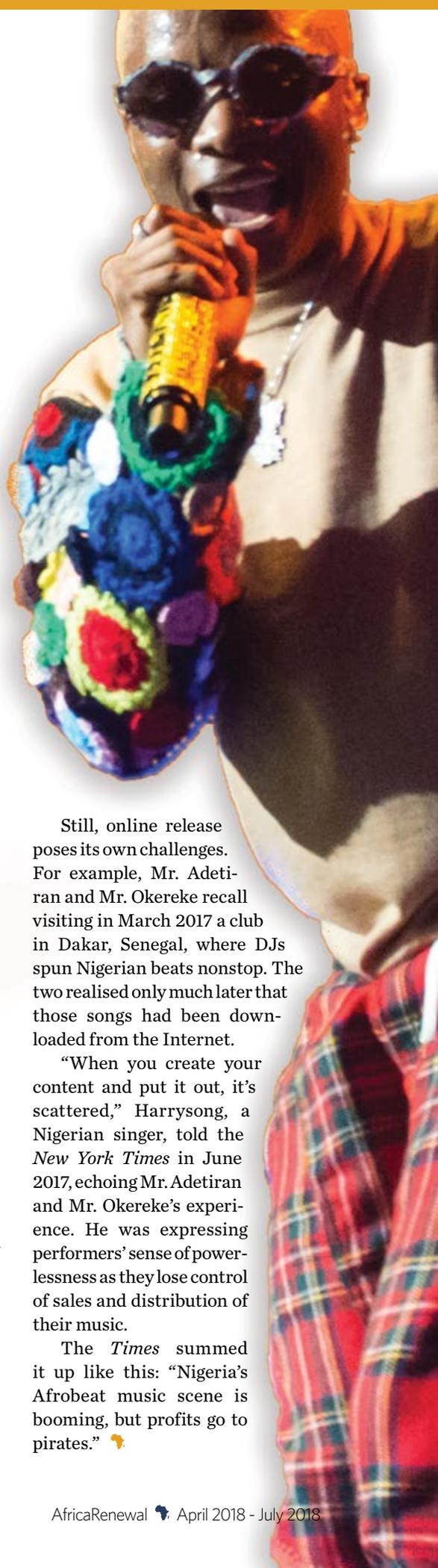
Profits are “scattered”

In December 2017, the Nigerian police charged three people in Lagos with copyright violations. Their arrests had been widely reported in the country months earlier. “Piracy: Three suspects arrested at Alaba with N50 million [US\$139,000] worth of materials,” *Premium Times*, a Lagos-based newspaper, announced in a headline.

Alaba market in Nigeria’s commercial capital, Lagos, is famous for electronics, but it is also notorious for all things fake and cheap, attracting customers from across West Africa to East Africa.

Recent efforts by the authorities to fight piracy led to police raids of Alaba and other markets in the country, resulting in the seizure of pirated items worth \$40 million.

Despite such raids, the business of pirated music and movie CDs continues unabated, turning enforcement efforts into a game of Whack-A-Mole. With minimal returns from CD sales, Nigerian artists rely on ringtone sales, corporate sponsorship contracts and paid performances to make ends meet. Most Nigerian artists now prefer online releases of their songs.



Still, online release poses its own challenges. For example, Mr. Adetiran and Mr. Okereke recall visiting in March 2017 a club in Dakar, Senegal, where DJs spun Nigerian beats nonstop. The two realised only much later that those songs had been downloaded from the Internet.

“When you create your content and put it out, it’s scattered,” Harrysong, a Nigerian singer, told the *New York Times* in June 2017, echoing Mr. Adetiran and Mr. Okereke’s experience. He was expressing performers’ sense of powerlessness as they lose control of sales and distribution of their music.

The *Times* summed it up like this: “Nigeria’s Afrobeat music scene is booming, but profits go to pirates.” 🐼

Wizkid performs in London, United Kingdom.

Alamy/Michael Tubi

PROFILE

Raphael Obonyo

From poverty to the pinnacles of power

A Kenyan boy's odyssey

BY RAPHAEL OBONYO

My name is Raphael Obonyo from Kenya. I grew up in Korogocho, the third-largest slum in the capital, Nairobi, where people live in grinding poverty.

I was the fourth child in a family of nine, and we all lived in a single room with our parents. My dad was a cook at the University of Nairobi. He walked 10 km to and from work daily to support our large family.

From an early age, I knew that education would be my only route out of poverty and hence took my studies seriously. In school I befriended my deputy head teacher's son and we became study partners. The teacher, Stephen Kariuki, would buy books and other school items for me and his son.

It was impossible to study or do homework at home because there was not enough light from the tin lamp we used. Mr. Kariuki opened his home for me to study on weekends. In academic grading, I was always first in class and his son would be second, or vice versa.

I was among the top students in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exams in 1995. Because my dad couldn't afford to send me to high school, my friends from St. John's Catholic Church in Korogocho raised money to pay my fees for the first term at Dagoretti High School.

Many of my classmates were from wealthy and prominent families, unlike me with meager possessions that included donated secondhand uniforms and small change for pocket money.

In school I faced hardships. Frequently I was sent home for nonpayment of school fees. During visiting days, I watched with envy as fellow students were visited by relatives clutching big shopping bags filled with food and goodies.

During holidays I would walk the 10 km from Korogocho to McMillan Memorial Library in the city and back, to study. Despite all these hurdles, I performed well and was admitted to the University of Nairobi.

After undergraduate education, I did community work in Korogocho before clinching a scholarship from the International Fellowships Program through the Ford Foundation to take a



master's in public policy at Duke University in the United States.

In 2012 I was selected to serve on the United Nations Habitat's Youth Advisory Board (YAB), and I was later nominated as a special adviser. My profile had been subjected to a global vote, where it received the highest number of votes.

YAB is a board comprising 16 young people from across the world. The board members are volunteers, and for two years they serve three main roles: represent young people in local and international forums, advise the UN on how to engage urban youth in sustainable urbanization, and develop and strengthen youth participation and advocacy in youth-led initiatives.

Through this UN role, I traveled to different countries around the world, spoke at many forums, and met and shared platforms with presidents and other global leaders.

Currently, I sit on the boards of international bodies such as the Global Diplomatic Forum and the World Bank's Global Coordination Board on Youth and Anti-Corruption.

I am also giving back to my community. I took part in initiating various youth and community development projects, including the Youth Congress of Kenya and the Kenya Youth Media, which have trained many young people from Korogocho on entrepreneurship, filmmaking and journalism. After training, we help teach the trainees how to access capital to start small businesses. The initiative is helping to improve living conditions and reduce poverty amongst the youth.

I have always described myself as a restless dreamer. My ambition is to one day serve as the Secretary-General of the United Nations or the president of my country. But most importantly, I want to keep doing my best at every level, to be the best that I can be, and to make a difference in the world.

So this is not all. There is more work to do. I see myself as a work in progress.

I always share the story of my life journey to inspire young men and women born in disadvantaged places. I often urge the youth to live by the three d's: dream, discipline and determination.

I have faith in the young people of Africa. My passion for the youth is founded on our enormous potential to create a better future for ourselves and for others.

Youth in Africa need opportunities. They represent dynamism, talent and energy that must be harnessed for the continent to make real progress. It should go without saying that the youth are Africa—and we cannot leave Africa behind. 🌱

PROFILE

Phumzile Van Damme

A young MP with a mission

Standing up for women's rights in South Africa's parliament

BY GAYANE ALIKHANYAN

Phumzile Van Damme, one of the youngest members of parliament in South Africa, is also the shadow minister for communications.

She grew up in a family of strong women, and her gift for leadership was already apparent when she was a child. In the fifth grade, she called a student strike because the teacher would not allow students to go out for break. For that she earned the nickname "Big Mouth." Ms. Van Damme became active in national politics after graduation from Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, in 2007, with a bachelor's degree in law and politics. She joined the Democratic Alliance (DA) as a staffer. The DA is the official opposition party to the governing African National Congress (ANC).

Without the financial backup that other politicians had, Ms. Van Damme at some point did menial jobs.

As a black woman, people expected her to join the ANC, the party of Nelson Mandela, but she had other ideas.

"I joined the DA as a disgruntled ANC supporter who found the DA's liberal policies more appealing to me personally. My personal politics are very liberal. I believe in the liberty of the individual, equality, freedom and democracy," Ms. Van Damme says.

Passionate about empowering young women, Ms. Van Damme is dedicated to making sure they have the support they need to stand on their own feet. "The harder I work, the easier I make it for young women who climb up the ladder behind me, so that their struggle will be a bit easier than mine," she says.

"It is challenging to be a young woman. You struggle to be heard, people don't take you seriously. You have to work twice as hard [as men] to be taken seriously," Ms. Van Damme told *Africa Renewal*. Despite such challenges, she says, she would never give up fighting to bring about change in South Africa.



An opportunity came in 2014 when she was elected to parliament at the age of 31, helping to break a gender barrier that once confined women to only 3% of the lawmaking body. Today 42% of all seats in the South African parliament are held by women.

Last year she further distinguished herself by bringing a case against the British multinational public relations and advertising firm Bell Pottinger Private for stoking racial tensions to keep the ruling ANC in power. The firm was subsequently expelled from

If breakdown happens, you must never, ever think that it's a sign of weakness or it's a failure. Do not give up hope. Keep trying. Knock on every door.

South Africa's public relations and communications association.

Nevertheless, it is still a turbulent ride for women who choose a public service career. Phumzile has been disappointed by many developments in her field, but says, "Each time, I believe I learn from that disappointment and I become stronger."

Her message to young women is, "If breakdown happens, you must never, ever think that it's a sign of weakness or it's a failure. Do not give up hope. Keep trying. Knock on every door. Work hard, have a balance and take care of yourselves." 🌟

PROFILE

Gwendolyn Myers

A peace advocate

Mobilising the young for peace and development

BY GWENDOLYN MYERS

I was born in 1990, a year after the Liberian civil war began, and was only 13 years old when the war ended in 2003.

My mother told me that at the time of my birth, she could not afford even a blanket to wrap the new baby. A midwife was kind enough to assist with a cloth. Those were trying times for my family.

As a child, I dreamt of seeing an airplane—not even being in it—and regularly begged my father to take me to the airport to see one. These days, I fly to different regions of the world on speaking engagements as a peace and human rights advocate. The countries I have visited include the United States, Turkey, the Netherlands, Cambodia, South Africa and Rwanda, among others.

I did not initially aspire to a career in peace, human rights and women and youth empowerment advocacy; I wanted to be a doctor and had successfully completed undergraduate studies in chemistry and biology at the Mother Patern College of Health Sciences, an affiliate of the Stella Maris Polytechnic, in Monrovia, Liberia.

Once I began getting involved in peace advocacy, witnessing the international community's peace efforts in my country, I realised that disarming the fighters was just an aspect of peace; to achieve genuine peace requires reconciliation among the various groups, between young and old, the genders, etc.

I decided against going for medical studies, a move that mystified friends and relatives. In fact, my pastor urged my parents to “speak sense into” me. A career in medicine, they felt, would be much more rewarding than any advocacy work I might want to do. Peace advocacy would be a waste of my intellect and talent, they insisted.

I received a Gbowee Peace Foundation scholarship funded by the US Agency for International Development and the International Research and Exchanges Board, a nonprofit, in 2012. This enabled me to study peacebuilding and leadership at the Centre for Justice and Peacebuilding, Eastern Mennonite University, Virginia, US. It was an opportunity I took delightedly.

My passion for peace work began at age 13, when I would engage other children as

the presenter of a radio programme. My father had taken me to the Talking Drum Studios in Monrovia, managed by the nongovernment organization Search for Common Ground. Following weeks of practice, I was selected from among many other children to present a programme called Golden Kids News. Through this programme, I learned how to confidently articulate issues.

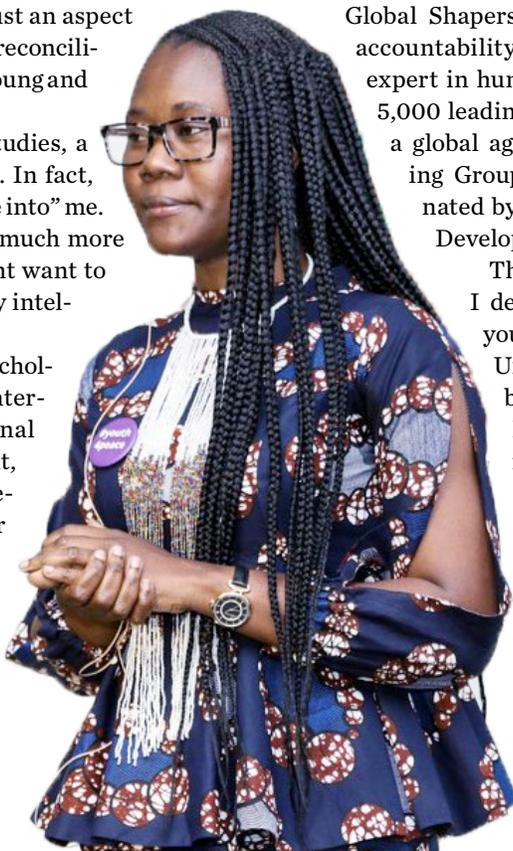
In high school and during my undergraduate studies, my friends and the school administration often called me to settle disputes between students. It was an indication that I could do well in peace efforts. On my graduation, the Catholic Media Centre hired me to present a programme on Radio Veritas, its broadcast channel.

A life-defining moment came in 2008 when the United Nations Mission in Liberia asked me to help organize a group of young volunteers to raise awareness among the youth on social issues such as HIV and AIDS, anti-rape and so on. We later named the group Messengers of Peace, and registered it as a nongovernmental organization with the goal of engaging young people nationwide in volunteerism and peacebuilding.

In 2017 I was elected to the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Advisory Council, for governance and accountability. The forum also nominated me as an expert in human rights, making me one of more than 5,000 leading experts engaged by the forum to shape a global agenda. I am also a member of the Working Group on Youth for Gender Equality coordinated by the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development.

The highlight of my career was in 2015 when I delivered the first-ever official address on youth, peace and security on behalf of the United Network of Young Peacebuilders before the UN Peacebuilding Commission in New York. I used the occasion to advocate for the adoption of Resolution 2250, which urges countries to include young people in peace processes and conflict resolution.

I believe that young people need to demonstrate wisdom and ethical conduct and must be engaged in community- and youth-based initiatives that promote peaceful coexistence. 🌍



PROFILE

Eric Kaduru

Agripreneur with a passion

Changing youth mindsets about commercial agriculture

BY SHU ZHANG

Most young people would hesitate before leaving a stable job for an entrepreneurial venture. But not for a plucky 34-year-old Ugandan, Eric Kaduru, who made a decision to leave his advertising job in the capital city, Kampala, to become an agripreneur—an entrepreneur in the agriculture business.

Mr. Kaduru had grown weary of the early-morning traffic and day-to-day struggle in Kampala, and was ready to try something new. A magazine article about an agricultural project triggered his interest. He and his wife did some research, and that's how the idea of passion fruit farming was conceived. He quit his advertising job in 2011 to found KadAfrica, a commercial passion fruit farm and outgrower network, which links farmers with buyers.

KadAfrica, located in Fort Portal, a town in the Western Region of Uganda, concentrates on commercial production of export-quality passion fruit. It sells fresh passion fruit used to produce juice and pulp countrywide to markets as well as to juice companies such as Coca-Cola. KadAfrica products can now be found in markets in London.

A desire for positive social change drives the company. On its website it lists early marriage, high school dropout rates among girls and girls' lack of economic power as social problems it hopes to tackle. Its vision statement sums up its purpose: "Enable girls to become economic drivers of their communities."

Mr. Kaduru told *Africa Renewal* that at the beginning, most of his employees were women who needed money for food and for their children's school fees. The women also complained that their husbands were not providing any support.

The quicker you fail, the faster you learn, the quicker you grow. So don't give up.

In rural Uganda, women face economic hardships and many young girls are still out of school.

Mr. Kaduru subsequently thought that commercial agriculture could help "out-of-school girls have a better life."

KadAfrica provides training and passion fruit vines to girls, especially those between the ages of 14 and 20 who have dropped out of school, so that they can set up viable agricultural enterprises and earn income. It assists the girls to start their own cooperatives and trains them in basic business management skills and agriculture. The company then connects the girls to domestic and international markets.

The company has engaged more than 1,600 girls since it began operations.

More than 70% of households in Uganda grow food for subsistence only—meaning little to no income. As a result, farming is not seen as a business, but rather a chore delegated to women and girls.

"It was challenging to convince them that it can be a profitable business," Mr. Kaduru said.

With time, after his work with three farmers proved profitable for them, many more wanted to work with KadAfrica.

Young entrepreneurs in Africa usually face challenges in finding capital to start a business and lure top-notch employees.

"Finding access to money is a huge headache for young people, plus getting the best-quality workers also costs a lot of money," Mr. Kaduru said, adding, "Finding good partners really helps."

In 2015, at just 31 years, Mr. Kaduru was awarded the Africa Food Prize, becoming the youngest laureate since the prize was established in 2005 to honour achievements in agriculture in Africa.

Encouraged by this and other accolades, he gives this message to African youth: "When you have an idea, if you pursue it, if you persist, you'll succeed....The quicker you fail, the faster you learn, the quicker you grow. So don't give up." 🌱



PROFILE

William Elong

An ICT innovator

Scaling up drone manufacture for a global market

BY FRANCK KUWONU

The news wasn't big enough to excite international media, but it was an exciting development this year in Cameroon when Will&Brothers, a local engineering and consulting company, unveiled the first-ever drone made in Cameroon.

"It's the pride of the country!" exclaimed Ms. Minette Libom Li Likeng, the country's minister of telecommunications and postal services, who attended the unveiling.

Last year, Forbes magazine named Will&Brothers founder William Elong, 25, one of the most promising Africans under 30.

Mr. Elong, who describes himself as a "big dreamer and overachiever," at 20 years was the youngest-ever graduate of the Economic Warfare School in Paris. He is better known in his country for his Drone Africa venture, a commercial imagery service used by the tourism and agricultural industries in Cameroon.

"Our countries spend huge sums of money on contracting satellite imagery companies to address their geographical mapping needs," Mr. Elong told Africa Renewal in a phone conversation from Douala, Cameroon's economic capital. "Using drones is much cheaper, cost effective and more practical," he added.

The company provides services to the local tourism industry, allowing it to access a "different vision of the same reality"—aerial images of points of interest.

The company also offers mapping services to farmers and others, making it easier for them to pinpoint the exact dimensions of their arable lands.

"In Cameroon, people have

lands but often don't know the borders of their fields. Our service helps determine that," he says. In addition, farmers can use their services in field surveys and targeted in-field crop management.

Since its founding three years ago, when it had four employees and 12 drones, the company has been growing at a good pace: it now has 12 employees, half of whom work in the Douala headquarters, while the rest operate from Germany, France and Côte d'Ivoire.

Following the unveiling of his locally made drones, Mr. Elong is looking at expanding into other countries in Africa, Asia and Europe, and is in the process of raising \$2 million for that purpose.

It will not be the first time that Will&Brothers has relied on external and publicly subscribed financing for the drone initiative. Three years ago, the company managed to raise some \$200,000 to advance the drone manufacturing project.

"It is not just about the hardware," Mr. Elong said. "It is also about software, about coding." While he is eager to locally manufacture cheap drones, the real challenge is to provide tailor-made solutions to socioeconomic development challenges, he said.

So enters Cyclops, Mr. Elong's next quest, which aims to explore artificial intelligence and with which he wants to equip drones with the ability to "detect people, objects and vehicles and to identify different types of animals at specific sites."

"Artificial intelligence is the future of humanity," he says. "I wish more people would take an interest in technology." 🦋



Our countries spend huge sums of money on contracting satellite imagery companies to address their geographical mapping needs. Using drones is much cheaper, cost effective and more practical.

PROFILE

Gogontlejang Phaladi

A social change activist

“Stand up, rise up and push forward... Refuse to be silent”

BY SHU ZHANG

At a recent youth forum at the United Nations headquarters in New York, 24-year-old Gogontlejang Phaladi from Botswana was in the spotlight. The organisers of the event consider her one of the “most innovative young people across the world.”

Ms. Phaladi moderated a session on Africa organized by Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, and she urged young people to “stand up, rise up and push forward for a better Africa. Nobody is going to do this for us. We need to do it for ourselves.”

She further urged young people to fight for a place among the decision makers of their country: “If you don’t have a seat at the table, you will sit on the floor.”

In Botswana, Ms. Phaladi is a distinguished philanthropist and human rights activist. Her social change activism began at age four. “I have 20 years of experience already,” she joked in an interview with *Africa Renewal*.

At five years of age, with the support of her parents, Ms. Phaladi started the Gogontlejang Phaladi Pillar of Hope Organization (GPPHO), a nongovernmental organization that focuses on human rights, gender equality and humanitarian work, among other issues.

How could anyone engage in charity work at such an early age? Two near-tragic events deeply affected the young Phaladi. First she nearly lost her mother in a serious car accident, and her father predicted she could speed her mother’s recovery if she dedicated herself to charitable acts. It was a message that pricked her conscience, she recalls.

Becoming a witness to the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS on families was the other moving experience that deepened her commitment to charity. “Botswana has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world. Many lives

were lost and children orphaned, and I wanted to do anything to help.”

In 2006 Ms. Phaladi organized seminars, workshops and charitable events in most of Botswana’s 11 districts. Yarona FM, a radio station popular with young people, provided her with a platform to speak to a wider audience.

Ms. Phaladi was always considered a precocious child, admired by the adults who supported her work.

Still, she says, being a young woman has its challenges. “In our society, success, leadership, achievements are mostly associated with the male gender.

Also, communities believe the young cannot think constructively, that they have no opinion on important community matters.”

If you don’t have a seat at the table, you will sit on the floor.

She’s heard some people say of her, “She is so young, why is she doing this? She must be confused,” she said. But Ms. Phaladi is not giving up. “If I don’t speak up, who will do that?”

Having experienced much more than most people her age, Ms. Phaladi feels lucky to be able to pursue the life she dreamed about at a very young age.

Her message to young Africans is, “Stand up and take action. Refuse to be silent.” 🦋



INTERVIEW

Bringing rural women to the frontline

— Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women executive director

Phumzile Mlambo-**Ngcuka**, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and executive director of UN Women, recently began a second term in office. In her first term, she drew attention to women's issues globally, getting some countries to change gender discrimination laws. In this interview with *Africa Renewal's* **Kingsley Ighobor**, Ms. Mlambo-**Ngcuka** discusses her vision and the hurdles that African women continue to face.



Africa Renewal: What were the key accomplishments and challenges of your first term?

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**:** In the last four years, we focused on encouraging countries to pass legislation and adopt norms that enhance gender equality, to the point that annually we helped pass laws that address domestic violence or criminalise rape in more than 60 countries, and where these violations are tolerated or not punished, we challenged countries to amend or repeal those laws. We still have about 150 countries with legislation that discriminates against women. We have strengthened the trust between governments and us [UN Women] as an honest broker. Of course, we could do with more resources.

Are there African countries that have reduced or eliminated gender discriminatory laws?

Yes, we are proud of Malawi for passing legislation that changed the age of marriage [to at least 18 years], outlawing child marriage. In Kenya there are legal and electoral reforms that enable greater participation of women in politics. Egypt passed laws to facilitate women's participation at local government levels, and we saw an exponential number of women standing for and winning elections.

What are you focusing on next?

Implementation of laws. Since Beijing [the World Conference on Women, 1995], countries are passing laws that address gender inequality, but the impact

has not been great because of weak implementation, and as a result, the norms and traditions that the laws address have not changed. In the last two years, we have been working with traditional chiefs and the religious community at the grassroots level to change the norms. We are also working with men and boys as stakeholders and role players in changing discriminatory norms and practices.

What do you mean by discriminatory norms and practices?

For example, people will say, "We believe in human rights, but we have our traditions." But community leaders are helping to address those issues. In Zambia, for instance, there is a chief who, after the government passed a law to raise the age of marriage to 18, raised the age of marriage to 21 in his district. He says at 18, a girl is supposed to go to university, not get married. In Uganda, the president emphasized the importance of education for girls in the fight against child marriage. Uganda passed a related law, and they are working on community-based initiatives to make the law a success. The country is highlighting women's economic empowerment so that poverty is not an accelerator of child marriage.

Are people reluctant to change age-old practices?

Actually, it's not been too bad. But we are investing in local communities so that our organization doesn't have to be there all the time. In Malawi, a

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countries with legislation that discriminates against women

woman chief, Theresa Kachindamoto, with whom we had established a really good working relationship, has since 2004 terminated a total of 2,549 child marriages in a breakthrough that has cost some subchiefs their positions.

The other focus area of our work is women's empowerment. We formed the African Women Leaders Network, which is establishing leadership that has a constituency and a leadership that works for the needs of that constituency. We want to see grassroots women in Africa standing up together on issues they care about, such as ending child marriage.

What's the endgame?

The endgame is to have people who can stand on their own with or without the UN, so that we are just a support system. No single country in the world has attained gender equality or a robust democracy without the women's movement, without civil society, without a certain degree of feminist thinking.

How bad is the situation of women in African conflict zones?

It is bad. In South Sudan, the level of violence against women is heartbreaking. Women in camps are violated by law enforcers and security personnel who are supposed to protect them, by the men living in the camps and sometimes by their own family. If they move outside the camps, they are at risk of abduction and rape. The perpetrators target women to punish their opponents. We have the same pattern in Central African Republic, where, because of religious or political conflicts or general lawlessness, women bear the brunt of the humiliation and pain that come with the war. In Sudan, things are not perfect. In Burundi, there are problems. But it should also be said that women in these places are fighting back. Women in South Sudan are standing up. Women in Burundi are playing a significant role in averting conflict by being community mediators. In Somalia, women are organising themselves to increase their participation in parliament.

A recent study shows that when women are actively involved in conflict resolution, peace is sustainable.

When you negotiate peace and women are empowered negotiators, the quality of the negotiated peace is better. Women sit at the table not to settle scores, but to seek genuine reconciliation. Women want reconstruction to be about clinics that heal, schools that teach, agriculture that feeds the village, etc. They want reparations that benefit the community. For peace to be sustainable, it must be inclusive. Women form at least 50% of the population in most countries, they bear the brunt of conflict and they need to have room to put forward their needs and priorities and have them adequately captured and represented when negotiating peace.

In Liberia, women played a major role in ushering in and sustaining peace, and they have never disbanded as peace activists. If you look at South Africa, a postconflict country, women played a significant role leading to the end of apartheid, to the negotiations, to the constitution—and ticked a lot of the critical boxes to sustain democracy. We saw that to some extent in Mozambique and in Namibia.

In Rwanda too?

Yes, in Rwanda, and, although not a postconflict country, Ghana too.

Apart from Rwanda, where women constitute 64% of parliamentarians, the gender parity goal in political representation is far from being achieved in Africa.

Compared with other regions of the world, Africa is doing better. South Africa is above the global average in the level of women's political participation. There are more countries in Africa with a higher representation of women than you will find even in countries without conflict and that are much richer. But we should not be satisfied, because our best is not good enough.

Why the focus on women living in rural areas lately?

If there's anyone left behind, it is women and girls in rural areas. We want to take those at the back of the line to the front of the line. We are putting their critical issues high on the agenda, looking at different solutions, exchanging and sharing best practices.

How does poverty in rural areas affect child marriages?

Because poverty is higher in the rural areas, girls in these areas face a higher risk of forced and early marriage. It is important for us to break with child marriage in the rural areas, where traditional authority and cultural practices are still strong.

Is there hope for young women in terms of economic empowerment and political participation?

We have a CSW [Commission on the Status of Women] for youth, which generates recommendations and insights that are taken to the main CSW. We are also ensuring that in the CSW we begin to get the young people to address and tackle the norms that hinder gender equality so that they are not steeped in the traditions of the generations before them.

The UN Secretary-General recently declared gender parity had been achieved in senior UN leadership. What can the African Union learn from that?

Decisiveness and leading from the front. The pace at which women have been recruited into the UN has a lot to do with the resolve of the secretary-general who has used his authority and power to make the appointments. He has had to assert himself, not take no for an answer.

Women earn 30% less than men in Africa. Is that an issue for you?

Yes. We are partnering with the ILO [International Labour Organisation] and civil society to promote equal pay. We want to see a breakthrough much sooner than 2030. It is one of the biggest but simplest campaigns: everyone understands the difference between a big pay cheque and a small pay cheque. Political leaders and heads of organisations must speak up and have policies that ensure women and men are paid equally.

What is your vision for the African woman?

The African woman is a pillar of the family and society. African women have leadership qualities. They care for their communities. I would like to see more women heads of state in Africa. 🇳🇬



Liberians wave goodbye to departing Nigerian peacekeepers. © UN Photo/Gonzalez Farran

Mission accomplished: 15 years of peacekeeping success in Liberia

As the last contingents of peacekeepers depart, UN promises to remain engaged

BY KINGSLEY IGHOBOR

On a bright, sunny day in January this year, Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf turned over power to George Weah, a decorated soccer star, following peaceful and successful elections. This marked Liberia's first democratic transfer of power in more than 70 years.

In his inaugural address, President Weah was quick to advise his compatriots to “not allow political loyalties to prevent us from collaborating in national interest.” He vowed to tackle inequality because “the absence of equality and unity led us down the path of destroying our own country.”

Mr. Weah was referring to the Liberia's civil war from 1989 to 2003, which left the country in tatters politically and economically. The United Nations Mission

in Liberia (UNMIL) was deployed in 2003 to help restore peace and security in the country.

After nearly 15 years in Liberia, the UN peacekeeping mission ended, having disarmed more than 100,000 combatants, secured about 21,000 weapons, enabled about one million refugees and displaced persons to return home and assisted in the holding of three peaceful presidential and legislative elections.

The UN's secretary-general António Guterres in a statement issued in early April expressed his “respect to the memory of 202 peacekeepers who lost their lives” in Liberia. Mr. Guterres commended the “excellent leadership” of his Special Representative for Liberia, Farid Zarif, UNMIL's previous leaders and uniformed and civilian personnel.

“Peace is here to stay and our democracy is maturing. Now we need jobs,” Marwolo Kpadeh, head of the Liberian Youth Network, a leading youth organization, told *Africa Renewal*.

After the peaceful handover of power, Mr. Kpadeh says that Liberia's key challenge is now mostly economic. “Limited employment continues to undermine the welfare of Liberians in both urban and rural areas,” notes the World Bank.

UN's engagement continues

While President Weah must deal with economic issues, the withdrawal of UNMIL peacekeepers will test the government's readiness to perform public safety and security duties, writes *FrontPageAfrica*, a Liberian newspaper.

The UN has allayed concerns, promising to remain engaged even in the absence of a peacekeeping force.

The UN family will remain in the country “with a view to ensuring that the hard-won peace can be sustained and the country and its people will continue to progress and thrive,” Mr. Guterres added, in his statement.

The UN Country Team, including its agencies, funds and programmes, such as the UN Development Programme, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, will remain in the country.

A “strengthened Resident Coordinator” will lead the team and help the government achieve targets set in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Ms. Amina Mohammed, the UN’s deputy-secretary-general, said in March.

Ms. Mohammed, who visited Liberia in late March as the final batch of peacekeepers prepared to leave, praised UNMIL for being “at the forefront of establishing the key foundations for peace in Liberia.”

The UN’s promise of continuing engagement should be welcome news to Liberians, who have been dealing with the ubiquitous peacekeepers over the past 14 years.

How it began

The Liberian civil war began in 1989 when Charles Taylor started a military campaign to overthrow President Samuel Doe.

By 2003, with more than 250,000 people killed, the UN Security Council authorized the establishment of a peacekeeping force consisting of up to 15,000 military personnel and over 1,000 police officers, among others.

UNMIL began operations in October 2003, when about 3,500 troops of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), who had arrived in Liberia a few months prior, were rehatted as UN peacekeepers. Mr. Guterres said that ECOMOG troops laid the foundation ahead of UN peacekeepers’ deployment.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed by President Taylor and leaders of all warring factions and political parties on August 18, 2003 in Accra, Ghana, provided the political cover for UNMIL’s deployment throughout the country.

UNMIL’s first force commander, now-retired Lieutenant General Daniel Opande, described the situation of the country at the time of deployment: “Nothing functioned, the government had collapsed, no security

arrangement, the entire country was in turmoil. People were moving from place to place, looking for safety or for food. It was very bad.” (See interview on page 26)

“When I arrived in Liberia, a thick cloud of uncertainty and insecurity hung over the country,” corroborates Patrick Coker, who joined UNMIL as a senior public information officer in October 2003. “There was no electricity, no water, fighters carried weapons around, thousands of internally displaced persons, hopelessness, poverty, anguish—we were on edge.”

UNMIL and its partners, including an interim government headed by Gyude Bryant, attempted but failed to begin disarmament on December 7, 2003. General Opande attributed the botched attempt to UNMIL’s ill-preparedness. There was a misunderstanding over money to be paid the fighters, and when they began firing in the air, the process ended abruptly.

Successful disarmament

Fighters of the rebel faction Liberians United for Reconstruction and Democracy (LURD) tested UNMIL’s resolve on Christmas Day of 2003 when they prevented the peacekeepers from deploying in Tubmanburg, northwest of Monrovia. Two days later, General Opande led heavy reinforcements of troops and weapons back to Tubmanburg. This time the fighters capitulated, even danced—and, bizarrely, set fire to their checkpoint.

“The Liberian people are tired of war. We too are tired,” said LURD’s deputy chief of staff, “General” Oforie Diah.

The mission had learned a lesson and so, when disarmament restarted in April 2004 after a robust communications campaign to educate combatants on the process, there were no serious hitches.

Mr. Coker recalls that “dealing with the ex-combatants, who had been in the bushes for more than a decade, was no easy task.” At the slightest provocation, such as a delay in payment of disarmament allowance, they rioted and threatened to torpedo the peace process. During such moments, UNMIL and partners often relied on Liberian women to bring the former fighters under control.

“If there is a group in Liberia that I, Opande, can give the biggest congratulations

Key Facts About UNMIL



Between **2003** and **2018** over **126,000** military, **16,000** police and **23,000** civilian staff served in UNMIL



Disarmed over **100,000** combatants and secured over **21,000** weapons as well as over **5,000,000** rounds of ammunition



Enabled hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons to return home, including over **26,000** to Côte d’Ivoire



Assisted in holding **3** peaceful presidential and legislative elections in **2005, 2011** and **2017**



Supported the strengthening of Liberian **security forces**, including **integration of women**

Before UNMIL’s Arrival



Conflict in Liberia claimed the lives of almost **250,000** people, mostly civilians



GDP per capita dropped by more than **70%** due to conflict



1/2 of the population was forcibly displaced



2/3 of women were subject to sexual violence during displacement

Sources: UN Peacekeeping

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INTERVIEW

How we disarmed Liberian fighters

— Lt. Gen. Daniel Opande, first force commander, UN Mission in Liberia

BY ZIPPORAH MUSAU and KINGSLEY IGHOBOR

From 2003 to 2005, retired Lieutenant General Daniel Opande was the force commander of the peacekeepers of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Tough but diplomatic, the Kenya Defence Forces officer in 2004 got the commanders of Liberia's warring factions to agree to the disarming of more than 100,000 former combatants. UNMIL also provided security, technical and logistical support for the electoral process that culminated in peaceful democratic elections in 2005. As the mission finally winds down operations in March 2018, *Africa Renewal's* Zipporah Musau and Kingsley Ighobor interviewed Lieutenant General Opande on his experience leading a multinational force during a most challenging period in Liberia. These are excerpts.



***Africa Renewal:* Can you briefly describe the security situation in Liberia when you first got there?**

Lieutenant General (Rtd) Daniel Opande: I arrived in Liberia from Sierra Leone on 1st October 2003. By then Sierra Leone had established a UN peacekeeping mission. The situation in Sierra Leone had returned to normal: there was a functioning government and peace had been restored throughout the country. But Liberia was the opposite: nothing functioned, the government had collapsed, there was no effective security arrangement, the entire country was in turmoil and in grave danger of falling apart. People were moving from place to place looking for safety and food. It was a very bad situation indeed.

Given the situation in Liberia you just described, how confident were you of a successful mission?

That is a question many people, especially journalists, often ask me. I was determined to address the appalling security situation as my number one priority. Once that was accomplished, then the politicians would address the political, economic and governance issues.

How were you able to get the many “generals” of the various warring factions to accept peace?

I embarked on what we had done in Sierra Leone—reach out to the various warring factions and target their leaders. Instead of sitting down in Monrovia [the capital city] and expecting them to come and discuss the way forward in solving the dire security situation, I went out to meet them in their strongholds. I was not afraid to go wherever they were; I went to meet the “generals” and the local leaders in places like Ganta, Gbarnga, Buchanan and other locations. I made sure they understood what I expected of them in order to restore peace and security in the country.

There is a video clip of you in a town (not Monrovia), surrounded by armed rebels, and you are talking tough to them. Were you not scared?

That was probably the time I went to supervise the forceful opening of the road between Monrovia and Buchanan [in southern Liberia], which the rebels had barricaded and blocked for free movement of civilians. Rebels are difficult people to deal with and very unpredictable. They kill and commit atrocities against civilians and can occasionally turn their guns on peacekeepers. A week before this incident I had asked the rebel commander to open the road forthwith but it was not heeded. So, I decided to go there myself and send a strong message that UNMIL peacekeepers

Lt. Gen. Daniel Opande.  Pasfsfans

were determined to make sure that peace returned to the country. There are times when the peacekeeping commander must lead by example, and that was my message to the rebels.

Given the unsafe security situation at the time—with thousands already killed during the war—were you not taking unnecessary risks?

No. I had a job to do, it was my duty to fulfil the mandate given by the UN Security Council to UNMIL. We had to engage the rebels and fighters from all sides to establish peace and security in Liberia.

Do you think the strong presence of UN troops was a factor that influenced the rebels to disarm?

When I landed in Liberia, I expected to lead one of the largest UN peacekeeping missions ever deployed. That gave me some hope that, with the huge manpower and the equipment provided, we would be able to face any security challenges posed. I was confident that we had the will to deal with any situation, including countrywide disarmament. Within six months I received sufficient number of troops who were well trained and motivated for tasks ahead.

What was your toughest challenge during this assignment?

The most difficult challenge was when I landed in Monrovia. The city was under siege, surrounded by rebels and ex-government forces who were on the rampage, killing, raping, looting and determined to cause chaos so our mission could fail. Due to lack of sufficient troops at the time, I deployed the small number of troops I had to protect key areas within Monrovia and prevent mayhem within the city.

The first attempt at disarmament, in December 2003, failed. Why?

I had drawn up a plan to deploy contingents in key locations throughout the country before attempting any disarmament. It was my view, and from my experience elsewhere, that we should avoid rushing into disarmament without a proper plan. If you do not have sufficient troops to monitor the process, disarmament will not succeed because rebels will just move from one place to the other and circumvent the process. Occasionally, military and civilian leadership in a mission have different approaches on how to deal with such situations.

Is a key takeaway from that experience that political and military leaderships of peacekeeping missions must work together?

Yes, they must work together as a team. The idea of a single leadership cannot always bring success in a mission.

How was it leading a multinational force made up of troops with dissimilar training, accustomed to different equipment and with varying levels of motivation?

It is not easy leading troops who speak different languages, use different equipment, have different ethics and command structure. But leadership ethics require that everyone must be brought on board and appreciated. I always insisted on creating a cohesive command in UNMIL despite the

challenges we faced. We all understood our roles and expectations.

UNMIL, which ended its work on 30th March 2018, is one of the UN's success stories. What role did Liberian women play in the peace process?

If there is one group in Liberia that I, Opande, can name and congratulate for working tirelessly to bring peace in the country, it is the women. I remember seeing thousands of women sitting on an open field near Spriggs Payne [Airport] daily, praying and discussing how to effectively cultivate lasting peace in Liberia. They would confront then-president [Charles] Taylor insisting that he must give peace a chance; they travelled all the way to Ghana to confront the leaders of the warring factions as they were negotiating peace, urging them to sign a ceasefire agreement. Although the men of Liberia also played a role, but the women were consistent and in the forefront.

Liberia recently held presidential elections won by Mr. George Weah and a peaceful handover of power took place. Why has peace endured in the country?

I must congratulate the Liberian people. During the elections of 2005/2006, they elected a leadership that was focused on improving the economy, security and good governance, which then laid the foundation for development and stability.

What lessons can other countries in conflict, such as South Sudan, learn from Liberia?

It is difficult to compare countries in conflict. Liberia, having gone through a long and bitter civil conflict, has proven that a country can overcome the worst conflict. South Sudan and other countries can learn some lessons from the Liberian conflict to end their suffering.

Many families in Liberia are said to have named their children after you because they appreciated your service there. What message do you have for the Liberian people?

I am humbled and I would like to thank those whose children were named after me. I don't want to say that I played the key role, all of us in UNMIL played a role in getting Liberia back on its feet. I would like to appeal to the Liberian people: do not look back, do not fall back into chaos again. If there are still political or economic problems, the government and the people must address them with determination. You must see to it that Liberian children have a stable country and a better future.

As one of the first UN peacekeepers on the ground, how do you feel about UNMIL's success as it winds down?

I feel elated and vindicated for having said that UNMIL would overcome the challenges it faced during its peacekeeping mandate. I also feel happy that the people of Liberia have made tremendous progress in healing the country. I believe peacekeepers who served there have played a significant role in assisting Liberians consolidate the gains made in the last two decades or so. 🇱🇮

General Opande (right) watches as a former rebel leader briefs journalists on disarmament process. 📷 UN Photo/Shima Roy



Women: Liberia's guardians of peace

The role of women in bringing and sustaining peace lauded globally

BY FRANCK KUWONU



Not long ago, images of child soldiers and the nation of Liberia were wedded in the minds of the international community. The country was struggling to end a horrific civil war, but military efforts were going nowhere.

Then the mothers, grandmothers and sisters of Liberia stepped forward and formed the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace campaign.

They pressured Liberian men to pursue peace or lose physical intimacy with their wives. Wearing all-white clothing, the women of Liberia's capital, Monrovia, gathered at the fish market in the thousands, sitting, praying and singing. Their images were seen around the world.

"The women of Liberia say peace is our goal, peace is what matters, peace is what we need," was their clear message, stamped on a billboard in the downtown fish market.

"The world once remembered Liberia for child soldiers," said Leymah Gbowee, a leader of the peace group for which she won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2011. "They now know our country for the women in white."

Their efforts, which continued until the nation's first elections, were successful.

"We felt like the men in our society were really not taking a stand," recalls Gbowee,

Liberian women at an empowerment and leadership conference in Monrovia, Liberia.  UNMIL
Photo/Christopher Herwig

who now heads the Women, Peace and Security Program at Columbia University in New York. "They were either fighters or they were very silent and accepting all of the violence that was being thrown at us as a nation.... So we decided, 'We'll do this to propel the silent men into action.'"

The women demanded a meeting with then-president Charles Taylor and got him to agree to attend peace talks with the other leaders of the warring factions brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a subregional grouping.

The women perfected the art of "corridor lobbying," waiting for negotiators as they entered and exited meeting rooms during breaks. Their action paved the way for negotiations taking place in Ghana, where a delegation of about 200 Liberian women staged a sit-in at the presidential palace and applied pressure for a resolution.

Dressed in white, the women blocked every entry and exit point, including windows, stopping negotiators from leaving the talks without a resolution. Their action, as well as the pressures mounted by ECOWAS

leaders, led to the signing of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

He added, "They would confront then-president [Charles] Taylor, insisting that he must give peace a chance; they travelled all the way to Ghana to confront the leaders of the warring factions as they were negotiating peace, urging them to sign a ceasefire agreement. Although the men of Liberia also played a role, the women were consistent and in the forefront."

Liberian women's political activism continued in the aftermath of the Accra peace accord through the period leading to 2005 elections, which brought Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to the presidency.

Observers note that through civic education and a voter registration drive carried out by women, Liberians had their voices heard and their votes counted.

Close to 80% of the Liberian women who flooded the polls during the country's first postwar presidential election voted to usher a woman into power for the first time on a continent that for centuries had been the world's most patriarchal. Ms. Sirleaf's election was hailed as historic. "We have shattered the glass ceiling theory," the then president-elect was quoted as saying.

Addressing jubilant supporters celebrating her victory a few days earlier, she'd urged women to "seize the moment to become active in civil and political affairs."

President Sirleaf became the first democratically elected president in Africa. All in all, Liberian women have been a force against violence in the country, and their actions contributed to the ending of hostilities after a 14-year civil war. Subsequently there was a shift in focus to peacebuilding.

The women's continued advocacy, with clear messages to the public, has led to their being considered community watchdogs, while they have also developed the concept of "peace huts," where women receive leadership and entrepreneurship training. 🇱🇲

Additional reporting by Catherine Onekalit in Liberia.

BITCOIN

Africa could be the next frontier for cryptocurrency

Experts say conditions on the continent are great for virtual currency

BY PAVITHRA RAO



Interest in cryptocurrency, a form of digital currency, is growing steadily in Africa. Some economists say it is a disruptive innovation that will blossom on the continent.

Cryptocurrency is not bound by geography because it is internet based; its transactions are stored in a database called blockchain, which is a group of connected computers that record transactions in a ledger in real time.

The difference between cryptocurrency and, say, Visa or Mastercard, is that a cryptocurrency is not now regulated by government and doesn't need middlemen, and transactions rely on the internet, which means they can happen anywhere in the world.

The big cryptocurrency global brands include Bitcoin, Litecoin, XRP, Dash, Lisk and Monero, but Bitcoin leads the pack in Africa. Created in 2009 by a person or people with the alias Satoshi Nakamoto, investors hope Bitcoin becomes the new mode of financial transaction in the digital age.

"Africa is rarely mentioned among the largest markets for cryptocurrency, but it may be set to steal a march over other markets," says

Rakesh Sharma, a business and technology journalist.

Mr. Sharma says that citizens of countries battling high inflation are likely to opt for cryptocurrency, because "with their paradigm of decentralization, cryptocurrencies offer an alternative to disastrous central bank policies."

Stealing a march

South Sudan's inflation rate was 102% between September 2016 and September 2017, according to the World Bank. Other countries with double-digit inflation rates include Egypt, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is no surprise that some of these countries are among the main Bitcoin economies in Africa. The main Bitcoin countries are Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe, according to gobitcoin.io, a website dedicated to Bitcoin news in Africa. The BBC adds that cryptocurrency is gaining ground in Uganda.

When Zimbabwe's inflation skyrocketed in 2015, forcing authorities to print \$100 trillion notes (each worth just \$40), some Zimbabweans turned to Bitcoin.

Zimbabweans and citizens of other African countries transact in Bitcoin "as opposed to their local currencies, which are plagued with hyperinflation," comments Emmanuel

Tokunbo Darko, vice president of marketing for ICOWatchlist.com, a platform that hosts cryptocurrency tokens.

There will be 725 million mobile phone subscribers in Africa by 2020, according to the GSM Association, which represents the interests of mobile operators globally. That means more Africans will have the tools to plug into the cryptocurrency ecosystem, says Mr. Sharma.

"I check my Bitcoin every day [on my mobile phone] and any chance I can get. Any minute, any hour, anytime, as often as I can," Peace Akware, a Ugandan millennial, told the BBC.

Bitcoin spreads

That African governments are not now regulating cryptocurrency may be a factor spurring its growth on the continent; however, there is no guarantee that governments will not change their current mindset.

Rather than simply not wanting to, governments may be powerless to regulate cryptocurrency, the Nigerian central bank indicated recently. Currently tackling the country's 12% inflation rate, the Nigerian apex bank announced that it could not control or regulate Bitcoin, "just the same way no one is going to control or regulate the internet. We don't own it."

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UN signals new era of partnership with Africa

Increased attention may prevent conflict on the continent

BY LANSANA GBERIE

With United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres as a guest at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in his first month in office in January 2017, and then again this January past, the UN is signaling a new era of partnership with the regional body and with the continent.

“I stand here on behalf of the United Nations system and reaffirm our strong commitment to the member states and the people of Africa,” Mr. Guterres told the 30th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union (AU), in January. He added prophetically, “I strongly believe Africa is one of the greatest forces for good in our world.”

Flanked by the executive secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, Vera Songwe, and his new special adviser on Africa, Bience Gawanas, the Secretary-General announced a “platform of cooperation” to align the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the agenda of the African Union for 2063.

Mr. Guterres described how the AU-UN partnership could be strengthened in five key areas: anti-corruption measures, cooperation in peace and security, inclusive and sustainable development, climate change action and international migration.

Combatting the “far-reaching and devastating” impact of corruption, tax evasion and illicit financial flows—a main theme of this year’s AU Summit—requires an unimpeachable commitment to transparency and accountability,” he said, offering the UN’s full support. He also welcomed the designation of 2018 as African Anti-Corruption Year.

Mr. Guterres—a former Portuguese politician and UN high commissioner for refugees—has demonstrated interest in

African affairs. He has already visited the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda.

By picking Amina J. Mohammed, Nigeria’s former environment minister, as his deputy, Mr. Guterres sent an important signal with respect to diversity and sustainable development in Africa.

UN peacekeepers

In Addis Ababa in 2017, Mr. Guterres touched on the “need to change the narrative about Africa” from a conversation “based on all the current crises in African countries,” which he termed “a partial view” to “a narrative that recognizes Africa as a continent with enormous potential...[and with] extraordinary success stories from the point of view of economic development and governance.”

In prior years, UN officials of various institutions delivered similar sentiments, but more as exhortations than in recognition.

The UN headquarters in New York has hosted a number of Africa-themed events recently, mainly on development issues.

Outside of New York, deputy secretary-general Mohammed last year led to Africa a high-level team including UN Women’s executive director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict, Pramila Patten, and the African Union special envoy on women, peace and security, Bineta Diop. Their mission was to promote women’s active participation in peacemaking, peacebuilding, security and development.

In the past, foreign leaders’ near indifference to African issues represented their countries’ failure to live up to the concept of partnership with the continent. The apparent shift from a concentration on crises to a discussion of economic, political



and security matters is attractive but may be too optimistic, some analysts say.

Focus on development

Several African commentators believe that the frequent trips by Mr. Guterres serve to remind Africans that even during an era of concerns—that the new US administration may be less interested in Africa than previous ones, for example—the international community will not neglect African issues. The new focus may also be helpful in preventing conflict in some countries.

In Addis Ababa, Mr. Guterres said that development “must be at the centre of [UN-AU] cooperation. The best prevention of conflict is sustainable and inclusive development.”

Africa hosts most of the UN’s peacekeepers, and African security issues are often discussed in the Security Council.

As of April 2018, there were seven UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. The largest missions are in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Darfur in Sudan (where the mission is jointly administered with the AU), South Sudan, and Mali.



The UN established its first peace operation in Africa, the UN Operation in the Congo, in 1960. It was the UN's first large-scale mission, with nearly 20,000 military personnel at its peak.

From 1989 to date, the Security Council has authorized about 27 peace operations for Africa, four of them in West Africa—a subregion whose countries had previously experienced UN peace operations only as troop contributors. Peace operations help countries in conflict create the necessary conditions for peace.

For 15 years the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia played a key role in “midwifing” the country’s peace process and helping to strengthen key institutions. The mission wound up in March, with hopes that these institutions will be able to support the country’s democratic growth and socioeconomic development.

While the UN’s actions toward Africa have evolved, some commentators call for

UN Secretary-General António Guterres (seated, third from left) in a camp for internally displaced persons in Bangassou, Central African Republic.

 UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

more concerted efforts to maintain stability in conflict-prone countries, especially around election time.



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UN peace operations in Africa from 1989 to date

A proactive UN engagement with Africa may prevent disputes during the electoral process from developing into conflicts.

Conflict analysts say that the advantage of such an approach is that the UN would be effective in preventing conflict and, where it intervenes in an actual conflict situation, well prepared and informed about when exactly withdrawal is most appropriate.

This might further strengthen the UN’s relationship with Africa. 🇺🇳

Mission accomplished ... from page 23

for bringing peace, it is the women,” says Lieutenant General Opande.

After a successful disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration process and peaceful elections, the mission’s attention shifted to providing security for the country, helping to midwife a new army and police force and extending civil authority throughout the country. As well, UNMIL provided technical and logistical support to various government departments.

Renewed hope

Former president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf inherited an economy ruined by war; however, she mobilized foreign and domestic resources to kick-start development, including in the energy and transportation sectors.

In 2010, Liberia secured nearly \$5 billion in debt relief from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, African Development Bank and other creditors. That was 90% of the country’s total foreign debt and 15% of its GDP.

As the economy was taking off, the Ebola epidemic hit in late 2014 and caused a negative 1.6% growth rate by 2016. The World Bank now forecasts modest but sustained positive growth after a 2.6% rise last year.

Fourteen years of war, bad leadership and the Ebola epidemic might have derailed Liberia’s socioeconomic development, but Mr. Weah’s inauguration—as much as Ms. Sirleaf’s 12 years in power—appears to be rekindling hope in the country’s future.

President Weah needs to build on Ms. Sirleaf’s successes, writes Benjamin Spatz in the *New York Times*. “She brought Liberia back from the dead. Now it’s his turn to nurture the country’s fledgling institutions by taking on its coercive, corrupt political culture.”

In sum: “Liberia is an important example of what sustainable peace means in practise,” reflected Ms. Mohammed, speaking for the UN.

Mr. Kpadeh’s hope of a better country depends on sustained peace. “Development is never possible without peace,” he said. “We should all be proud of UNMIL’s achievement.” 🇺🇳

CLIMATE CHANGE

Cape Town water taps running dry

South Africa's second biggest city averts a water crisis—for now

BY MASIMBA TAFIRENYIKA

Mohammed Allie's wife has given up showers while Cape Town, South Africa's second-largest city after Johannesburg, contemplates life without a drop of water in its taps. Allie, a BBC correspondent, related his wife's experience with the shrinking supply of water, caused by an historic three-year drought.

"[My wife] boils about 1.5 litres of water and mixes it with about a litre of tap water to have her daily wash, while the rest of us catch the slow-running water in a bucket for re-use in the toilet cistern."

Mr. Allie joins over three million Capetonians taking extreme steps to save water in a last-ditch attempt to evade disaster, or Day Zero—when dam levels hit 13.5%, a level too low to keep taps running. The plan is when Day Zero finally strikes, residents would have to line up at about 200 designated water collection points monitored by security to get their daily allocation of 25 litres per person.

Since the beginning of the year, Day Zero has been a moving target. Originally set for 11 May, it was later pushed to 1 June and then to July 9. Thanks to the residents' cooperation with strict water-rationing measures, the day of reckoning is unlikely to happen this year, Mmusi Maimane, the leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA), announced in March.

Tucked at the southern tip of the African continent, where the Atlantic Ocean meets its younger sibling, the Indian Ocean, Cape Town—one of the world's most popular tourist destinations—is joining the list of global cities affected by serious water shortages attributed to climate change.

As the clock ticks and the seasonal rains refuse to arrive, Cape Town has launched a flurry of measures to avert disaster. These range from setting up recycling and desalination plants to extracting groundwater by drilling boreholes as well as imposing tighter restrictions on water usage. The measures, however, are late in coming. The city's population has grown by more than 80% over the past 20 years to over four million, while infrastructure has lagged behind.

Averting Day Zero

Desalination plants, which process seawater to make it drinkable, are expensive and require time to set up. According to the *Sunday Times*, a national weekly, a large desalination plant costs between \$417 million and \$1.5 billion. By the end of February, the city had completed more than two-thirds of the work required to install four desalination plants of varying sizes.



According to a local environmental advocacy group, Philippi Horticultural Area Campaign, the city council failed to invest in the mass infrastructure necessary to meet the water demands of an expanding city. The group opposes desalination plants, maintaining that "desalination is regressive—its cost will be borne disproportionately by the poor, and its technologies are already outmoded and superseded by more sustainable environmentally proactive methods of water conservation."

Compounding the crisis caused by drought is the fact that, according to scientists at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town's surrounding seawater is contaminated by chemicals. Their report last year drew attention to "the probable presence of pathogens, and literally thousands of chemicals of emerging concern" in the city's seawater. The researchers discovered "high levels of microbial pollution and 15 pharmaceutical and common household chemicals" in various samples taken from the city's Granger Bay. City authorities dispute the findings.

Some experts view the water crisis in terms of equity and justice. Cape Town is the richest city in South Africa, a country with one of the worst income inequalities in the world. Many of the country's wealthiest citizens and some of the world's best-known celebrities own properties in the city's posh suburbs dotted with impressive mansions and surrounded by acres of lush gardens.

For the city's poor residents, Day Zero will be nothing new. In Khayelitsha, the largest and fastest-growing township in South Africa, tens of thousands of people have no access to piped water, according to Beyond Our Borders, a local advocacy group.

Anele Goba, a 34-year-old resident of Khayelitsha, told *Independent Online*, a South African news site, that she had little sympathy for the alarm of the rich. "'Day Zero' would give them a taste of how slum dwellers live," she said. "Maybe that wouldn't be a bad thing."



Musa Gwebani, a project manager with the Social Justice Coalition, says that, “For the first time, everyone in Cape Town has to live with water restrictions that are a daily reality for all slum dwellers.”

Such reflections of the less fortunate have been picked up by Moody’s Investors Service, the US-based credit ratings agency, which warns that due to Cape Town’s “acute income inequality,” the water crisis poses a possible threat to social order.

Cape Town’s water crisis has the potential to spark political fights in the run-up to national elections in 2019. The city’s mayor, Patricia de Lille, is a senior member of the opposition DA. Her predecessor, Helen Zille, a former DA leader, is the premier of the Western Cape Province, the only one of the country’s nine provinces not under the control of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC).

Early this year, the city council accused the ANC government of bureaucratic foot-dragging in declaring the drought a national disaster. After months of a political debate between DA and ANC senior officials, the government declared the drought a national disaster in February.

In his 2018 budget speech, embattled finance minister Malusi Gigaba (now minister of home affairs) allocated \$500 million

Cape Town residents queue to fill containers with water.  AP Photo/Bram Janssen

dollars to Western Cape’s drought relief efforts. For its part, Cape Town increased its capital expenditure budget on water projects to \$583 million in 2018 from \$492 million in 2017.

Economic impact

Cape Town’s water crisis has affected not only the political dynamics of the city but also, in various ways, its economy and sanitation, with effects ranging from climbing borrowing costs and sinking revenue from water rates to public health risks from poor sanitation. In 2017 the share of the city’s municipal water revenue to its operating income was as much as 10%, notes the Moody’s report. Released at the end of January, the report did not imply a review of the city’s credit rating, but if such a review happens, it could affect Cape Town’s bond ratings.

“The city will lose a portion of this [water] revenue and will have increased operational costs from crisis management policies and programmes, and implementation of water supply projects,” says Moody’s. A decline in agriculture and tourism, the city’s major industries and its biggest water guzzlers,

would increase job losses, which would be a blow to tax revenues.

According to estimates from the government’s Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the impact of the drought on the economy of the Western Cape Province will be \$492 million, with exports expected to decline by between 13% and 20% this year. The province’s agriculture sector accounts for almost a quarter of South Africa’s total value from agriculture.

Surprisingly, the city’s property market has largely escaped unscathed—for now. Richard Day, the regional head of Pam Golding Properties, told Property24, an online real estate company, of buyer hesitancy recently, but added that this was largely due to property prices as well as recent political and economic uncertainty. He said he had not seen any signs that residents might soon be relocating from the province permanently because of the water crisis.

El Niño-related droughts

Cape Town’s water crisis is a symptom of a much wider and more prolonged problem facing not only South Africa but the whole Southern African region. Over the past several years, the region has watched with frustration as the effects of El Niño-related droughts took their toll. South Africa has suffered one of the worst meteorological droughts (dry weather patterns) since 1904, with the average rainfall from 2014 through 2016 dropping to 403mm from 608mm, according to the *Mail & Guardian*, a national weekly.

The Food and Agriculture Organization says 45 countries, including South Africa, are experiencing critical water shortages. And according to UN Environment estimates, Cape Town’s population almost doubled between 1995 and 2018, while its dam storage increased by a paltry 15% over the same period.

Given the pace of climate change and the El Niño effect, South Africa’s rainfall patterns are likely to worsen. The only options left for large cities like Cape Town are to develop water infrastructure that meets the needs of a growing population and for residents to change their water usage.

“Less frequent rainfall and a changing climate mean that drier conditions are likely to become the new normal,” says UN Environment. 🌧️

TOURISM

South African tourism holding steady

Tourists undeterred amid reports of historic water crisis in the country's second largest city

BY KERRY DIMMER

Recent reports that Cape Town, a popular tourist destination in South Africa, will soon run out of water due to a prolonged drought hardly seem to be slowing down the country's burgeoning tourism industry.

This despite warnings by water resources management experts that soon, Cape Town could be the first major city worldwide to run out of water.

South African Tourism, the country's national tourism marketing body, asserts optimistically that the current water crisis may actually help position the country as a global leader in sustainable tourism practices, including the judicious use of water.

Even as residents adjust to water rationing, with its two-minute showers and scanty baths, the consequences of water scarcity, Mr. Sisa Ntshona, the chief executive officer of SA Tourism, insists that "Cape Town and its many attractions and hotels remain very much open for

business. The difference is that people need to be more frugal with water usage, which is the new normal in the industry."

According to Mr. Ntshona, reports of tourists cancelling trips to Cape Town due to the water crisis are mostly anecdotal, given the lack of corroborating official data. He says, "We do understand travelers' concerns; we hope that any unwarranted fears subside."

Unwarranted fears?

Cape Town is a global leader in business tourism, according to ratings published by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), an agency that promotes responsible and sustainable tourism.

According to Statistics South Africa, a national statistical service, Cape Town is Africa's foremost tourist destination, with some 3.5 million people passing through its entry ports in August 2017 alone.

The South African tourism sector supports about 716,000 jobs, which is about 4.6% of the country's total employment, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), a global forum for the travel and tourism industry. Including jobs in related industries, that figure jumps to 2.5 million. Yet SA Tourism hopes the sector can generate an extra 225,000 jobs by 2030. The sector attracts foreign direct investment and at the same time supports small businesses.

In 2016, more than 10 million international tourists visited South Africa, injecting some R402.2 billion (\$27.3 billion) into the economy. Although 2017 figures have yet to be announced, WTTC had predicted a 2.5% increase.

Bright future

The WTTC has also predicted a 4.2% (or \$42.4 billion) annual increase in tourism receipts for South Africa until 2027, which

Giraffe running past tourists and their guide on a guided walk in the bush in South Africa.

📷 South Africa Tourism



Mr. Ntshona believes is achievable. “We are one year into our strategic goal of attracting five million more tourists by 2021 four million international and one million domestic or business or holiday trips,” he enthuses.

He adds, “It’s a huge task that requires us to develop a framework that injects substantially more tourism revenue into the economy, while simultaneously providing a platform to create sustainable jobs.”

Besides directly contributing to the economy, tourism in South Africa also drives inclusive economic growth and provides the necessary incentive for the government’s transformation programmes.

Key transformation initiatives include Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment, a programme to enhance black Africans’ participation in the economy, and the National Development Plan 2030, a blueprint for eliminating poverty and reducing inequality. Both interventions address entrenched inequalities caused by the apartheid regime that ended 20 years ago.

“Most of our informal small enterprises are black owned, generating much-needed income for their owners and their families, and contributing to the tax base. They are vitally important to our economy,” explains Mr. Ntshona. “They are often drivers of innovation, with entrepreneurs identifying a need or gap and developing new, previously unexplored sectors of the economy.”

Targeting the Middle East

While Cape Town is still a significant tourism destination for the US market and for the African traveler, Mr. Ntshona told the American trade publication *Travel Weekly* that SA Tourism is also setting its eyes on visitors from the lucrative Middle East, including Saudi Arabia.

In mid-2017, Saudi Arabia’s Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, president of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, visited South Africa to explore with SA Tourism officials mutually beneficial opportunities for the two regions.

Prince Abdulaziz Al Saud, who met with South Africa’s then minister of tourism, Tokozile Xasa, stressed the need to “foster intraregional tourism...and pool our resources”



Within the continent, South Africa is collaborating with the Regional Tourism Organisation of Southern Africa (RETOSA) to boost the region’s share of global tourist arrivals within the next decade, from its current 2% to 5%. RETOSA was created by the Southern African Development Community, a regional economic grouping, to develop tourism and regional destination marketing among its 15 member states.

“We aim to achieve this [5% share of global tourism] through smart partnerships with private players and RETOSA, and by taking innovative and pragmatic approaches,” says Mr. Ntshona.

Easing visa processing

But the tourism industry in South Africa is not without its challenges. The country is easing out of a controversial visa policy with onerous document requirements. It announced that starting in October 2015, proof of original birth certificates will be required only during the process of application for children entering from abroad.

Crime is a worrying factor, according to a 2017 report by the Urban Safety Reference Group working with the South Africa Cities Network and the Inclusive Violence and Crime Prevention Program. Their study found Cape Town to have “unacceptable levels of serious crimes despite the lowest level of poverty (as measured by the Human Development Index), the lowest income inequality, and the second lowest youth unemployment rate.”

Travel agencies however are firmly upbeat, believing that the industry is resilient enough to withstand such shocks, and

Elephant about to cross the road in front of a game drive in Kruger National Park.  South Africa Tourism

they are enthusiastically welcoming efforts to tap into domestic and regional markets.

Daniel Joaquim de Nobrega, corporate general manager at TBA Corporate (formerly known as XL Travel by Arrangement), a Johannesburg-based travel service company, says that at the moment there is neither an uptick in leisure travel nor a decline.

Mr. de Nobrega ascribes the standstill to the fact that people are becoming more travel savvy. “They are researching more and weighing options such as local versus international travel.”

He reports marginal increases in corporate travels but adds that some companies now prefer to organise conferences locally while limiting the number of staff they send on trips to faraway destinations.

On the way forward, Mr. de Nobrega stresses the need to rebrand South Africa as much more than a safari destination, and urges more city packages that show just “how eclectic and different our cities are.”

Tourists visiting South Africa are often willing to include stops in neighbouring countries such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe as part of a package, says Mr. de Nobrega, adding that SA Tourism should continue to promote the country’s unique attractions.

“Tourism is part of our country’s DNA,” concurs Mr. Ntshona. 🇿🇦

Africa could be the next frontier... from page 29

Fearing a collapse of the banking industry or arbitrary appropriation of money by the government, Africans without access to banks and who live in politically unstable countries could be attracted to cryptocurrency. "Bitcoin transactions help to eliminate the procedural bottlenecks that plague traditional banking and financial services," Mr. Darko explains.

Some 15 cryptocurrency-related operations began in Africa in the past year alone, reports Mr. Sharma. But South Africa-based Luno Exchange, established in 2013 and now boasting 1.5 million customers in over 40 countries worldwide, is the first to be based in Africa.

Others, particularly cryptocurrency-based remittance services, are popping up in various countries. These services include Abra, which operates in Malawi and Morocco, GeoPay in South Africa, BitMari in Zimbabwe and London-based Kobocoin, which was launched by Nigerian entrepreneur Felix Onyemehi Ugoji.

The Plaas Application is a mobile app that enables farmers to manage their stock on the blockchain.

Launched in 2013, Kenya's BitPesa facilitates virtual remittances transfers to both African and international locations, to and from individuals' mobile wallets, where cryptocurrency is stored. LocalBitcoins.com in Kenya reported trading volumes in excess of \$1.8 million as of December 2017, underlining the lucrativeness of the business.

"I started mining Bitcoin [in Nairobi, Kenya] in September 2017 and, so far, this is the best business I have ever tried," Gladys Laboi told *Africa Renewal*, adding: "Under six months, I earned \$800 after investing in \$700."

Not to be left out, some governments are moving into the virtual currency terrain. Tunisia's eDinar is a government-issued digital currency. Senegal is in the process of creating eCFA, which, if successful, could be emulated by other Francophone countries in Africa.

There will be government-issued cryptocurrencies in Africa in the near future, predicts Shireen Ramjoo, ceo of Liquid Crypto-Money, a South Africa-based cryptocurrency consulting firm.

Industry experts believe that cryptocurrency will be around for years. That Bitcoin users can send money to just about anywhere there is an internet connection for relatively small fees and with no third-party interference is an advantage that standard government-issued currencies cannot offer.

"Every single computer device on the surface of the planet with an internet connection can access information on the blockchain and make 'transactional' inputs onto it. The information cannot be distorted, deleted, modified or destroyed, and [the] computer device has the same information as everybody," says Mr. Darko.

Another recommendation is that transactions are anonymous, and users' information is private and safe; there is little possibility of identity theft, which is common with other forms of digital payment.

As of December 2017, the global demand for cryptocurrency had increased to the extent that a Bitcoin sold for \$20,000. Its value had been \$1,000 one year prior.

Ponzi scheme

Nevertheless, some industry watchers refer to cryptocurrency as a risky and temperamental scheme, citing the crash to \$8,700 in the value of Bitcoin last February, from a high of \$20,000 in December 2017.

Without regulations, cryptocurrency is a double-edged sword; there may be gains from time to time, but any precipitous crash in price could leave investors with no escape route. Manasseh Egedegbe, an investment manager based in Nigeria, says that Bitcoin's frenzied prize surge seems like the dot-com bubble at the turn of the millennium.

There is also the fact that cryptocurrency can be used by criminals to funnel funds. In 2011 Bitcoin was a currency of choice for drug peddlers, according to the US Justice Department, which seized almost \$48 million worth of illegal contrabands that year, and discovered that the criminals involved had made transactions totaling 150,000 Bitcoins (approximately \$130 million).

Countries such as Bangladesh, Ecuador and Kyrgyzstan believe the risks outweigh the gains and have banned Bitcoin as well as initial coin offerings or ICOs, which are used by start-ups to evade the demand for capital by banks and other financing institutions.

Quartz Africa, an online business news publication, reported last December that a similar scheme, Mavrodi Mundial Moneybox

(MMM), once had over two million users in Nigeria, while also operating in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

There are reports that South Africa's central bank is actively studying cryptocurrency and may institute guidelines to foster innovation. Those guidelines could be a slippery slope to regulation. The Sunday Times of South Africa reported in March that 27,500 individuals, including South Africans, lost more than \$50 million when they were duped into transferring their Bitcoins into an online wallet. The publication called it "one of the biggest scams to hit South Africa."

At 22% (the world average is 48%), Africa has the lowest rate of Internet usage of any region, according to a 2017 report by the International Communications Union, which may undercut optimistic projections of cryptocurrency and blockchain technology on the continent. Also, poor power supply in many countries continues to impede the internet access on which cryptocurrency largely depends.

Despite some analysts likening Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies to a Ponzi scheme, many Africans are taking the risk to invest in them.

Other experts, such as Mr. Darko, believe Africa should warmly embrace the innovation. "Truth be told, Africa needs blockchain technology and its resultant cryptocurrencies more than any part of the world," he says. 🐼

Climate change efforts bear fruit... from page 3

ing role in food security and is inspiring several other African countries.

Morocco's agricultural sector has been growing at roughly 7% per year since 2008, with a 34% uptick in exports and 11% increase in farmland use, according to estimates by FAO. Two years ahead of schedule, the country met the Millennium Development Goal of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015.

By 2020 Morocco will reap a triple win of adapting to the reality of climate change, lifting itself out of poverty and creating new opportunities, according to the World Bank. ●

BOOK REVIEW

Burkina Faso: Power, Protest, and Revolution

by Ernest Harsch

In the book *Burkina Faso: A History of Power, Protest, and Revolution*, author Ernest Harsch draws on his more than 30 years of experience reporting on sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Burkina Faso.

Authoritatively informative, Mr. Harsch takes the reader on a historical and political journey through the landlocked West African country of 18 million people.

He details the history of French imperialism, which was met with resistance by the Burkinabé population late in the 19th century, and the lasting impact the revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara, affectionately called “Africa’s Che Guevara,” had on Burkinabés in the 1980s.

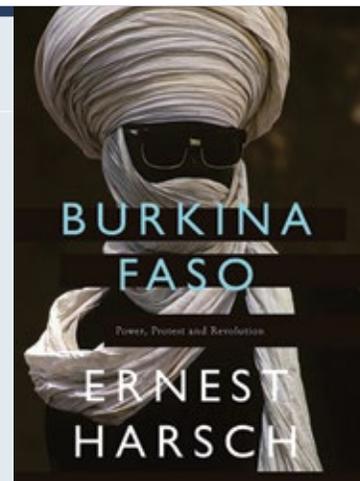
A key focus of the book is the 2014 popular uprising that ousted President Blaise Compaoré, who had been in power for 27 years. While the author demonstrates vivid affection for Mr. Sankara, who was murdered in a coup d’état masterminded by Mr. Compaoré in 1987, he is unsparing in his disapproval of Mr. Compaoré’s dictatorial rule.

Mr. Harsch believes Mr. Sankara cemented his own political legacy through an idealistic approach to governance, including audacious attacks on corruption and elitism. To lead by example, Mr. Sankara used a modest Peugeot 205 as his official vehicle.

The very politicised Burkinabe army and the elites didn’t quite accept Mr. Sankara’s style; instead they conspired to terminate his rule with the support of a foreign state, allowing Mr. Compaoré to gain and remain in power for nearly three decades.

In March this year, a terrorist attack in Ouagadougou, its capital, carried out by al Qaeda allies in the region, killed eight people, underscoring a continuing political turbulence in the country.

Mr. Harsch writes that Burkina Faso’s vibrant civil society, led by students, teachers’ unions, trade unions and feminists, inspired by the 2011 Arab Spring in North Africa, successfully nullified attempts by Mr. Compaoré to elongate his tenure in



office. The author believes civil society can still ensure that the country doesn’t revert to the ways of its distant past.

Reactionary elites will try to continue their paternalistic control culture, but an active and emboldened civil society will hold the line, maintains the author, who foresees a struggle ahead between these two sides.

Published by Zed Books, London, UK, the 287-page book is organized into 15 chapters. It is an easy read that students of history and politics will find invaluable. 🌍

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Mr. Harsch is a former managing editor of Africa Renewal magazine.

— Pavithra Rao

APPOINTMENTS



UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

The United Nations Secretary General António Guterres has appointed **Bience Gawanas** of Namibia as his Special Adviser on Africa. She most recently served as Special Adviser to Namibia’s Minister of Poverty Eradication and Welfare. She will succeed

Maged Abdelaziz of Egypt.



UN Photos

Leila Zerrougui of Algeria has been appointed as Special Representative and Head of the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). She most recently served as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict. Ms. Zerrougui succeeds Maman Sidikou of Niger.



Dereje Wordofa

Dereje Wordofa of Ethiopia has been appointed as Deputy Executive Director (Programmes) of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). He most recently served as International Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa Region for SOS

Children’s Village International. He succeeds Natalia Kanem of Panama.



UN Photos

Anita Kokui Gbeho of Ghana has been appointed as Deputy Joint Special Representative for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). She most recently served as Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative of the United

Nations Development Programme, Namibia. She succeeds Bintou Keita of Guinea



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ISBN: 978-92-1-101391-7

