

The Freedom African

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Hanan Razek
of the BBC
News Arabic

African
Entrepreneurs
are *Prosperity*
Champions
By
Lenora
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OF AFRICAN
SPIRITS AND
ALL THINGS
FREEDOM

By
ibrahim
Bàbátúndé
Anóba

- David Hundeyin

Freedom means
the ability to express
myself without
censorship or undue
consequence.



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STUDENTS FOR LIBERTY
A FREER FUTURE

AFRICAN LIBERTY IS A PROJECT OF STUDENTS FOR LIBERTY

Editor's Note

“Africa is at a crossroads.” I cannot recall the first time I came across this surely old expression. But when is Africa never at a crossroads? There is no need to rehash how the bad decisions of successive post-independence African leaders, in concert with the decades of Western imperial and neocolonial meddling in Africa’s affairs, have kept the continent wallowing in numerous economic and political crises. The more recent incursions of China and Russia do not promise to make the recent iterations of these crises disappear, either. With the continent’s population projected to reach 2.5 billion in 2050 and 4.2 billion in 2100 amid the urgent need for an annual infrastructure spending of \$170 billion a year by 2025, there is no escaping this haunting expression: that is, indeed, “Africa is at a crossroads” yet again.

In 2024, the decision on what path to follow in each African country—from deciding on national budgets to the parameters of protecting (or “preventing”) human rights—are no longer exclusive considerations of the political elite. Young Africans are thrusting themselves into the heart of these conversations. Those who are not creating start-ups are organizing physical protests or writing critical articles in newspapers to challenge the status quo. More so, thinking about challenging the oppressive state, it feels like the good old 1970s are upon us once again—when young Africans, specifically students, led a wave of protests demanding reforms, rights, and accountability from heavy-handed regimes. The voices of those freedom-loving young Africans from Addis Ababa (1974) to Soweto (1976) and Zaria (1978) are invoked through the words of contributors in this magazine.

Here we present a collection of words, mostly in the form of opinion articles, addressing some of the burning cultural, economic, religious, and sexed—all existing as political—issues affecting individual and collective freedoms on the continent. These are the issues for Africa to consider at the present crossroads.

Contributors are mostly alumni of the African Liberty Writing Fellowship Program, which demonstrates the program’s success in producing cohorts of young African freedom advocates in the last four years.

While African Liberty accommodates diverse approaches to writing about freedom, contributions in this publication represent the opinions of their respective authors and not necessarily of African Liberty.

Enjoy!



ibrahim Bâbátúndé Anóba
is the editor of African Liberty.

Anóba

By Charles Waiganjo

Anatomy of a Coup in Africa



Coups are more likely when the public's support for a government is waning, providing an opening for the military to take control.

Predicting coups in different countries is multifaceted challenge. No single factor alone determines the likelihood of a coup. Instead, it is the interplay of various causes that shape a country's political stability. Examining the African continent, a notable trend emerges from the 13 coup attempts since 2020. Eight of these attempts proved successful, occurring in Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Sudan. According to the 2023 Fragile State Index (FSI), which indicate governments' inability to maintain stability and provide essential services. On this ranking, Sudan is 7th, Mali is 13th, Burkina Faso is 21st, Niger is 24th, and Guinea is 14th. However, Gabon deviates from this pattern, ranking 99th, indicating a comparatively higher level of stability.

The (FSI) considers factors like factionalized elites, group grievance, and external intervention. That said, these states can be labeled as fragile due to their constrained control over legitimate coercive capacity, leading to systemic and structural security challenges. These issues create a breeding ground for various security challenges, both new and pre-existing. Recent trends show that dynamic political shifts, including civil unrest, anti-government sentiment, or disputed election outcomes, often precede coups. Thus, coups are more likely when the public's support for a government is waning, providing an opening for the military to take control. For instance, President Ibrahim Keïta's ousting in Mali stemmed from protests against corruption, economic mismanagement, and electoral disputes. This event underscored the power of public discontent to drive political change. Similarly, in Gabon, allegations of election rigging prompted President Ali Bongo's overthrow. In Guinea, President Alpha Condé's removal came after his contentious attempt to amend the constitution, seen as a bid to extend his time in

office. In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the involvement of armed forces in politics is influenced by a combination of historical, social, and institutional factors. This often leads to their entanglement in conflicts, creating tensions with the civilian leadership in addressing pressing threats like terrorism. The 2020 coup in Burkina Faso, which ousted President Roch Kaboré due to his struggle to contain a growing insurgency, exemplifies this intricate relationship between security crises and military intervention. Coups can also be driven by opportunistic motives, such as when military leaders intervene ostensibly to “restore” public order, but have other hidden intentions. This is the case with Sudan. The power-sharing period in Sudan from 2019 to 2021 was marked by deep distrust between the military and civilian political leaders, given the military’s historical dominance. Tensions between the Sudan Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces exacerbated the crisis.

This mutual distrust ultimately escalated into violence, making a civilian government less likely. Thus, Sudan’s coup was supposed to be about restoring public order, but it quickly became more about seizing and consolidating power for the disagreeing military leaders. Indeed, in countries with a legacy of coups, the occurrence of such events is statistically higher.

This is attributed to a reduced social and political stigma surrounding coups. Additionally, the military tends to exhibit greater confidence in its capacity to execute a successful power grab and sustain control. This environment likely fosters a higher coup predisposition.

It is vital to emphasize that the potential for democratic progress remains a tangible reality, even in nations with a history of multiple coup attempts. Sudan stands as a notable exception, with 17 coups, including the recent 2021 coup. Nigeria has experienced 8 coups, Ghana 10, and Sierra Leone 10. These countries, despite their intricate militarized political histories, persist in adeptly nurturing democratic values and robust civic engagement to this day, albeit amid diverse institutional challenges.



Charles Waiganjo is an African Liberty contributor and a senior regional analyst at WS Insight. KENYA



Involvement of armed forces in politics is influenced by a combination of historical, social, and institutional factors.



DAUGHTER OF LIBERTY

By Ruth Reje

I travelled to the land of your ancestors and arrived in the East. I peeped into a window of a beautiful house as I heard mama Nkechi scream, “Nkechi! Nkechi!” What are you “teching” with that phone, is that how you will behave in your husbands house? Women in tech my foot.”

Disappointed by what I saw in the East, I travelled to the West and from a distance heard Mama Bisola warn her daughter about joining the “ashawos” in the name of women in politics. “Politics is for men” she said, “no man will want to marry another man.”

Let me not even talk about the North where nine-year-old Aisha was married off to fifty-year-old Alhaji as she saw her dream of becoming an accountant, evolve into a nightmare that will haunt her forever.

But Daughter of Liberty, fly above the sky, swim across the ocean, visit Mars or Pluto if you want. Let your dreams take you to Space. Whatever you want to do or be, but I forbid you to put borders around your dreams.

The top is for anyone willing to pay the price. You have what it takes.

Quit being in the company of chickens. Don’t you know eagles who hang around with chickens start enjoying the company of the nest? Your dreams are valid. Come out of the shadows into the limelight.

Daughter of Liberty, you have my permission. “Oya” begin to fly.



Ruth Bassey Okim AKA Ruth Reje is a public speaker, TV presenter, social change activist, CEO of Let's Speak Africa, author, model and medical laboratory scientist NIGERIA.



Uganda's Anti-Gay Laws:

A Divisive Political Maneuver to Divert Attention from Governance Issues

By Chidera Ezeokoli

On March 21, 2023, Uganda's Parliament passed an Anti-Homosexuality Bill, widely known to be among the world's harshest anti-gay laws. Though same-sex relations were already illegal in Uganda, this bill further threatens LGBTQ+ rights. It imposes death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality" and mandates life in prison for those, convicted of homosexual relations. Someone simply advocating for gay rights could serve up to 20 years in prison. It is also required by law that family, friends, and even healthcare workers report the homosexual relations of their loved ones or face a six-month jail sentence.

While supporters of these laws claim that they are based on cultural and religious principles, a deeper look reveals that they are essentially a political plan

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Is it not audacious and laughable that the government decides to put so much energy into an issue that has no relevance to the growth and prosperity of Ugandans?

intended to divert attention from the serious governance problems that the nation continues to face.

Is it not audacious and laughable that the government decides to put so much energy into an issue that has no relevance to the growth and prosperity of Ugandans? Like many other countries, Uganda faces a variety of challenges, from corruption and poverty to poor healthcare and educational systems. To solve these issues, good leadership and reasonable policies need to be made. But rather than putting these concerns first, the government decided to make its unending fight against the LGBTQ+ community a priority. The origins of the new anti-LGBTQ law in Uganda can be traced to 2009, when a bill nicknamed "Kill the Gays" was drafted in parliament. It finally passed in 2014, but it was overturned before it took effect. These anti-gay regulations have drawn criticism on a global level, leading to sanctions, aid cuts, and strained diplomatic ties. While these consequences may not have been felt immediately, they have gradually worsened Uganda's problems. Uganda's interests on the international scene have eventually been harmed. As of January 9, 2023, the World Food Program Hunger Map shows

that 16.4 million Ugandans face insufficient food consumption. These are issues that need favourable policies and must be tackled, yet the government decides to put its energy on unimportant issues. Also, for a country whose economic and social advancement relies on aid from international partners, this is a self-inflicted economic damage. Uganda received \$2.52 billion in 2021 for development projects and pandemic recovery programs. This includes \$82 million in assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development to offset suffering because of the global food crisis.

The anti-gay policies have gone beyond leaving a mark on the reputation of Uganda. They have promoted prejudice and a culture of fear throughout the nation. There is clearly no viable future for the LGBTQ+ people in Uganda, as they have been left in an untenable situation. Amidst the discrimination, harassment, and assault they already face, they are now unable to rent a house, work, or seek medical services. The policies have further marginalised the Ugandan LGBTQ+ community, preventing them from contributing to the social and economic growth of Uganda.

In a country that has high rates of people living with HIV, the law will also adversely affect Uganda's ability to end AIDS as a public health threat. People will be less likely to seek HIV testing, prevention and treatment as they fear discrimination, getting prosecuted or being perceived as gay. It is essential that the government shifts its attention in order to deal with

the problems that really affect Ugandans.

The government should place a higher priority on good governance, transparency, and accountability, rather than taking up controversial laws to deflect attention. It is important to combat corruption head-

on, strengthen initiatives to reduce poverty, and invest in healthcare and education. These are the topics that will genuinely improve the quality of life in Uganda.

Furthermore, Uganda needs to reconsider its stance about LGBTQ+ rights and revoke the discriminatory laws that only stand in the way of its advancement. Not only would embracing inclusivity and tolerance enhance the lives of LGBTQ+ people, but it would also demonstrate Uganda's commitment to human rights and the welfare of all its citizens. Uganda's decision might make other African countries want to follow suit, and this takes Africa a step backward in the fight for freedom of expression.

In conclusion, Uganda's anti-gay laws are a divisive political ploy that has enabled the administration to focus on less important governance issues. These regulations have harmed the nation's internal climate of fear and discrimination while also straining relations with other countries. It is time for Uganda to reorient its priorities, pay more attention to good governance and accountability, and repeal these discriminatory laws in order to promote a more inclusive and prosperous future for all of its citizens.

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*Chidera Ezeokoli is
an intern at African
Liberty. NIGERIA*

IT IS WHAT IT IS

by
Ogochukwu
Peter, NIGERIA

I am neither black nor brown,
I am human in flesh and blood,
my skin is no dress nor makeup,
the sun radiates as my witness,
the last thing to think of is bleaching.

My song of freedom comes from within,
my mother tongue is no vernacular,
how well I speak it is my pride,
my “native” name is all I’ve got,
it’s either you learn it or you learn it.

My uniqueness lies in my kinky hair,
no need to chemically process nature,
my validity is not how well I speak your tongue,
it will do you some good to learn mine,
when you are ready find me in Alkebulan.

THE MEN IN BLUE UNIFORM

by
Patrick
Benyin, RWANDA

It's quite unfortunate I can't use my assets. Even when driving in my car, I must explain to them. Seeing them alone creates frustration, a feeling of distress in my atmosphere.

They think they are better than us because they are in uniform. Where people are not judged, criticized, harassed, or punished for possessing things perceived to be out of the ordinary. Where the strong, weak, poor, and rich can live together. In that world, leaders do not infringe on individual private choice, or use guns to tell us what to do. In that world, everyone can buy and sell whatever they wish, with whoever agrees.

In that world, each individual is responsible for the harm they cause.

I see in that world the pillars are established by individual free will. The government caters and distributes resources fairly and people are not categorized by uniforms.

Thus will it be, in no other place than the free world. So strike along with me, the drums of the freer world. Let us dance boldly to its rhythm. For our biggest enemy, “oppression” has been overcome.

Interview with Hanan Razek of the BBC News Arabic



Tell us about yourself?

My name is Hanan Razek, I am an Egyptian-British award-winning journalist and correspondent at BBC New Arabic, which is the oldest non-English language service from the BBC World Service. BBC News

Arabic reaches 30 million people globally each week, our biggest audiences are in the Middle East and North Africa.

I studied journalism at Cairo University, and after graduation, moved to London in 2008 to join the BBC and do a master's at the University of London. I have always been a big fan of the BBC and its school of journalism, and that was the motive behind my move to London.

I have reported from the ground on a wide range of news, current affairs, investigation, and long-form stories in the Middle East, North Africa, West Africa, the UK, Europe, Turkey, and the US as well.

How would you describe the pressure of being a female investigative journalist in Africa?

I believe that there are two layers to the experience. First, as a reporter on the ground and investigative journalist, my job can naturally, on occasion, take me

to hostile environments. As journalists, we are often looking to hold powerful people and groups to account for issues that they do not wish to address or even wish anybody to know about.

Our job is to uncover the truth even if it will make some people uncomfortable, and that, in turn, imposes challenges on the ground. This is a challenge journalists face around the world. In the world we live in today, even though the information seems easier to get,

it is still challenging to find accurate information.

As a female journalist, I have faced issues when conducting my reporting. For example, I have had



Our job is to uncover the truth even if it will make some people uncomfortable, and that, in turn, imposes challenges on the ground.

instances when men in powerful positions did not want to be challenged by a young female journalist and refused to speak with me. With that being said, I would not generalize and say that this happens all the time, but it can happen.

Can you describe the unique challenges and opportunities that female investigative journalists face in regions where Islam is prevalent and conservative values are upheld?

Each community has its own practices, and as journalists, we must respect different cultures and perspectives. However, that does not mean that we do a lesser job – whenever I work on a story, I always focus on the story.

It is extremely important to be impartial about the stories you are working on and to analyse different perspectives even if those perspectives are different from your personal views. The emphasis on impartiality is one of the things that I hold dear about working at the BBC.

How do you navigate the delicate balance between pursuing investigative journalism and respecting cultural norms and expectations regarding women's roles and behavior in your region?

You can respect the cultural norms, you can respect the culture you are working in, and you can still pursue the journalism you are there to do.

For example, my recent documentary “Sex for Healing” uncovered allegations of sexual abuse and manipulation by spiritual healers in Morocco and Sudan. The context is that spiritual healing is an extremely popular practice in both Morocco and Sudan and is very deeply rooted in their cultures.

We are not investigating the practice itself, or the belief in it, we are looking at instances of malpractice by some of those who work in this profession. We found that the lack of regulations in this practice leaves a window of opportunity for exploitation.

In this investigation, we managed to both respect the cultural practice we were investigating and pursue the truth. In doing so we held those healers accountable and unsilenced all the women who were so afraid to speak out because it is an issue that has a lot of sensitivity and stigma around it.

What motivated you to become an investigative journalist in an environment where the profession is typically male-dominated, and how has your work elevated the conditions of oppressed people or minoritized communities?

My family realized that I wanted to be a journalist from a very young age. When I was about three or four years old, my dad got me a toy which was a small keyboard with a mic. While other kids used that toy to

sing, I used it to interview people coming to our house. I could barely make a sentence back then, but for everyone coming to our house, I would just like to use the mic and ask them questions about who they were, how they knew my dad or my mom, and why they were there.

Each community has its own practices and a variety of cultures, and I believe as journalists, we should always respect different cultures.





My main motivation behind becoming an investigative journalist, has always been wanting to know more about the world, putting the pieces of the puzzle together, holding those responsible for any misdeed accountable, and giving voice to different perspectives. I think that is my duty and it has always been my passion.

As you mentioned, journalism used to be a typically male-dominated profession. But there have been so many great female journalists, before me, who paved the way for me and others. Such as female journalists who went to war zones at a time when foreign postings were considered a men-only club. They went and changed the narrative that covering war is only for men.

What is the most impactful story you have uncovered to date and why?

It is the most recent story I have worked on, "Sex for Healing," which I encourage your readers to watch on our BBC World Service YouTube channel.

One of the 80 women we managed to convince to speak to us was a young woman in Morocco who did not want to be identified. She was suffering from depression and she decided to go to the healer to seek help. She trusted him because she thought he was a professional healer. In one session, the healer gave her something to smell. He told her it was musk and it had an aromatherapy effect, so she started to smell it, and lost consciousness. She woke up, and found out that she was drugged and raped by the healer.

When she confronted him and asked him, "What did you do? Why did you do it?" He said, "Well, no, no, it was the evil spirit inside your body that did that." So, these men do not just sexually exploit women, they abuse their power as healers because they tell these women, "Oh no, it is not my fault. It is the evil spirit."

These young women often cannot tell anyone about what happened. The young woman in this case could not tell anyone about it, not even her family, because she told us if she told her family about what happened, they would have killed her. So she had to suffer in silence. A couple of months later, she found out that she was pregnant. She did not know what to do. She called the healer again, and she tried to get some help, but he dismissed her. So she had to move discreetly to another town until she gave birth, and she gave the child away to another family to adopt. It was a very sad story.

It speaks volumes about how much power some of those who pretend they can heal hold over women. But I think I am so proud of that investigation in particular because it has been an issue going on for quite some time now, but many have been afraid to speak out as they did not have a platform.

How do you envisage the journalism profession in the long term, particularly for advocating greater individual freedom and the rule of law?

Journalism helps the audience make sense of what is happening in the world. Journalism has always been and will always be important for shedding light on issues, giving the silenced an audible voice, and exploring problems affecting people from all backgrounds. We live in a world where media freedom is an increasing concern in journalism. It is impacting the BBC's ability to reach audiences in different parts of the world, but we are trying to negate this through digital outreach.



it might seem today that there is easy access to information.

But be careful, you will still need to dig deeper because they [the politicians] are getting better at hiding info.

How can young journalists make Africa freer?

There is always space for freer journalism, even in countries where you have greater freedom of speech for the press.

I remember in 2012 when I was invited to the US on an exchange program in which 140 journalists from all over the world were invited to learn and exchange experiences about the media landscape in the US. As part of that program, we met with Bob Woodward, the very famous American journalist behind the Watergate Scandal, his advice to us as young journalists back then was: "It might seem today that there is easy access to information. But be careful, you will still need to dig deeper because they [the politicians] are getting better at hiding info."

There is always a role for that investigative journalist to dig deeper, to be able to seek the truth of what happened and hold people accountable.





African Entrepreneurs are *Prosperity* *Champions*

By
Lenora
Ebule

Africa's entrepreneurial spirit is deep-rooted. From the dynamic markets of Lagos to the innovative tech startups in Nairobi, the continent's entrepreneurs are forging a path towards economic freedom and prosperity. Their creativity, resilience, and sheer will are transforming Africa's economic landscape. By nurturing these innovators, the continent stands to unlock unparalleled economic growth, spur innovation, and pave the way for a prosperous future for all Africans.

The past two decades have witnessed a remarkable upsurge in startups and small enterprises across the continent, creating millions of jobs and pioneering solutions uniquely adapted to local challenges. The African Development Bank reports that small and medium-sized enterprises constitute up to 90 percent of all businesses in Africa, contributing approximately 60 percent of total employment. Larger trailblazers like Kenya's M-Pesa and Nigeria's Dangote Group are not just massive employers, but they are also catalysts for economic prosperity, introducing groundbreaking solutions that resonate locally. For instance, M-Pesa's revolutionary mobile money

service has empowered millions of Africans, particularly those previously underserved by traditional banking systems, to manage their finances and conduct business.

However, to sustain this entrepreneurial momentum in Africa, three critical factors must be prioritized, namely financial accessibility, education and skill enhancement, and a favorable regulatory climate. Capital remains elusive for many African entrepreneurs. Traditional financial institutions often view startups as high-risk investments; African startups are no exception. The past decade has marked a positive trajectory in startup financing, with tech enterprises in Africa securing an astonishing \$2.02 billion in equity funding in 2019 alone. This infusion of capital from microfinance bodies, angel investors, venture capitalists, and traditional banks is integral to African commercial success stories; hence, its continuity is vital in enabling entrepreneurs to drive economic growth. While funding is crucial, equipping entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed is equally important. This involves investing in education and training

programs that emphasize business stewardship, digital fluency, and market intelligence. Organizations that equip African entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of their reality and compete on a global scale are essential. Institutions like the African Leadership Academy and the Tony Elumelu Foundation are critical in empowering African entrepreneurs through training, mentoring, and developing a robust network of entrepreneurial leaders who will address the continent's greatest challenges.

Entrepreneurial flourish requires a business-friendly regulatory environment. In many African nations, there is a pressing need for streamlined regulations, diminished administrative impediments, and incentives for budding enterprises. By simplifying the process of starting and running a business, governments can encourage more individuals to embark on entrepreneurial ventures, leading to increased economic activity and job creation.

African think tanks are instrumental in shaping policies and strategies that further economic freedom and prosperity via entrepreneurship. By conducting research, hosting dialogues, and providing policy recommendations, these institutions offer insights and solutions tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities of the African entrepreneurial landscape. For instance, the African Center for Economic Transformation (Ghana) researches effective governance and economic policies, advocating for an environment where entrepreneurs can thrive. Empowering African entrepreneurs requires a multifaceted strategy encompassing financial backing, skill cultivation, regulatory adjustments, and a societal shift toward appreciating and championing entrepreneurial endeavors. Collaboration between governments, the private sector, and civil society is essential in forging an ecosystem where entrepreneurs can thrive.



Lenora Ebule is the founder and CEO of Bailan, a company specializing in high-quality seasonings and foods that capture the rich flavors of Africa. CAMEROON



As Africa looks towards the future, its entrepreneurs will undoubtedly play a central role in shaping its destiny. By empowering them, the continent can embark on a pathway to economic freedom and prosperity, ensuring a brighter future for all its citizens.

OF AFRICAN SPIRITS AND ALL THINGS FREEDOM

By
ibrahim
Bàbátúndé
Anóba



The ways we think of “rights” and “freedom” in Africa are significantly influenced by thoughts largely derived from the European Enlightenment. The adoption of these two words as pillars of democracy across Africa—as reflected in our constitutions and other epistemic instruments of law and order—are direct legacies of European colonization. These words even became more fetishized in Africa after the independence wave of the 1960s due to the political influence of “Western” liberal democracy. While Christian values strongly influenced colonial laws in Africa, advocates of liberal democracy in the present day usually point to Judeo-Christian values as foundational to the ideas’ emergence. Also, in African communities where local laws are grounded on sharia (Islamic canonical law) or derived from its elements, Islam is promoted as foundational to the protection of “virtue” and “dignity.” Nowadays, it is virtually a universal subconsciousness among Africans that these four elements—rights, freedom, virtue, and dignity—are, in different ways, innate to the teachings of Abrahamic religions. In that process of universalization, the mind of several Africans, specifically those with a fundamentalist embrace of the Abrahamic religions, castigates indigenous African religions as antithetical to the former, i.e., the idea that those indigenous religions are no

respector of rights, freedom, virtue, and dignity. But they are wrong.

Unless we choose to be ignorant, we cannot deny the fact that religious tolerance flourishes the most among that same category of people whose beliefs we castigated as antithetical to freedom and other elements. In some cases, an ethnic group could have two or more variants of the same indigenous religion amid perfectly tranquil relationships among devotees. The idea of “an antithetical religion” or, for the sake of fancy English, “heresy”—that one religion, or spiritual consciousness, or way of devotion is fundamentally “wrong” while another is, “right”—is largely foreign to the African imagination. In fact, the virtual absence of canonical texts in indigenous African religions makes them so flexible and open to syncretizing with non-African alternative religions. Such remix engendered the advent of Candomblé, Santería, Quimbanda, Kimbanguism, and several others.

While Africans welcome such fusions of different faiths into new ones, the Abrahamic alternatives reject them. Our people should remember that in Africa, prior to the appearance of Islam and Christianity, we did not believe that there was one right way to

worship the heavens, the ancestors, or a Supreme Being. We did not care about who had the “ideal” pathway to salvation. Our ancestors believed that achieving goodness in the afterlife, or what we imagine as “salvation,” is a journey of many roads, and no individual or group could monopolize that journey by claiming to have one way. To claim the latter is unAfrican; it is the bedrock of many wars, social discriminations, and ethnic cleansing in post-1960 Africa. Our brothers and sisters twist the same Abrahamic religion that claim to promote peace and love into tools of division. There is no better time for these Africans to take a pause and learn from their people’s history.

Before Saint Augustine (the African Bishop of Hippo) wrote about the individual’s right to free will, and well before the political founders of the United States published the Bill of Rights, several African cultures exhibited the quality that one may refer to as “freedom of religious expression.” The Ancient Egyptians had numerous deities. Their civilization was littered with temples constructed for many of the over 2,000 deities (what the English language relegates to “small ‘g’ gods”), famous among which were Amon, Hathor, Anubis, Horus, Osiris, Mut, and Thoth. This polytheistic way of worship endured for many centuries until the adoption of the god, Aten, by Amenhotep IV—also known as Akhenaten (c. 1353-1336 BCE)—as the official deity of Egypt during the period of the New Kingdom. As true Africans that they were, the Ancient Egyptians rejected the subversion of their polytheism and soon restored the old gods. South of Egypt in Nubia, their worship framework was not laced on one deity, either.

Today, the Voodoo religion of the Fon and Ewe people in West Africa comprises over 100 deities, with each having its own devotees. It would not be an aberration to see people freely attend different processions in devotion to an array of deities. It is normal for a family or clan to adopt a deity unique to them, and their ways would not be “wrong” to neighbors. In Akan religion, predominantly in present-day Ghana, worshipers of the different Abosom (deities) like Tano and Bea would often participate in each other’s rites as they all believed in one Supreme Being (Nyame). The Akan will often say “obi nkyere abofra nyame,” meaning, “nobody teaches a child the knowledge of the Supreme Being” because they consider such knowledge to be personal to each individual, therefore, the responsibility of each individual to pursue. The Akan believes that Nyame is omnipresent and that even children can observe It through elements in the environment. To the Akan, no one needs to be forced to worship what they do not wish to worship. Not even children. The Odinani religion of the Igbo people in southeast Nigeria is also known to accommodate devotion to numerous deities (Alusi) often peculiar to each separate clan in a community.

Similarly, among the Yorùbá, there are different channels of worshiping the Supreme Being (Olódùmarè). Today, as in the “past,” each channel of worship has its deity (Òrìṣà), liturgy, ethical principles, and a legion of devotees. It was, and still is, normal for Yorùbá monarchs, their court, and council to participate in rituals for different deities. It is not a quality only seen in the royal corridors but a normality among the Yorùbá public. Across Africa, it

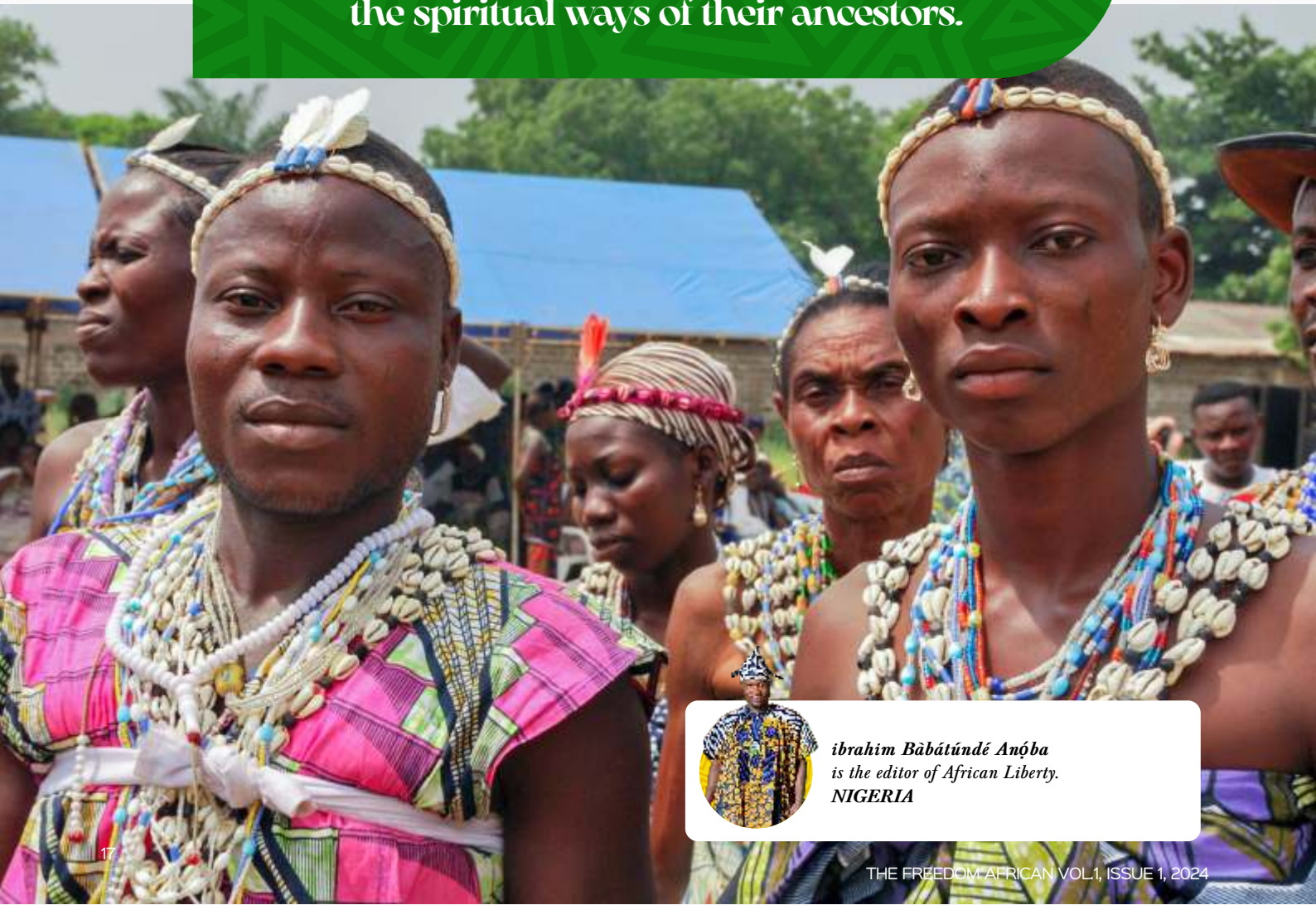


The Akan believes that Nyame is omnipresent and that even children can observe It through elements in the environment. To the Akan, no one needs to be forced to worship what they do not wish to worship. Not even children.

is hard to find instances where one line of devotees promotes the argument that other lines, or deities, or their devotees are engaged in heresy and would, for that reason, perish in some theatrically idealized “hell.” The culture of seeing one’s religion or line of devotion as superior to every other alternative and, as a result, seeing those who follow the alternatives as “hell-bound,” “devil-led,” “unsaved,” and “different,” is alien to Africa.

Tolerance and the love for the freedom of religion, or spirituality, or whatever other fancy synonyms exist in the English dictionary, are ingrained in the consciousness of Africans devoted to the spiritual ways of their ancestors. For this category of Africans, it is an abomination to dare call their deity or Supreme Being the “only way to salvation” or “the seal of prophets.” It is appropriate to echo John Mbiti’s observation that “since African Religion belongs to the people, no individual member of the society concerned can stand apart and reject the whole of his people’s religion. To do so would mean to cut himself off from the total life of his people.” This statement was true of Africans before Christianity and Islam, and it should be true of Africans today as well. But one must be realistic by asking the right question: how badly will Africans continue to cut themselves off from their fellow Africans—murdering, cleansing, and declaring themselves “different” from those with whom they share a language, history, and ancestor, in the name of some capital letter “G” God?

Tolerance and the love for the freedom of religion, or spirituality, or whatever other fancy synonyms exist in the English dictionary, are ingrained in the consciousness of Africans devoted to the spiritual ways of their ancestors.



ibrahim Bābātúndé Anóba
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NIGERIA

AFRICA SHOULD BE A COUNTRY

PROPONENT:

JUBRIL ENAKELE

The notion of an integrated Africa is not a new argument. I have asked before: “What if Africa were a country?” Embracing this idea does not entail sacrificing individual identities or cultures, or adopting the same ideology. I do not refer to idealistic notions of utopian conformity; but the pragmatic realities that we need to consider—regarding trade, payments, resource, and knowledge exchange, to seize our place as a global force. The notion might initially seem impractically bold, but African Union member states appear to have since agreed otherwise: the African Continental Free Trade Agreement is clear evidence. The evidence for this reaches even further back to 1991, with the establishment of the African Economic Community.

Consider the power in unifying resources, allowing nations on the continent to leverage their competitive advantages and deepen trade among themselves and collectively, with others. In the discourse surrounding Africa’s potential, the recurring theme of fragmented nations hindering collective development resounds. While pockets of innovation and development thrive within individual nations, the overall growth trajectory remains stunted by a lack of intra-African trade. With under 20 percent of trade occurring intra-continently, the potential for shared prosperity is stifled by a lack of cohesion that hinders shared success and economic synergy. Furthermore, facilitating the movement of people across borders is equally crucial. Easing migration restrictions can unlock a wealth of talent, skills, and diverse perspectives. Just as goods and services should flow freely, allowing for the exchange of human capital fosters innovation and dynamism. A united Africa would enable professionals, entrepreneurs, and visionaries to collaborate and thrive uninhibited by artificial borders. Streamlining regulations and creating mechanisms for cross-border investments, payments, and policy innovations can fuel entrepreneurship and infrastructure development, catalyzing economic progress across the continent. A supranational union might seem daunting, given the complexities of merging diverse economies and addressing conflicting interests, but history has shown that such ambitious endeavors can yield remarkable outcomes.



Jubril Enakele is the chief executive director at IRON (capital, global markets and wealth managers). NIGERIA

OPPONENT:

IFUNANYA LILIAN IGWEZE

Africa, the world's second-largest continent, is home to 54 unique countries. These countries boast distinct cultural heritages, expressed through diverse traditions and practices. While some may appear unfamiliar to outsiders, they hold deep significance for the communities that celebrate them. The continent's cultural wealth extends beyond traditions, resonating in the distinct musical prowess exhibited by each country. From the Afrobeat of the West to the soulful melodies of the East, each note adds its own unique flavor to the continent's cultural heritage. However, proposals for a unified Africa raise concerns about the potential loss of this rich diversity. Merging distinct cultural identities into a single entity risks homogenizing traditions, languages, and ways of life, silencing the diversity that defines the continent.

Furthermore, the vastness and diversity of Africa present significant challenges to unification. Overcoming historical and cultural divides, ensuring equitable representation, and navigating regional disparities would be almost impossible. Additionally, past instances of ethnic friction within diverse populations serve as cautionary tales, highlighting the potential for conflict within a unified Africa. Therefore, focusing on fostering stronger ties and promoting collaboration among individual nations appears a more promising path forward. By facilitating open trade and seamless travel within the continent, African countries can leverage their collective potential while preserving their unique identities. This approach fosters economic growth, knowledge exchange, and cultural understanding, allowing each country to flourish while contributing to the continent's shared success. In conclusion, Africa's strength lies in the diversification of each country. By celebrating this uniqueness and promoting collaboration, we can empower the continent to thrive while preserving its rich individualized cultural heritage.



Ifunanya Igweze Lilian is a medical doctor and the co-founder of Preggify. NIGERIA

Talk about Technology Rescuing Africa from

By Chiamaka Adinnu Food Insecurity

Agriculture is Africa's biggest employer of labor. It employs 70 percent of the labor force, impacting a significant 987 million inhabitants residing in rural areas across the continent. It equally accounts for over 37 percent of the continent's gross domestic product and for nearly 60 percent of its export revenue. Although agriculture undoubtedly plays a major role in Africa's economic life, the continent still faces serious food security challenges. These food security challenges—partly driven by low agricultural productivity in addition to a growing population, and climate change—demands innovative solutions.

Agricultural productivity in Africa can be improved through technological innovations, strategic investments, and harnessing the power of local African entrepreneurs. Presently, the persistently low agricultural productivity in Africa is due to the limited adoption of modern agricultural technologies. This is primarily a consequence of chronic underinvestment. Also, the potential of local development partners in safeguarding food security on the continent is vastly underutilized.

Innovations such as precision agriculture leverage data and digital tools. It empowers farmers to make informed decisions about planting, harvesting, and resource management. Such acts subsequently lead to increased yields, reduced resource wastage, and, ultimately, engender greater economic returns. Moreover, biotechnological innovations also aid in developing resilient and high-yield crop varieties that can withstand changing climate conditions and pests. In Africa, where climate-related issues present a huge problem, particularly in agriculture, biotechnological innovations represent a welcome solution to boost agricultural output.

Similarly, an increased investment in agriculture is key to boosting food security in Africa. These investments can be channeled towards research and development, improving farming techniques and crop varieties, and upgrading agricultural infrastructure. A significant part of the investments can also be utilized in facilitating access to credit and financing options for small-scale farmers.

Investing in support programs for the education and training of farmers is crucial to empowering them with

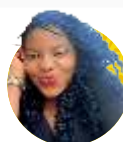
Fostering the growth and involvement of local entrepreneurs holds the potential to sustainably address food security challenges and elevate incomes, revenues, and employment opportunities in farming communities.

the required knowledge and skills to adopt modern and sustainable farming practices. Such empowerment will, in the long run, yield significant results toward bridging the food insecurity gaps on the continent.

Beyond the above solutions, the role of local entrepreneurs is also crucial to boosting food security. Local development partners make a greater impact beyond the typical traditional model of indirect, external partners and foreign aid. These entrepreneurs have the potential to uplift the continent from its prevalent food security challenges. This is primarily because of their unique understanding of the needs, culture, and context of local communities. Such understanding helps them play an essential role in the adoption and dissemination of technology-driven solutions to enhance food security.

Fostering the growth and involvement of local entrepreneurs holds the potential to sustainably address food security challenges and elevate incomes, revenues, and employment opportunities in farming communities.

The impact of food security transcends the boundaries of the agricultural sector. Bridging the food security gaps in Africa through technology ensures equal access to stable and sufficient food supply. It further improves human productivity and also boosts revenue and foreign exchange earnings through the export of surplus agricultural produce.



Chiamaka Adinnu is an editorial assistant at African Liberty. She is a former African Liberty writing fellow. NIGERIA

In support of the adoption of Agroecology

By
Arekpitan
Ikhenade



Food is central to life and should heal and protect our bodies, instead, our foods are harming us.

A few years ago, as happens with most people settling into adulthood, I became conscious of what I ate and started making intentional decisions about what went onto my plates. I wanted to fill my body with only foods that nourished me. I cut out overly processed foods and sugars and deliberately switched to farm-grown foods. I did not know then as I know now that even farm-grown foods could harm my body. Though they were fresh and grown by local farmers, they were grown with a ton of chemicals harmful for my body, chemicals with ingredients like profenofos, dichlorvos, endosulfan, triazophos, glyphosate, atrazine, butachlor – ingredients categorized as highly hazardous and have been linked to illnesses like cancer and chronic kidney disease.

These ingredients have found their way into our food because agriculture in Nigeria is worrisomely chemical-intensive. Our farmers are heavily dependent on chemical pesticides and fertilizers, making us the largest importer of chemical pesticides on the continent. Food is central to life and should heal and protect our bodies, instead, our foods are harming us.

Every year, Nigeria reports an estimated 102,000 new cases of cancer, 72,000 of which results in death annually. In 2015, the WHO suspected that the 18 people who mysteriously died in South-Western Nigeria died because of pesticide poisoning. In 2020, at least 270 people in Benue State died from pesticide poisoning. In 2022, 3 people died and 8 were hospitalised after eating beans with residues of chemical pesticides.

In addition to this decline in human health, the dependence on chemicals has led to an increased loss of biodiversity, decreased soil fertility, and a decline in Nigeria's economy. Nigeria loses about \$362.5 million yearly in foreign exchange to the ban on the exportation of beans in the last eight years. The banned beans contained dichlorvos, a pesticide-





The private sector, agribusinesses in particular, must invest in the training and capacity building of smallholder farmers who are responsible for most of the foods we eat.



Arekpitan Ikhenade is a writer and development communications expert, and also a former African Liberty writing fellow. NIGERIA

active ingredient. The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control also reported that 76 percent of Nigeria's agricultural commodities are rejected by the European Union because of the chemicals found in them.

We cannot feed the hungry and achieve a food-secure future without changing how we grow food. Growing food should not put farmers's lives at risk and harm the earth as it currently does, with industrial agriculture contributing more than 40 percent to greenhouse gas emissions. Agriculture should be a regenerative process and we must make it so once again.

Agroecology is a promising solution. The term "agroecology" covers all ecological agriculture systems that work with nature, for nature and for life. It involves practices like polycultures, crop rotation, organic farming, composting, livestock integration and the use of biopesticides. When we practice agroecology, we co-create with nature and produce more nutrition whilst replenishing the earth. With agroecology, we are given the opportunity to produce food while improving our soils, sustaining biodiversity, fighting climate change and contributing to environmental resilience.

To aid the adoption of agroecology as a sustainable agricultural practice, the current pesticide legislation must be revisited to guarantee the protection of farmers and the health of Nigerians. The current legal framework is deficient and supports the toxic alliance between regulators and the promoters of agrochemicals in Nigeria.

We also must aid knowledge transfer and the recovery of indigenous farming techniques to reclaim agriculture as we used to know it. The private sector, agribusinesses in particular, must invest in the training and capacity building of smallholder farmers who are responsible for most of the foods we eat.

According to Nigeria's Pesticide Atlas, 90 percent of these farmers are unaware of the contents of the pesticides they use or the dangers involved in using them. Agribusinesses must collaborate with civil society and non-governmental organisations to educate farmers, promote awareness, and improve and adapt agroecological practices to local contexts. Agribusinesses also have a burden to facilitate supply chain integration and market access to ensure fair prices for farmers who adopt agroecological practices.

With better legislation and proactive steps from the private sector, we soon can live in a Nigeria where what is on our plates is no longer a threat to us.

HUMAN RIGHTS

by
Najibullah
Nakaka, NIGERIA

I opened my eyes in a land of misery,
surrounded by thick walls of hardship and slavery,
with bold black guards blocking all the entries,
ruled by the communal lords of the dark history.

We live our lives by the books of inequality,
written in a language of unjust and equivocality,
discrimination and corruption surrounding the
lands of tenancy,
on which we sow our seeds for comfortability,
but the harvested fruit is seized with no empathy,
and get shared among those with utmost
connectivity,
leaving us behind in an awe and poverty.

Our voices are silences, our rights are denied, all
hopes are gone.

Together we come, with the knowledge of rights, for
freedom we yearn.

We amplify our voices and a hard hand strike, for
freedom we yearn.

To chase away the guards and break away the walls,
for freedom we yearn.

The communal lords are gone, human rights are
served, for freedom we yearn.

We spread the words rights, to teenagers at schools,
for freedom we yearn.

We educate the olds and the women in the bush for
freedom we yearn.

That our rights are there, hidden within the books,
for freedom we yearn.

For the life of misery, corruption and inequality will
be gone when human rights are served.

MY VOICE IS MY LIBERTY

by Pauline
Omutere
KENYA

I was long lost in the void,
deeply drenched in my fears,
day and night shedding tears,
torn between my peers and self-satisfaction,
easily swayed by and distraction,
I did lack a sense of direction.

I was a cringe,
in a cocoon enclosed,
afraid of getting my potential exposed,
a means of freely expressing myself I lacked,
or so I thought.

In different ways I tried,
to bring my ideas to book,
song and dance I tried,
but all these fell off the hook,
contented I was not,
I had to find my own unique way,
of spreading my wings to the world.

It then came to my realization,
oh, what sweet revelation,
that I had a weapon,

stronger than the mighty atomics,
within me it was,
only now do I realize.

My voice, I had,
the greatest at hand,
a perfect shield for defence,
a way to freely express myself,
about things I feel oppressive,
my voice became my liberty,
my voice is my armour.

To Protect Fragile “Democracies”

by
Tinashe
Sithole

In the aftermath of the 2023 harmonized elections in Zimbabwe, the country faces significant electoral issues. The election exposed a serious concern: how the persistent solidarity among former liberation movements in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is obstructing meaningful intervention in the disputed Zimbabwean election. The consequence is that Zimbabwe's 2023 elections are now overshadowed by the supposed abuse of the democratic tenet of “one person, one vote.”

The discrepancies between official election results and opposition figures raised questions about the fairness of the electoral process. The SADC observers, led by Dr. Nevers Mumba, noted these irregularities, but their findings were criticized. These issues collectively raised doubts about credibility before domestic and international observers.

Credible elections are a critical vehicle through which Africans can realize the principle of “one person, one vote,” ensuring proper democratic representation. Therefore, regional solidarity should prioritize holding credible elections, which are the foundation of a legitimate government.

The African Union (AU) has established key frameworks, such as the Constitutive Act, the Lomé Declaration, and the African Charter, to address unconstitutional changes in government, and promote best practices in conflict management and elections. However, there is a disparity in the AU's response to coups compared to election subversion. In 2023, the AU swiftly condemned the coup in Gabon following a controversial election where the incumbent secured victory by suppressing the opposition. This example underscores concern about institutional trust, leading the public to question the AU's decisions favoring incumbents over citizens. As Africa navigates democracy, the AU and regional bodies must address internal governance issues proactively, moving beyond reactive responses to coups and upholding democratic values.

Regional cooperation is crucial to prevent the interference of incumbents in elections. This involves countries and civil societies working together to ensure fairness and election integrity. For instance, civil societies can collaborate with bodies like the AU and the United Nations (UN), and exert diplomatic pressure on governments that undermine elections.

This international pressure urges governments to uphold democracy, prevent election subversion, and promote electoral fairness. This is an effective approach, in light of the historical context where regional cooperation in SADC was pivotal in the fight for independence, as exemplified by the Frontline States.

African diplomacy is a practical tool against electoral manipulation, as notably witnessed in Zimbabwe's 2023 election irregularities. Leaders, leveraging diplomatic channels, must influence the ruling ZANU-PF. Drawing parallels with the 2023 AU delegation to Ukraine to mediate the Ukraine-Russia war, AU and SADC leaders can employ a similar scale of diplomatic intervention to address legitimacy issues in Zimbabwe.

African leaders are responsible for championing democratic values, setting a global example in promoting free and fair elections, and averting substantial challenges. International supervision and mediation are crucial for thriving democratic processes. Involving organizations like the UN ensures critical oversight and mediation when electoral concerns arise. African leaders must embrace their responsibility in safeguarding democracy and building up the continent.

“All it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” Thus, it is imperative for African leaders to proactively employ regional collaboration, African diplomacy, and international oversight to counter unconstitutional government changes.



Credible elections are a critical vehicle through which Africans can realize the principle of one person, one vote.



Tinashe Sithole is a postdoctoral add product research fellow at the University of Johannesburg. He is a former African Liberty writing fellow.
ZIMBABWE



Cobalt, Copper, and the Mineral “Control” Palaver in the DR Congo

By ibrahim Bâbátúndé Anóba

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) should be the mineral wealth capital of Africa. It is, and, it is not. While the barbaric atrocities of Belgium and the “hidden genocide” of its infamous ruler King Leopold II in the Congo Free State (present-day DRC), have directly impacted the progress of the DRC since 1960, they are not of primary interest here. Rather, this article looks at how the attempt to control the same mineral wealth that attracted Belgium to Congo in the nineteenth century is one of the many problems bewildering the current DRC state. The focus here is on cobalt and copper.

The DRC stands on some of Africa’s largest mineral deposits, including cobalt and copper. Even as the DRC’s cobalt is more of a “modern” discovery, the history of copper usage in the country is older and can be traced to the Garanganze peoples of the Katanga area. Strict state centralization of the control of copper mining and its returns only began under Belgian colonization in the late nineteenth century. The colony was, for a while, the personal looting machine of Leopold II. At some point, Congo’s mines were declared as his private property and, by extension, the Belgian state. With the DRC’s political independence in 1960, state control shifted from Belgium to the indigenous Congolese government led by Patrice Lumumba and Joseph Kasavubu. While Belgium and its Western allies illegally kept their

hands in Congo’s mineral wealth even after the so-called independence, the mines were technically properties of the DRC state and have remained so ever since. The country’s record of corruption, which is directly linked to the attempt to control its mineral wealth, is among the worst in Sub-Saharan Africa. Greedy Congolese politicians like Mobutu Sese Seko and their allies in the West, including Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (France) and King Baudouin (Belgium), were the engineers of this legacy of corruption. It is not a surprise then, that on average, Transparency International ranked the DRC as the 159th most corrupt country in the world between 2009 and 2018.

It is essential to point out that the production of a high-end smartphone in 2021 will be incomplete without a cobalt-powered lithium-ion battery. About 7.4 billion such smartphones are estimated to be in use by 2025. Cobalt is also essential in the making of jet and gas turbines. It is equally a key component of electric cars. It is estimated that 67 percent of the cobalt produced globally is extracted from the DRC. In 2018 alone, the demand for cobalt by the electric vehicle industry increased by 40 percent; a figure projected to remain steady through the next decade. The DRC is also among the top five producers of copper. Its copper production was estimated to have reached an impressive 1.4 million metric tonnes in 2020, with the country only



Mobutu's wealth, a substantial portion of which was diverted from mining returns, was estimated to range between \$4 billion and \$10 billion. It is also alleged that many of his relatives ended up with more than \$200 million each by the time he was kicked out of office in 1997.

producing 96,000 tonnes in 2007. If combined, the market value of cobalt and copper extracted in the DRC is worth \$10 billion annually. According to Global Witness, they jointly account for 80 percent of its annual export earnings. These remarkable market potentials position the DRC's cobalt and copper mining sectors as two of the most important in the future of the global technology market. But only a fraction of what is actually realized from cobalt and copper makes it to the DRC's budget. Sometimes it could be as low as 6 percent, although the state mining company, Gécamines (Générale des Carrières et des Mines), has claimed the resources contribute more to the budget.

Meanwhile, Gécamines itself has for long remained a looting machine for the state. Its leadership is indirectly centralized in the hands of the DRC presidency, which has controlled it since replacing the colonial Union Minière du Haut Katanga in 1966. It is reported that former President Mobutu Sese Seko

looted Gécamines to bankruptcy, resulting in the collapse of the DRC's economy in the 1990s. Mobutu's wealth, a substantial portion of which was diverted from mining returns, was estimated to range between \$4 billion and \$10 billion. It is also alleged that many of his relatives ended up with more than \$200 million each by the time he was kicked out of office in 1997. All from the returns of two resources that have largely failed to benefit their ancestral owners.

Mining and exploitation permits were awarded to private companies in the same year by the new president, Laurent Kabila, following calls for the government to demonopolize the mining sector and get indigenous Congolese involved in controlling their wealth. The attempted liberalization and indigenization of Gécamines only made the company more vulnerable to looting, especially as concessions and joint ventures (JV) were made under secretive terms. Arguably the only significant achievement of Gécamines in its early years of existence was the increase in the number of African executive personnel in the company from 251 in 1967 to 2,249 in 1980. No other significant achievement happened. The other policy that could have made things more transparent was the 2002 Mining Code, which gave the state more regulatory authority while reserving mining duties for the private sector. But the Mining Code did not make much of a difference in making Gécamines and other state companies more transparent or accountable to the people. It gave the right to award mining titles to the CAMI (Cadastre Minier—the Mines Registry) rather than to Gécamines. It was not a big change, since both CAMI and Gécamines were under the influence of the central government and some crony foreign market actors. By 2007, CAMI had issued 471 exploitation permits, 65 percent of which were given to state mining companies. It implies true privatization never really happened, even though this was a major objective of the 2002 Mining Code. Under such conditions, the then president, Joseph Kabila—son of Laurent Kabila—and his allies, still determined what companies got mining titles after private negotiations. The presidency reserved most exploitation rights for state companies under its control, and the government of Joseph Kabila brazenly exploited this structure.

An Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative report claimed that between 2013 and 2015, over \$750 million of payments made to the DRC government could not be accounted for in the national treasury under Joseph Kabila. Subsequent efforts to truly open the mining sector, especially before the 2006 general elections, mainly led to the creation of inefficient JVs, which the government occasionally submerged. According to the Carter Center, by 2016, three years before Joseph Kabila left office, Gécamines had held 98 percent of all exploitation permits, almost twice as much as the amount permitted by the 2002 Mining Code, effectively instituting a quasi-nationalized mining sector.

Most mining projects in the DRC have either failed or experienced significant operational difficulties due to accountability issues. As expected, independent studies on the DRC's economic performance, vis-à-vis its mineral export, often point at Gécamines as the main reason why returns from the mining sector have not appropriately benefited Congolese. A 2017 report by Global Witness was so vivid in its findings, with a claim that Gécamines was “hemorrhaging money in suspect transactions...while simultaneously failing to make any substantial contribution to the national treasury or invest in its own mining operations.”

But Gécamines is simply a piece in the gigantic corruption machinery that is the DRC government, which has successfully infiltrated Gécamines' operation. Such infiltration is evident in the nature of the landmark mining agreement that the DRC government signed with China in 2007. Both countries created the Sino-Congolese mining JV protocol (also known as Sicominex) worth \$9 billion, although it was later renegotiated to \$6 billion in 2009. A consortium of China Development Bank, Sinohydro, and China Eximbank held a 68 percent stake in Sicominex while Gécamines owned the remaining 32 percent. It was a resource-for-infrastructure deal. The protocol stipulated that China would get 10.6 million tonnes of copper and hundreds of thousands of tonnes of cobalt worth \$40 billion, with an improvement potential of up to \$120 billion. In return, the Chinese would build infrastructures in the DRC—two universities; 3,500 km of roads and 3,200 km of railroads (with an option of renovating existing ones); 176 health centers and hospitals; and two hydroelectric dams. Years after it was adopted, this agreement has not benefited the DRC as much as it has helped China. A 2013 United Nations report found that the DRC lost at least \$1.36 billion in potential revenue from undervalued assets conceded to China under the Sicominex protocol between 2010 and 2012 alone.

The agreement's infrastructure commitment aspect, which is tied to China's benefit from the mines, ought to be more than \$3 billion—sometimes estimated at \$6 billion—with additional investments in the mining sector. Only \$590 million was allegedly spent on infrastructure across the DRC by the Chinese as of 2018, which has not dramatically increased as promised. At the same time, China strengthened its manufacturing sector, partly with Congolese copper and cobalt. The purported mutually beneficial agreement has not been advantageous to the DRC.

As mentioned earlier, if economic development could be measured by the mineral wealth a country possesses, the DRC should be among the most economically prosperous in the world. But the reverse is the case. In 2012, the World Bank estimated that 77 percent of the country's 70 million people lived in extreme poverty, i.e., less than \$1.90 a day. The estimates in 2022 show nearly 62 percent of Congolese, lived on less than \$2.15 a day. While these numbers are not encouraging, the politicians in charge of the DRC do not seem to be anywhere near figuring out how to manage the country's mineral wealth. What is certain is that corruption (locally grown and foreign-directed) has to go. Local entrepreneurs should take a lead role as investors, and the control of mines must significantly devolve to the Congolese people, particularly to communities on whose land the two minerals are extracted.



Most mining projects in the DRC have either failed or experienced significant operational difficulties due to accountability issues.



ibrahim Bābātúndé Anóba
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NIGERIA

THE

OPEN TRADE SOLUTION FOR AFRICA'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

by
Olumayowa
Okediran



Open trade
fosters increased
competition and
innovation, which
are the lifeblood
of economic
development.

Africa, a continent of remarkable diversity and boundless potential, is at a pivotal moment in its economic journey. In our quest for progress and prosperity, the imperative of open trade emerges as a beacon of hope. Despite its rich resources and vibrant cultures, Africa has often grappled with economic challenges, ranging from political and economic problems carried over from the colonial era to contemporary barriers in global trade. Addressing these challenges requires innovative solutions, and open trade stands out as a key strategy for economic transformation.

Through enhanced economic integration, streamlined regulations, and the removal of barriers to commerce, open trade in Africa holds the promise of unleashing a transformative wave of benefits capable of uplifting countries and empowering their citizens. One of the foremost arguments favoring open trade in Africa is its potential to stimulate economic growth. Open trade fosters increased competition and innovation, which are the lifeblood of economic development. For instance, sectors like agriculture, technology, and manufacturing in Africa could experience a surge in innovation and efficiency due to exposure to global markets and competitive practices. This exposure is crucial for adapting to the rapidly changing global economic landscape.

Economic growth, in turn, translates into job creation. Open trade nurtures an environment where businesses can expand, and new investments can flourish. The Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) alone will generate up to 18 million new jobs in Africa by 2035. These new jobs will range from skilled positions in emerging tech industries to opportunities in traditional sectors like agriculture, requiring a focus on skill development and education to ensure a match between job market demands and the workforce's capabilities. These jobs provide not only income but also empowerment, improved livelihoods, and a pathway to a brighter future for everyone from Lagos to Maputo. The potential to bring many Africans out of poverty cannot be overemphasized. The critical concern of poverty reduction is intimately linked to open trade. By increasing incomes and creating opportunities, trade can be a powerful tool in the battle against poverty.

The success story of Singapore, where trade liberalization lifted many out of poverty, is noteworthy. According to a study by the World Bank, Singapore lifted around 400,000 people out of poverty between 1965 and 1980, thanks to trade liberalization. This represents around 20 percent of the population at the time. Africa can replicate this achievement by embracing open trade to reduce poverty and promote inclusive growth. Just as Singapore tailored its trade policies to its specific economic context, African nations can adopt a similar approach, considering their unique socio-economic environments and cultural nuances, to replicate such success.

Open trade has a tangible impact on the daily lives of Africans by making goods and services more accessible and affordable. The AfCFTA, with its potential to reduce tariffs on intra-African trade by 90 percent, could save African businesses and consumers a substantial \$292 billion annually. This reduction in tariffs under the AfCFTA is particularly beneficial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of many African economies. By lowering the cost of cross-border trade, these businesses can expand their market reach, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit across the continent. These savings can lead to improved living standards, better access to quality products, and enhanced well-being for millions.

For too long, Africa's fragmented markets have impeded progress. However, open trade is now forging greater regional integration. The AfCFTA, for instance, has established a single market for goods and services across the continent, simplifying cross-border trade and fostering economic cooperation. This not only enhances business prospects but also strengthens diplomatic ties, promoting peace and stability.

The AfCFTA is a testament to Africa's commitment to open trade. This initiative is set to boost intra-African trade by an impressive 52 percent by 2025, increase the continent's income by up to \$450 billion by 2035 according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and lift 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty. It heralds a new era of economic opportunity, connectivity, and progress.

Moreover, the rise of digital trade in Africa opens up uncharted horizons. With a growing e-commerce market expected to reach \$29 billion by 2025, African businesses can harness the power of technology to reach new markets and customers, transcending geographical boundaries and expanding their reach. Regional blocs, including the East African Community and the Economic Community of West African States can further boost trade among neighboring countries. These blocs are pivotal in nurturing economic ties and propelling trade to new heights. Open trade is the key that can unlock Africa's immense potential. It promises economic growth, job creation, poverty reduction, improved living standards, and greater regional integration. The AfCFTA and other recent developments exemplify the continent's commitment to realizing these benefits.

Nevertheless, challenges such as high tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and inadequate infrastructure must be addressed to harness the potential of open trade fully. African countries must invest in reducing trade barriers, streamlining regulations, and improving infrastructure to create an environment conducive to sustainable economic growth and development. Africa is on the cusp of a new era, and open trade is the catalyst that can propel it to unprecedented heights. With determination and concerted efforts, African nations can rise above their challenges, tap into their vast potential, and usher in an era of prosperity and progress that benefits all citizens. Open trade is not merely an option; it is an imperative for Africa's future.

In the words of George Ayittey, the renowned Ghanaian economist, "Trade is in the blood and veins of Africans. It is not something we have to teach people. It is our way of life." Ayittey's profound statement resonates deeply with the historical and cultural essence of trade in Africa; a tradition that continues to shape our continent's destiny.

As Africa strides forward, it is essential that both intra-continental collaboration and supportive international trade policies align to ensure the promise of open trade becomes a widespread reality, heralding a new chapter of prosperity for the continent.



Open trade has a tangible impact on the daily lives of Africans by making goods and services more accessible and affordable.



Olumayowa Okediran is the chief of staff at Students For Liberty. NIGERIA

YOU CAN KEEP THE CHANGE

by Ogochukwu Peter, NIGERIA

My best moments in the shop is any time a customer says "don't worry, you can keep the change." It tastes sweeter than the various rice delicacies we sell. Our shop is located along the road that leads to Fruitful Urban Student schools in Okposi village in Ebonyi state. The construction of a new hostel for the school just began and it tripled our sales and made us acquire two new shops and more employees.

The price of food was affordable for both students and workers, which has been my mum's major aim for "Jolly Kitchen." This has been possible for years until a ban was placed on the importation of foreign rice. Foreign rice has been the best option since you just have to prepare outrightly. Unlike local rice where you must pick stones before cooking. You cannot possibly trust it enough for Jolly Kitchen has built a reputation for excellent food services over the years.

Rice became scarce and very expensive. Sales dropped drastically and no one says "you can keep the change" any longer. Did the ban on rice also affect our customers? I got to understand better from two customers' discussions. Government agents would invade our shop for selling "illegal food" and everyone in the shop would definitely be arrested. Nobody wants to be associated with illegal dealers.

The sudden closure of borders and high tariffs increased hardship. It affected the hostel construction in terms of building materials and the construction was suspended. Many villagers became jobless as a result. Some of the students who worked on the site to support their education started finding it difficult, some later dropped out.

We went back to one shop and dismissed our workers. My mum could no longer afford to donate daily lunch to the motherless children's home. Mr. Johnson, who deals in the rice importation business, and has been a major supporter of many indigent children, widows, and charity homes, has been arrested. Five thousand bags of rice were confiscated in the name of "illegal food" while many are wallowing in abject poverty and hunger.

HUMAN DIGNITY

By
Peter Awitajay
Mugadza, ZAMBIA

Like a whirl wind the world had put out the ember, and
Africa was filled with darkness thick,
For her foe too touch.
Lost and wrapt in grief,
her skin torn apart, her heart left naked
like a bleeding raw steak.
Her life but their rules,
each day rubbed shoulders,
with tribulations, pain was inevitable.

But not everlasting, And so;

The ocean roared with a joyous sound,
as trees tossed hands in sprightly dance,
with a sound as loud as heaven trumpets.
Bonds were loosened, life restored,
peace hovered, victory belonged to Africa.

And the sun begun to shine bright
on every fraction of African Life,
Black and White.
The moon has kept embracing every fraction of
African Life, good and bad.

With its abundant equal undying love,
every life valued and protected,
like the Sun, Africa equally breaths,
life in every African Soul, Black and White,
like the Moon, she is a warm Haven,
and every being finds comfort.

A Haven where, life is not differentiated,
But respected.
Where every voice is entitled to speak,
But in order.
Where every opportunity available,
is for all but qualified.
Where Human Dignity is highly upheld.
Africa what a beautiful land!

THE QUESTION OF PROPERTY RIGHTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

by David
Ansara

Private property rights are unevenly applied in South Africa. In 1913, black South Africans were denied freehold titles across most of the country following the adoption of the Native Land Act in 1913. After the National Party rose to power in 1948, non-white South Africans saw their property rights further eroded by pernicious legislation such as the Group Areas Act of 1950, which resulted in large-scale forced removals of millions from designated “white” areas. Many black South Africans were forcibly “resettled” in the rural homelands or “reserves,” and, when allowed to be present for work purposes near white economic centers, had to live in peripheral townships as tenants of the municipality. Here and in the homelands, most ordinary black South Africans were denied the right of ownership. However, even the military might of the apartheid state could not resist the wave of (officially illegal) black

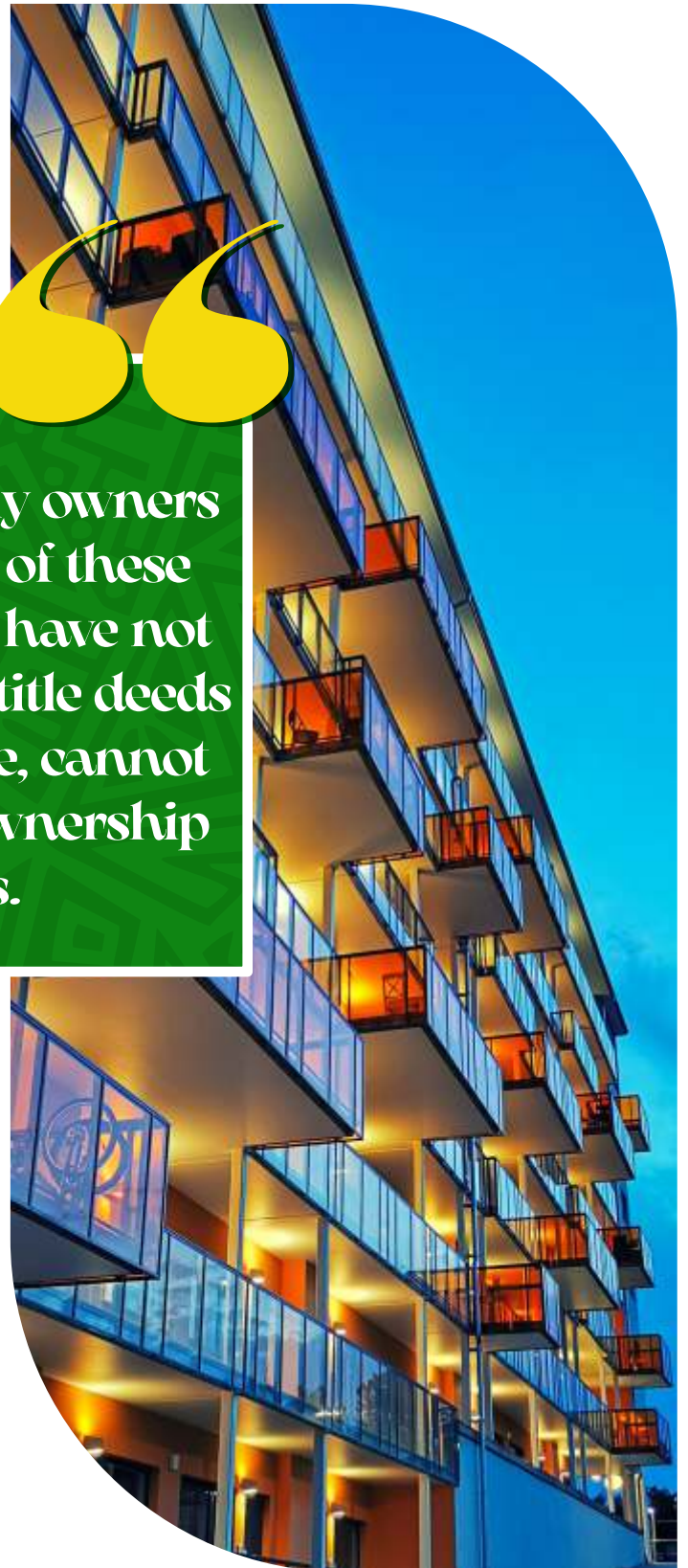


While formally owners today, many of these residents still have not received their title deeds and, therefore, cannot prove their ownership status.

urbanization during the 1970s and 1980s, forming what the late John Kane-Berman described as a “silent revolution” against apartheid policies.

As apartheid became impossible to enforce, many race-based laws were repealed in the 1980s, well before the formal transition to democracy began with the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and other black political organizations in 1990.

Significantly, in 1991, the National Party government of President F.W. de Klerk passed the Upgrading of Land Tenure Act. With the stroke of a legislative pen, the state transferred ownership from municipalities to the tenants who had lived in houses they built for themselves and their families for generations. While formally owners today, many of these residents still have not received their title deeds and, therefore,



cannot prove their ownership status.

In the contemporary democratic era, property rights enjoy protection under section 25 of the South African Constitution. These provisions are under increased political pressure, with the ANC government seeking to undermine private ownership through the proposed expropriation without compensation policy. Legislation currently before the South African Parliament would grant the government extraordinary powers to confiscate fixed property for “nil” compensation under a wide range of circumstances, once again threatening to undermine private property rights in South Africa.

Since its inception in 1975, the Free Market Foundation (FMF) has remained committed to not only upholding the private property rights of existing property owners but also to extend property rights to all people in South Africa, regardless of their race or background.

As part of this commitment, in 2010, the FMF initiated the Khaya Lam project—meaning ‘Our Home’ in isiZulu—to help guarantee the property rights of municipal tenants across the country. Through the tireless efforts of the (now late) Perry Feldman and others, the first 100 title deeds were successfully transferred in 2013, a full century after the Native Land Act of 1913 was signed into law.

Since then, the Khaya Lam project has grown in scale and reach. Last year, we recorded a significant milestone of 10,000 title deeds successfully transferred to their rightful owners since the inception of the project. More than 3,000 of these were transferred in 2022 alone, and we are on track to achieve similar numbers in 2023.

The FMF could not have achieved this major milestone without the ongoing support of donors, conveyancers, municipalities, and other project partners who share our commitment to advancing private ownership in South Africa. The FMF is motivated not by a sense of charity but by our core belief in the transformative power of private ownership. There are many benefits to property rights.

Firstly, private property rights make economic sense. Consider the difference between renting and buying a property. Owners tend to invest in maintaining and improving their property, while renters have less incentive to make their property better and to invest in its future. Without private property, economies experience the so-called tragedy of the commons. In Medieval Europe, those who grazed their livestock on common land tended to let their animals roam free, since they did not bear the costs of the commons being overgrazed.

When a property is owned privately, and not collectively, a farmer has an interest in preserving his fields by not overgrazing. Instead, he might prefer to cordon off his land and rotate the grazing to allow time

for the grass to grow back. Without the right to enforce the boundary of his property, the farmer’s ability to enhance his economic productivity becomes severely limited.

Many critics of private property believe that private ownership only benefits wealthy landowners. However, low-income groups are typically more vulnerable to harassment by state authorities and have fewer means to secure their properties against criminal land invaders.

The Industrial Revolution saw ownership extended from the wealthy upper classes to everyone, which is what ultimately heralded the explosion in prosperity the world has seen. Ownership benefits the impoverished significantly. In addition to the economic benefits of ownership, there is also the moral aspect.

Simply put, can you be considered a fully free person without the right to own private property? The answer is “no.” Without the right to own, you exist apart from the world rather than in it. In various successful societies, when ordinary people started owning land, they became a check on government power and the power of other elites. Without assets and land, civil society is made of straw. It is for this reason that property rights are the cornerstone of the liberal tradition, but also of democracy itself.

It is these values that form the basis of the FMF’s work with the Khaya Lam project. We are driven by the belief that all South Africans—and those across the continent—deserve to have their private property rights recognized and protected, whether they live in townships or suburbs. After all, property rights are human rights.

Simply put, can you be considered a fully free person without the right to own private property? The answer is “no.” Without the right to own, you exist apart from the world rather than in it.



David Ansara is the chief executive officer of the Free Market Foundation. SOUTH AFRICA

Peace Personified

My Africa whispers “Let go and hold still,
so I can embrace your fears.”



"Peace Personified" captures the essence of freedom, resilience, and unity through a heartfelt pen drawing. Two African women stand together, exuding joy and harmony, their vibrant attires reflecting cultural richness. The intertwining lines symbolize the unbreakable bond of sisterhood and community. Below them, there are flowers that encapsulate the spirit of empowerment and togetherness. In the chaotic world, these women stand as a beacon of hope, embodying the strength and grace found in unity and the pursuit of true freedom. Their radiant faces echo a message of love, peace, and the power of shared dreams, where freedom thrives in the celebration of diversity.

Religious Freedom and the question of Dressing in Nigeria

by Claire Mom

On June 23, 2022, Malcom Omirhobo, a human rights lawyer, caused a stir in Nigeria. Underneath his legal regalia, Omirhobo was dressed in a traditional attire that reflected his religious beliefs. But Omirhobo's colleagues in the courtroom were not pleased with his sartorial expression.

In an interview with TheCable, Omirhobo said his "unusual" dress style was motivated by the Nigerian Supreme Court's hijab verdict. In accordance with section 38 of the country's 1999 constitution, the court had approved female Muslim students to wear hijab to school in Lagos State after the state had initially banned religious attire in schools. The court ruled that any attempt to stop the students from wearing hijab was an infringement of their rights to religious freedom.

Omirhobo was protesting this decision, more so because other religious denominations, specifically Christians and indigenous African religion adherents, have been prevented across different states from bringing their children to school with the latter dressed in religious attire. Indeed, religious freedom entails the right to follow one's faith without fear of oppression or prejudice. But it should not only revolve around the right to engage in religious practices in places of worship. Such liberties need to provide individuals with the ability to express their religious beliefs in public and private spaces

For some communities, these assertions are best expressed through donning religious attires like turbans, hijabs, yarmulkes, or even amulets. But religious freedom also means the right to articulate one's convictions, whether through public discourse, art, or writing, without fear of retribution. By allowing people to practice their faith freely, they are more likely to be respectful of the beliefs of others. Not only in the accommodation of Muslims but of all peaceful

religions. Having laws and policies that uphold religious freedom is essential. They must protect individuals from discrimination, hate crimes, and harassment.

But what happens in countries like Nigeria, where an

active law that is supposed to protect these rights is interpreted only in certain cases? It only shows that there are deep-rooted societal sentiments towards particular religions that must be addressed.

To effect change, civil society organizations, including religious institutions and non-governmental organizations, are required to step up religious freedom advocacy efforts. This can be done by promoting dialogue among different faith media groups can

addressing issues such as hate crimes targeting religious communities. There also needs to be more awareness about the need to accommodate diverse religious practices in educational institutions and workplaces, without leaving room for discrimination.

Sensitization sessions organized by human rights bodies with interpreters of the law, such as judges and security agencies, are also crucial to ensure that some religious groups are not treated unfairly. It is important to recognize that religious freedom is not absolute. Like any right, it can be limited. But such limitations must be proportionate, necessary, and non-discriminatory. Striking this balance can be challenging, but with collective responsibility, it is possible.

But religious freedom also means the right to articulate one's convictions, whether through public discourse, art, or writing, without fear of retribution.



Claire Mom is a Nigerian journalist passionate about societal reforms and the promotion of human rights. She is a former African Liberty writing fellow. NIGERIA

How to Fix the Coup Conundrum in Africa

by
Feyisade
Adeyemi

Africa now wears a military belt, spanning its entire breadth, from the east coast to the west coast.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there was a military coup in Mali. During that time, I was interviewed by Kaftan TV in Nigeria and one of the questions I was asked concerned why African leaders were converging in Mali during a pandemic. I responded that African leaders knew that COVID-19 was not the only virus that could spread across borders; they believed in the spreadability of coups as well. Three years later, as I write this article in October 2023, the “military coup pandemic” has spread to seven African countries.

Africa now wears a military belt, spanning its entire breadth, from the east coast to the west coast. This spread is due to the failures of successive democratic governments. But, our people need to remember that military rule has never been rosy in Africa. For example, shortly after “The Year of Africa” (1960), several African countries became engulfed in a series of military coups, in quick succession, for three decades. Today, about 45 out of 54 African countries have had at least one military coup attempt.

Many reasons are adduced for the current wave of military interventions, ranging from the military’s excuse of “fighting neocolonialism” to wading off “foreign interference” in local African political and economic order. But the real culprit is the failure of democracy. From Guinea to Niger, the stories are the same. African democracies have not lived up to expectations.

According to the Democracy Index, many of Africa’s so-called “democracies” are in fact authoritarian regimes. They conduct elections at intervals, but the elections are rigged. Leaders amend the constitution at will to extend term limits. Public infrastructures are left in a state of disrepair, and the society is plagued with abject poverty, diseases, high mortality rates, mass illiteracy, and insecurity amidst an ostentatious display of wealth by the political elite. These are problems that will plunge any society into public revolt.

Since the political elites abandon the actual tenets of democracy to run variants of feudal systems that enrich themselves and their cronies, they usually have to abuse the state’s monopoly of violence to keep themselves in power. They use a combination of police, military, and non-state actors to rig elections

and keep protesters at bay. Therefore, military intervention does not usually start with the takeover of government from the political leaders. It usually starts more inconspicuously with the political leaders themselves, inviting soldiers to the streets to perform what ought to be strictly police duties or even carry out illegal acts. This situation invariably empowers the military to see itself as belonging to the structure of public administration. The former would eventually find enough reasons and galvanize public support to displace the political leaders.

While politicians are always weary of open calls by the masses for military intervention, they forget that they are the ones who often lead the masses to that idea. As seen in Guinea, Gambia, and Niger, a well-timed military intervention is nowadays welcomed by the masses. Unfortunately, the public’s hope in the military is usually short-lived. The command and control methods they typically try to deploy are not suited for governance. Then comes the lack of capacity, inexperience, exuberance, sanctions from the international community, corruption, and so on.

South African countries have had the least military interventions in sub-Saharan Africa. It is, therefore, no surprise that they have been more progressive economically. Countries like Botswana and Mauritius are among the freest and most prosperous African countries. Both countries have never experienced any military intervention since they gained independence, and their politicians have less reason to worry about a possible military incursion because they exercise greater adherence to democratic tenets.

Africans are becoming weary of the status quo: autocracy and maladministration. But military intervention should not be the answer. There are clear examples of countries thriving under more principled democratic dispensations in Africa. Africa needs political leaders who are committed to the rule of law, not the military.



Feyisade Adeyemi (Ph.D.) is a trans-disciplinary educator, former senior fellow at African Liberty, and the executive director of The Chale Institute. NIGERIA

THAT TIME

by
Lindsay
Lunga, ZIMBABWE

I believe there was a time.
A time when we were all free,
free from the clutches of oppressive governments.
Free from price controls that are never in our favor
and are only for the elite.
I wish we could go back to that time,
when freedom was not just a word, it was an action.

I do not understand how we could strangle each
other
with regulations and policies that only benefit the
rich.
They do not consider that I am part of the country,
a contributor to the economy.
A citizen who has labored all her life trying to
achieve greatness.
I am a farmer, a small business owner, I am an
entrepreneur but I still have no freedom.

If only there was a way so basic;
a way out...for us,
for everyone who wishes to become an entrepreneur.
Who wishes to sell and buy what they labored for.
If only it was accepted.

ROAD LIBERTY

by
Egide
Nduwayo, BURUNDI

Everywhere we go in Burundi, passengers, especially
businessmen and businesswomen, complain. They
shout, "police, police, police" without end.

One of the main factors of the development of a
free country remains the freedom of circulation of
goods and services, the circulation of money under
good conditions that leave freedom to others. At
the center of the execution of the police's daily work
is the matter of public safety. In contrast, they do
what one calls "killing your patient."
See here, for example: the doctor who should be
treating the patient but who kills him in his own
way.
What a wretch!

Indeed, beating passengers, corruption, and bribery
are the behaviors of the Burundian police who
hinder development in every way by claiming that
road requirements are not fulfilled. What is the
fulfillment of the requirements before a corrupt
person?

This is the issue of corruption; the refusal of cyclists
on their roads, high demands on motorcyclists,
maltreatment of motorists...all hinder the free
movement of all kinds of goods. To the police,

It seems as if we take being African as only the
color of our skin and forget the knowledge we once
held.

We forget that our ancestors taught us the way to
live.

We should go back to that time when freedom was
not just a word,
it was our very being,
it was an action where we could have open markets,
Where the market was not regulated by the selfish
needs of governments.

Markets that were not for monopolies but for
competition and fairground.

corruption is called "soda" or "agafanta" in kirundi.
The lack of this soda leads to the imprisonment of
an innocent man or woman. Many are handicapped
by the brutality of the police, others are imprisoned
for nothing. In short, the police disrupt lives.

Therefore, as the police complicate life, it would be
good to always be on the side of freedom, to
advocate for our Road Freedom. To do what we
want, to carry out our jobs, to drive our cars and
motorcycles without police hindrance for nothing.
Free the roads.

End police corruption in Burundi... End police
brutality!

Internally Displaced Persons In Nigeria

by Nicholas Aderinto

The 2022 report from the International Organization for Migration reveals that Nigeria is home to 2,375,661 internally displaced persons (IDPs). This alarming number, primarily driven by conflict and displacement in regions of North-East Nigeria and the country's Middle Belt, underscores the profound challenges IDPs face, which often linger in the shadows of Nigeria's broader socioeconomic issues. For Nigeria's IDPs, accessing healthcare remains a formidable challenge. Insufficient access to medical services, inadequate infrastructure, and the prevalence of diseases have created disparities in healthcare access for IDPs. The magnitude of displacement, the hurdles IDPs encounter, and their fundamental right to healthcare demand immediate attention.

Nigeria is a signatory to international agreements and conventions that recognize the rights of IDPs, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and regional instruments such as the Kampala Convention. These frameworks stipulate that IDPs are entitled to protection and assistance, including access to healthcare. While these international obligations bind Nigeria, implementing healthcare rights for IDPs remains a significant challenge. Government responses have frequently needed to be more effective and efficient. IDP camps need more trained medical personnel, essential medicines, and infrastructure. The government must intensify its efforts to deliver comprehensive healthcare services to these vulnerable populations. One of the major barriers to healthcare for IDPs in Nigeria is the prevailing security issues in many conflict-affected regions. Medical personnel and facilities are often under constant threat.

This insecurity also hampers the delivery of humanitarian aid. Cultural stigmas and societal biases equally play a role in hindering the healthcare rights of IDPs. Many IDPs encounter discrimination and prejudice, making it difficult to access healthcare without fear. Civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are pivotal in delivering healthcare to IDPs. These organizations



Nationwide campaigns must be launched with the input of private companies to combat the stigmas and prejudices IDPs face. These campaigns can go a long way in fostering a more empathetic and inclusive society where IDPs are not viewed through a lens of bias, but with the compassion they deserve.

on limited budgets, working in high-risk areas to provide essential services. A prime example is the Nigerian Red Cross Society, which deploys healthcare workers to IDP camps, offering medical care and health education. NGOs like Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) also play a crucial role in providing vital medical assistance. Crucially, more resources must be allocated to healthcare within displacement camps. These funds should strengthen medical facilities and ensure they are adequately staffed and equipped. This investment can be a lifeline value addition for countless IDPs at the mercy of understaffed, ill-equipped healthcare centers. Furthermore, robust security measures must be implemented to protect the medical personnel who serve IDPs in high-risk areas. Collaboration with security forces and international peacekeeping missions is imperative to shield these often vulnerable healthcare workers.

Nationwide campaigns must be launched with the input of private companies to combat the stigmas and prejudices IDPs face. These campaigns can go a long way in fostering a more empathetic and inclusive society where IDPs are not viewed through a lens of bias, but with the compassion they deserve. In addition to addressing the immediate healthcare needs of IDPs, focusing on long-term solutions is vital. A more sustainable approach to reducing displacement and its associated hardships must be sought by tackling the underlying issues.

The struggle for healthcare rights among IDPs in Nigeria is a pressing issue. Urgency is required to bridge the gap in healthcare provision. Nigeria, its government, civil society organizations, and the international community must unite to ensure that the basic healthcare rights of IDPs are not just words on paper but a reality they can access and rely upon.



Nicholas Aderinto is an academic editor at PLOS ONE. He is a former African Liberty writing fellow. NIGERIA

Interview With

David founder of West *Hundeyin,* Africa Weekly



What does freedom mean to journalists?

I may not know what it means to "journalists," but I know what it means to me. To me, freedom means the ability to express myself without censorship or undue consequence, and the ability to use my job as a tool for social change without running up against the limits of what is deemed to be acceptable by the visible and invisible power brokers in the society.

How would you appraise the appreciation of "freedom of the press" in Africa?

Press freedom is still viewed as a nice-to-have across much of Africa, rather than a precondition for growth and development. Interestingly, not only governments are guilty of this. Large commercial interests, as well as non-state actors, also see a lot of value in preserving the information-desert environment that continues to characterize Africa's media spaces despite the existence of cheap, widespread high-speed internet access. Nobody likes a journalist until they need one.

Why did you choose the line of investigative journalism?

I come from a professional background in marketing and public relations, and as a result of this, I had a front-row seat to observe the inner workings of the 2015 presidential campaign that brought Muhammadu Buhari into power [in Nigeria]. I witnessed firsthand the amount of money and effort

that went into what was not so much a political campaign but arguably the largest mass disinformation campaign ever staged in Nigeria, leading to what I considered to be a farcical electoral decision to enthrone a 3-time coup plotting ethnoreligious jingoist as the president of a heterogeneous country of 200 million. I decided that if I ever got the opportunity to practice frontline journalism per my academic training, I would dedicate that career to equipping Nigerians with large doses of impactful, high-quality information that would help them break through the deliberately

**Freedom means
the ability to express
myself without
censorship or undue
consequence.**

imposed veil of misinformation and ignorance. That motivation can be seen even in the choice of stories I have chosen to work on—stories that take on the most difficult, controversial, and technically-challenging topics with a high level of potential public importance and impact.

What is the most impactful story you have uncovered to date?

There are multiple competitors here, but I think I would single out my investigation into Chinese electronic loan sharks operating illegally in Nigeria. That story directly resulted in the shuttering of at least one such illegal operation, as well as the launch of an official probe into the bank, payment processor, and the human resource consulting firm that was working with the loan shark. In addition, it opened the eyes of victims to the fact that they were, in fact, victims of financial crime, as against irresponsible, delinquent debtors—a very important distinction which can be the difference between committing suicide due to harassment from a loan shark and fighting back. Even now, more than 18 months since I published the story, I still get messages from grateful people stating that it was after reading this story that they realized that there was the possibility of having recourse to justice and that it gave them hope.

With rampant corruption in the news media, do you believe journalism is still a strong channel to challenge the authority of oppressive elites and authoritarian regimes in Africa?

I think journalism always has the power to challenge and checkmate power. The corruption of the news media is an ongoing process, not an event. As long as even one journalist with a sufficiently strong core of personal ethics continues to exist, journalism will never lose the power it has to challenge and hold power accountable. The only time journalism ceases to carry out this function is when no journalist agrees to be brave.

What are the most concerning dangers faced by investigative journalists like yourself?

In my experience, the biggest headache is the sheer unchecked power that a hostile government can wield maliciously, in trying to squish one like a bug. For example, in the event that an investigative journalist has to flee their home country on account of their work, they have to go to great amounts of trouble to extricate their lives from the grip of their home government. That government has the power to revoke or cancel passports, freeze bank accounts, maliciously leverage diplomatic relationships with other governments, and effectively impose individual travel restrictions using Interpol notices, all of which can significantly impede the journalist's ability to travel or carry out everyday activities. What I have found to be the most terrifying thing about this is that

these governments often wield these powers in a way that is devoid of any real process or consequences—a powerful government official can, given sufficient malice, simply wake up one morning and casually introduce incredible amounts of complication into the target journalist's life from halfway around the world, and nothing will happen.

What keeps you going amid the glaring persecution and harassment?

Very simple—if not me, then who? I believe that a large part of the reason why the Nigerian journalism space is so corrupt is that, for a variety of reasons, journalism and journalists in Nigeria tend to feature among the lowest-paid and lowest-regarded white-collar workers. The image, perception, and business model of journalism have been ruthlessly attacked and co-opted by the establishment over the years. Coming from a position of significant privilege into this space, I think it is a moral responsibility for me to accept burdens and responsibilities that other journalists from less auspicious backgrounds will not accept. I also believe that even putting aside the fact of being a journalist, I also have a responsibility as someone raised within Nigeria's establishment, to provide high-quality information about the “inner sanctum” to the generality of Nigerians, so that they can decide how they actually want to be governed. I believe that without this information, which gives the people the ability to make informed choices, “democracy” will remain far from us, regardless of how many “elections” we hold.

How can journalists make Africa freer?

I think journalists can do this by, first of all, having and expressing coherent ideologies that prioritize freedom. In other words, one cannot criticize African governments for violating human, civil, and economic rights, and also believe that certain African dictators who regularly violate human, civil, and economic rights, should be regarded positively. A consistent pro-freedom narrative is key. My second suggestion would be to understand journalism as a power to change the world, which contains the implicit responsibility to use that power often enough and for the right reason. Instead of treating the job as a box-checking exercise, journalists desirous of a freer Africa must have at least some measure of “crusader” inside them.



As long as even one journalist with a sufficiently strong core of personal ethics continues to exist, journalism will never lose the power it has to challenge and hold power accountable.

OPEN SOCIETY

by
Isangwe Laure
Marielle, BURUNDI

In an open society in Africa,
We break down the walls of division and hate,
We build bridges of love and compassion,
And we create a brighter fate.

In an open society in Africa,
We cherish our freedom and our rights,
We stand up for what is just and fair,
And we shine like stars in the night.

In an open society in Africa,
We embrace our differences with pride,
We learn from each other, we grow together,
And we journey side by side.

In an open society in Africa,
We unleash our creativity and our passion,
We innovate, we invent, we discover,
And we leave a lasting impression.

CORRUPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA: A NECESSARY CONSEQUENCE OF A WRONG IDEOLOGY

by Chris
Hattingh

The legacy of corruption in South Africa extends well beyond the purely economic damage that was caused (and, arguably, continues to be caused). The negative impact of corruption in the public sector is felt especially keenly by lower-to-middle-income citizens, many of whom do not have the requisite level of income or funds to “state-proof” themselves. This phenomenon of “state-proofing” boils down to the idea of establishing initiatives and plans in areas of electricity and water provision, food, and further. Such provisions fill the gaps that have been left by a national government (and in most cases, provincial governments too) that have failed to provide an adequate level of service delivery. In a wider sense, then, the legacy of corruption encompasses also the decline of the administrative capabilities of government departments and state-owned entities, and lastly a decline in the average level of trust that citizens place in the state.

The Corruption Perceptions Index, provided by Transparency International, in 2022 ranked South Africa at 43rd. The country’s best performance was 52nd, in 1998, and its worst was 41st, in 2011. A score closer to 0 indicates higher levels of corruption, and towards 100 indicates that the country is relatively more clean. That the country has improved somewhat slightly since 2011 is gratifying, but the move is nowhere nearly large enough to mean either perceptions, or the reality of corruption, has been moved to a significantly positive degree.

In January 2018 the Zondo Commission, or State Capture Commission, was established. The overall aim was to investigate allegations of state capture, corruption, and fraud in the public sector. State “Capture,” occurred during the years of the presidency of Jacob Zuma. 278 witnesses were interviewed, and 159,109 pages and one exabyte of data were eventually collected as evidence. In 2022, state capture investigator Paul Holden estimated the total cost of state capture to be anywhere between R50 billion to R500 billion. Operations and contracts at state-owned entities (SOEs) such as Eskom, South African Airways, and Transnet were used to benefit the politically connected. Hugely inflated deals were agreed to. In many cases, these arrangements and their effects persist to this day. Numerous coal-supply and parts-contracts for Eskom, for example, are geared towards benefitting only some, at hugely inflated costs, for low-quality products, and to the ultimate detriment of Eskom but also the wider economy.

Corruption in South Africa has served to undermine the capabilities of the developmental state. Average GDP growth per year will likely hover between 1 percent to 2 percent for the foreseeable future. Electricity constraints (in the form of regular blackouts), logistics bottlenecks, and increased levels of crime all impact negatively on business activity and investor confidence. The upshot of all these is lower economic activity, and fewer job opportunities will be created. The guiding ideology of South Africa’s governing party, the African National Congress (ANC), is the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). However, the NDR requires that as much of the economy and society be controlled by the party through the control of the levers and mechanisms of the state.

Viewed in this light, corruption at the scale witnessed since 2009 was always going to occur. Merit-based appointments, cost-effectiveness, and a focus on excellence in performance and quality service delivery have fallen by the wayside, as agreements that favor political considerations have taken precedence. Through the policy of ‘cadre deployment,’ that is the act of placing political party members, contacts, or friends across SOEs, in government departments, and in private businesses, what has become ever more important is not what you know, or how well you can do your job, but rather who you know.

South Africans will enjoy the opportunity of national and provincial elections in 2024. Based on numerous polls and the economy’s continued moribund performance, the ANC could attain less than 50 percent in a national election for the first time. This opens up the possibility of coalition governments. This kind of shift, during which the cadre-and patronage networks established during the last 15 years could well be shaken up and broken, presents an incredible opportunity for South Africans to move things in a positive direction. If that route is not taken, the legacy of corruption in South Africa will continue to be low growth, declining living standards, and the majority of citizens’ dependence on the state.



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SOUTH AFRICA*

DEMOCRACY HAS FAILED IN AFRICA

PROPONENT:

Stan Chu Ilo

I do not wish to generalize about Africa as if it were one country. In that regard, I will argue that democracy has failed in most African countries. Democracy is not simply about losing and winning elections, or successful transition from one government to another. However, given the complex and challenging situation in most African countries, elections and transition have often been the greatest sources of conflict and violence and thus indices of failing democracies in Africa. Indeed, in many African countries, failed elections and transitions have led to wars and military coups. Additionally, democracy is built on institutions and structures; without which there is no possibility of sustainable growth. Most African states have weak democratic institutions, which is a major cause of failing democracies in Africa. Democracy is sustained through the participation of every citizen and built on locally driven development anchored on the assets of the people. As long as Africans are not yet agents in their development and the architect of their futures, there can be no hope for a better future and African governments will continue to work against the people rather than for them without any accountability to the people. In many ways, the greatest reflection of the failure of democracy in Africa is that the masses of our people are like clients beholden to those in power who are like patrons with unlimited and unchecked access to the national till.

Democracy is not only failing in Africa, but also in many parts of the world including the United States where the riots that broke out at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, revealed how fragile democracies are becoming globally. Perhaps, the ideas that gave birth to democracy in the social contract theorists, particularly John Locke, have had their better days. Maybe it is time for all nations to find or rather re-found democracies on a new framework or new imagination.



Stan Chu Ilo is a professor of African studies and world Christianity at DePaul University, Chicago. NIGERIA

OPPONENT:

Michael Chukwurah

The assertion that “democracy has failed in Africa” can be considered as reductive and fallacious. Africa comprises 54 diverse nations, each with its unique historical, social, and political context with challenges related to corruption, weak institutions, and socio-economic disparities, not exclusive to the continent, but also exist in other regions of the world. Hinging these challenges to democracy and democratic systems is generalizing and failing to recognize other inherent factors such as colonial legacies, conflicts, and economic inequalities. Irrespective of these inherent factors and her governance challenges, Africa like other world continents, can be said to be making progress and diverse experiences across the continent. For instance, many African nations such as Cape Verde, Namibia, Benin, Botswana, Senegal, Ghana, and South Africa have successfully transitioned to democratic systems while democracy continues to evolve and strengthen in the different countries. Cape Verde, for instance, with its multi-party system, is recognized for its stable democracy and history of peaceful power transitions. Namibia with its multi-political parties, is known for its regular elections and peaceful transfer of power since its independence in 1990. Senegal is known for its long-standing democracy and political stability with several peaceful power transitions through elections. Ghana has a history of peaceful transitions of power through elections via multiple political parties. South Africa has held regular elections with established democratic institutions and principles of inclusivity and human rights.

In conclusion, democracy in Africa is a dynamic process with many African countries making significant strides towards democratic governance. While Africa like any other region of the world faces inherent and governance challenges, it is essential that we comprehensively address these complex issues, rather than placing the blame solely on the democratic system, and incorrectly asserting that democracy has failed in Africa.



Michael Chukwurah is a sustainable agriculturist and economist, teacher, lecturer, advocate and statistical analyst. NIGERIA

Pathways to Protecting Free Speech in Africa

by Iwebema
Emmanuel

Winner of 2023 African
Liberty Essay Contest

In Africa, the concept of free speech is as vital as the air we breathe. It is the cornerstone of a thriving society, enabling the exchange of ideas and the pursuit of progress. However, this fundamental right faces profound challenges that threaten its very existence.

The challenges to free speech in Africa are significant and diverse. Taking a closer look, there are instances of many African countries having laws that limit freedom of speech. For instance, Cameroon has legislation like the 2014 anti-terrorism law, which has been used to detain and prosecute journalists and activists, stifling open expression. In countries like Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, and Tanzania, governments have occasionally shut down the internet during protests and political events, severely restricting communication in the last two years.

Threats and violence against journalists and activists are equally commonplace in Africa. A case in point is the 2020 incident in Nigeria where security forces fired at peaceful protesters, causing fatalities and instilling fear in the public. There is also the problem of ownership of media outlets by political elites in Zimbabwe that limits independent reporting, leading to self-censorship and a lack of diversity in perspectives. These examples and data underline the complex challenges that hinder freedom of speech in Africa, and underscore the need for fresh approaches to overcome these issues.

Looking at one of the prominent issues which is the presence of restrictive laws, these legal barriers are often used to stifle open discourse, leading to a chilling effect on free speech. Restrictive laws allow governments to censor content, especially those critical of dissenting voices. The mere existence of such laws compel individuals, including journalists and activists, to self-censor, fearing legal repercussions from the state. Such restrictions hinder transparency and accountability within government institutions. When people fear legal consequences for exposing corruption, it becomes challenging to maintain an accountable government.

To mitigate the impact of restrictive laws on free speech in Africa, advocating for legal reforms should play a pivotal role in driving change. Civil society organizations, activists, and concerned citizens



should vocally advocate for legal reforms that uphold the principles of free speech.

This advocacy can include public awareness campaigns, rallies, and engaging with policymakers to bring attention to these issues. Governments across Africa should revisit and amend laws that impede free speech. Outdated or oppressive laws should be repealed, and model legislation should be adopted, in line with international norms, to ensure that free speech is protected. Pursuing these solutions fosters an environment where the voice of the people can be heard without fear of consequences.

Internet censorship is a pressing issue in Africa, where governments often restrict online access, content, and communication. Governments do this by blocking websites, social media platforms, and online content that critique the regime or challenge the status quo, suppressing open discourse and spreading information. This hampers free speech by limiting digital platforms where public opinions are expressed. To address internet censorship, promoting digital rights and access is essential. Encouraging policies that prevent internet shutdowns and censorship helps maintain the flow of information and free expression. Additionally, expanding national digital infrastructure, particularly in underserved regions, ensures that more people have access to the internet, which can only foster free speech.

Internet censorship is a pressing issue in Africa, where governments often restrict online access, content, and communication.

Media ownership in Africa, often in the hands of political elites, poses a significant challenge to free speech. When political figures control media outlets, it often hinders independent and fair reporting. These media organizations may avoid critical or “unbiased” reporting, leading to a lack of multifirmity in information sources. Addressing this issue effectively and promoting media diversity and independence is crucial.

One way to achieve this is by introducing regulations that prevent the concentration of media ownership among a privileged few. Governments should also consider offering incentives to support independent media outlets, encouraging their growth and ensuring that a variety of perspectives find a place in the media landscape. This approach will contribute to the protection and advancement of free speech in Africa.

As we embark on the journey to protect free speech, we should always recall the words of Nelson Mandela: “For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” Together, we can work to ensure that the voices of all Africans can thrive in an environment that protects free expression.



Iwebema Emmanuel (University of Lagos) is the winner of the 2023 African Liberty Essay Contest. **NIGERIA**

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