## NEWS

### Nigerian banks, others to struggle in 2025

FITCH RATINGS HAS CAUTIONED Nigerian and other African banks to brace for a challenging year ahead, as the agency's African Banks Outlook 2025 report indicates a cautious picture of the banking sector's financial prospects.

The report highlighted the ...

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### USDA plows $300m for market diversity

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced the second round of Regional Agricultural Promotion Program (RAPP) grants, which is intended to allocate $300 million to (67 partners) once all legal and administrative...

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## COMMENT

### African Energy 2024's surging investment

I'VE SAID FOR YEARS THAT African energy is a vital investment. Backers clearly agree — to the tune of $47 billion. That's how much capital expenditure (capex) 2024 saw in African oil and gas, showing a 23 percent increase from last year. Better yet, we expect growth to...

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TOWARDS MORE EFFICIENT MARKETS

# Nigeria's 2025 budget to deliver paltry N250K per citizen

ONOME AMUGE

## • Tinubu faces criticism over 15% inflation target, others

IN LAYMAN'S TERM, the 'Budget of Restoration' proposed by President Bola Tinubu last week, if shared among 200million Nigerians ( estimated) will amount to N250,000/head per annum. In dollar terms, it will amount to about 160.

This amount will not pay four months minimum wage salary ( N70,000) as agreed by the Federal Government and the organised Labour Unions this year.

Tinubu presented a N49.7 trillion budget proposal for 2025 before the Nigerian National Assembly, with the ambitious target of reducing inflation from its current heights of 34.6 percent to 15 percent in the coming fiscal year.

The proposed budget tagged, "Budget of Restoration: Securing Peace, Rebuilding Prosperity", prioritised funding to key sectors such as Defense and Security (N4.91 trillion), Infrastructure (N4.06 trillion), Health (N2.48 trillion), and Education (N3.52 trillion).

The proposed budget earmarked N16 trillion for capital expenditure, which will finance the development of infrastructure and other capital projects. Furthermore, N6 trillion was projected for human capital development.

The president also set a revenue target of N34.82 trillion to fund the 2025 budget, while government expenditure for the year was projected to reach N47.90 trillion, including an allocation of N15.81 trillion for debt servicing.

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# 3 years on: AfCFTA struggles to unlock Africa's intra-trade potential

ONOME AMUGE

## • Inter-African trade stands at 17%- Afreximbank
## • Experts blame poor AfCFTA performance on divergent currencies, poor infrastructure, others

AFRICA, RICH IN RESOURCES, and brimming with a population of over 1.3 billion potential consumers, would appear to present lucrative opportunities for economic growth and development. However, intra-continental trade has remained sluggish, a glaring contrast to the excitement and optimism surrounding the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

The free trade agreement, launched in 2021 with great anticipation and widely touted as the largest free-trade area by the number of states, after the World Trade Organisation (WTO), had high hopes of bringing prosperity to the continent by liberalising economies and integrating markets, but it is yet to gain

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L-R: Ralph Opara, group head, commercial banking division, Access Bank; Sara Ibru, officer, trade and business promotion, West Africa, Embassy of Sweden; Roosevelt Ogbonna, MD/CEO, Access Bank; Annika Hahn-Englund, Swedish Ambassador, Nigeria and West Africa; Fredick Ahsberg, head, political and trade affairs, Embassy of Sweden, Abuja; Amaechi Okobi, group head, corporate communications, Access Holdings; and Gregory Jobome, executive director, risk management, Access Bank, during a courtesy visit of the Swedish Ambassador and her team to Access Bank head office in Lagos recently.

## TRAVELLER & HOSPITALITY

### UBA banks on aviation infrastructure

OLIVER ALAWUBA, GROUP managing director of United Bank for Africa (UBA) plc, has reaffirmed the bank's commitment to fostering and supporting the growth and development of the aviation sector...

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## TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

### Global action to regular AI

AS THE WORLD MOVES toward an era defined by artificial intelligence (AI), the technology's rapid evolution has...

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### FG's failed N41bn tractor deal

IN NOVEMBER 2023, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security struck a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with American farm equipment powerhouse John

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## PROJECT SYNDICATE

### The West Is Not Dying, but It Is Working on It

ATHENS – A motley crew of centrist pundits in Europe, the Global South, and, following Donald Trump's election victory, the United States believe that the West is in decline. To be sure, never has so much power been concentrated in the hands of so few people (and postcodes) in the West...

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## 3 years on: AfCFTA...

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significant impact as shown by industry reports.

A 2024 report by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) titled: "Assessment of Progress on Regional Integration in Africa" brought to the fore the concerning fact that despite efforts to promote regional integration within the continent, African countries continue to favour trade with the rest of the world over intra-continental trade.

According to the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), although the African Continental Free Trade Area aims to establish a unified African market, increase intra-African trade, and enhance regional economic integration, a mere 17 per cent of African trade is intra-continental, a stark contrast to the 68 per cent and 59 per cent of trade within Europe and Asia, respectively.

A recent report by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on Foreign Trade in Goods for the third quarter of 2024, revealed that Nigeria's exports to Africa amounted to just 12.13 per cent (N2.486 trillion) of the country's total exports. In stark contrast, Europe and Asia accounted for a lion's share of Nigeria's exports, with 45.07 per cent (N9.23 trillion) and 25.31 per cent (N5.18 trillion) respectively.

A breakdown of the NBS report showed that while Nigeria's exports to countries under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) totalled N1.54 trillion in the third quarter of 2024, major destinations within the African region included Ivory Coast (N662.71 billion), South Africa (N621.68 billion), and Togo (N574.93 billion). However, Spain trumped these nations as the top export location for Nigeria, accounting for N2.27 trillion, or 11.07 per cent of the country's total exports during the same period.

The NBS report further disclosed that other non-African countries that topped Nigeria's exports aside from Spain included the U.S (N1.67tn or 8.25 per cent), France (N1.59tn or 7.75 per cent), the Netherlands (N1.43tn or 7 per cent), and Italy (N1.37tn or 6.72 per cent).

These five countries alone were responsible for 40.79 per cent of the value of total exports during the quarter in review, dwarfing the relatively meagre 12.13 per cent attributed to Africa as a whole.

According to analysts, the failure to leverage the economic synergies and complementary resources within the region has resulted in a loss of opportunities for income generation, job creation, and overall economic growth. By not taking full advantage of the larger market created by AfCFTA, African countries are effectively undermining their ability to reap the full rewards of market integration.

President Bola Tinubu (R) laying the budget proposal during the Joint Session of National Assembly for the presentation of the 2025 Budget Proposal by President Tinubu, at the National Assembly Complex in Abuja on Wednesday (18/12/24).

Challenges confronting Africa's intra-continental trade

Despite the promised benefits of regional trade and the recent launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), exporters and stakeholders are finding that the roadblocks to doing business within Africa remain very high, with logistics and policy barriers proving more challenging than those faced when exporting to other continents.

In recent roundtables at the Center for Global Development, a primary concern from DC researchers, policymakers, and civil society was the issue of Africa's apparent inability to speak with one voice on crucial global policy matters.

The DC researchers, policymakers, and civil society members shared a palpable concern that African leaders had yet to develop and present a unified, consistent message on global financial architecture reform and potential adjustments to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Without a clear, unified stance on these pressing issues, they feared that Africa might struggle to exert its influence in shaping global policies that could greatly impact its economic and social development.

There is no denying that the AfCFTA holds significant promise in promoting industrialisation and boosting the manufacturing sector across Africa. However, the harsh reality of limited production capacities and heavy reliance on external suppliers has cast a long shadow over these aspirations, analysts observed. This is as the African continent's manufacturing GDP remains disproportionately low, a stark reminder of the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that address local production capabilities and reduce dependence on imports.

The multiplicity of currencies in Africa, with more than 40 distinct currencies circulating on the continent, has also been identified as one of the roadblocks to the free flow of goods and services across borders.

This proliferation of currencies, according to the African Export-Import Bank, leads to a variety of challenges, such as increased transaction costs, inefficiencies, and complexities, which impede the seamless movement of trade and hinder economic integration within the continent.

Peter Njoku, deputy director of Market Access at the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), in his assessment, identified non-tariff barriers and currency issues as two challenges to intra-African trade. He noted that many African countries use different currencies, which can create complications and hinder seamless trade, in contrast to other regions, such as Europe, where a single currency like the Euro facilitates trade.

Njoku further underscored the need for harmonized regulations across Africa, pointing out that the lack of uniformity in trade rules and guidelines contributes to the difficulties of doing business within the continent.

He observed that while traders dealing with other countries can typically follow a set of well-defined regulations to carry out their transactions, the absence of such clarity and uniformity in Africa makes cross-border trade more challenging and unpredictable.

Bosun Solarin, CEO of Dasun Integrated Farms Limited, in an assessment of the logistical challenges hampering intra-African trade, observed that in certain situations, it is more economical to ship goods to Europe or the US than to other African countries.

"I've sent goods to Liverpool in the UK in 24 hours, but it can take seven working days to Ghana. The cost is so much, and the delays at borders are frustrating," she added.

Solarin recounted her personal experience travelling by road from Dakar to Lagos, which brought to the fore the poor state of infrastructure and lengthy delays at borders. She described the sight of trucks stretching from Senegal to Mali and then to Ivory Coast as disheartening, a stark testament to the inefficiencies plaguing intra-African trade.

The agricultural entrepreneur cautioned that while road transportation might initially seem economical, the associated risks and inefficiencies often outweigh the potential benefits.

Tony Nwabunike, former president of the Association of Nigerian Licensed Customs Agents (ANLCA), voiced apprehension over Nigeria's readiness in intra-African trade, citing substantial deficiencies in its export capabilities, border security, and trade infrastructure.

Nwabunike emphasised these concerns during his address at the recent Association of Maritime Journalists of Nigeria (AMJON) annual conference, where he emphasised the urgent need for Nigeria to strengthen its trade-related systems and institutions to ensure that it can leverage the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA.

Nwabunike pinpointed the woefully outdated border infrastructure in Nigeria as a major obstacle to the country's effective participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area.

He added that not a single border in the country meets the standards of a smart border - one equipped with cutting-edge technology and systems for efficient border management, ensuring smooth trade flows and enhanced security.

Highlighting the need for modernised border infrastructure in Nigeria, Nwabunike noted that the country has lagged behind its African counterparts such as Kenya and Rwanda, which have made significant investments in smart border systems to facilitate seamless cross-border trade.

He emphasised the urgency of Nigeria upgrading its border infrastructure, warning that without similar investments, the country runs the risk of losing its competitive advantage in intra-African commerce.

"As a country envisioning good volumes of trade, the federal government needs to modernise our borders for national security, economic protection, and proper monitoring of human and cargo movements," he said.

The chief executive officer of freight forwarding service provider Mac Tonnel Nigeria Limited suggested that Nigeria can play a leading role in the African trade revolution facilitated by AfCFTA by investing in smart border technology, enhancing regional partnerships such as the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline, and fostering economic growth and cooperation in the region.

He also highlighted the importance of revitalising legacy ports and creating dedicated spaces for exports to stimulate maritime trade, along with a liberalised visa regime to facilitate travel and trade across Africa. He further emphasised the need for Nigeria to address its power challenges to support industrial growth and increase export capacity.

## Nigeria's 2025...

Continued from Page 1

A budget deficit of N13.08 trillion, or 3.89 percent of GDP, was further projected for the year. This budget deficit, which represents the difference between government spending and revenue, is expected to be financed through borrowing.

Tinubu, in his address to the legislative arm of government, assured that the proposed budget would consolidate key economic policies aimed at restructuring the Nigerian economy, boosting human capital development, increasing trade and investment, bolstering oil and gas production, and kickstarting the manufacturing sector.

According to the president, the budget is designed to pave the way for a stronger and more competitive Nigerian economy, one that can weather the current challenges and emerge even stronger.

Tinubu expressed optimism that the rate of inflation would decline from the current rate of 34.6 percent to 15 percent by 2025. This expected drop in inflation is anticipated to be accompanied by an improvement in the exchange rate, with the naira projected to strengthen against the US dollar, moving from approximately N1,700 to N1,500, and a base crude oil production assumption of 2.06 million barrels per day (mbpd).

While the 2025 budget proposal represents a 80.73 percent increase compared to the proposed N27.50 trillion of 2024, there are concerns that the budget plan lacks a clear focus on key sectors that could boost local production, alleviate inflationary pressures, and bring some much-needed relief to Nigerians who are struggling with the high cost of living.

Drawing attention to the proposed budget's minuscule per capita expenditure of just N250,000 per citizen in 2025, economist and business strategist Marcel Okeke voiced concerns over the feasibility of the proposed budget, highlighting the uncertainty surrounding whether the projected figures will be realised and, if achieved, whether the funds will be allocated as planned.

"Obviously there'll be shortfall in revenue generation, leading to more deficits. Leading to more borrowing. Corruption and 'leakages' in the system won't allow the budgetary expectations to be realised," Okeke stated in a note to Business a.m.

Raising red flags on the viability of the budget projections, the sustainability consultant pinpointed several critical assumptions as highly unrealistic. Chief among these were the president's assertion that the inflation rate would drop from 35 percent to 15 percent in just a few months.

Okeke also queried what factors would drive Nigeria's crude oil production level from its current anemic 1.45 barrels per day (bpd) to

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L-R: Fatima Wali-Abdurrahman, independent non-executive director, Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX Group); Clifford Akpolo, head, group communications and partnership, NGX Group; Mohammed Garuba, non-executive, NGX Group; Ojinika Nkechinyelu Olaghere, independent, non-executive director, NGX Group; Sehinde Adenagbe, non-executive director, NGX Group; Temi Popoola, GMD/CEO, NGX Group; Umaru Kwairanga, group chairman, NGX Group; Ashishkumar Chauhan, MD/CEO, National Stock Exchange (NSE) India; Mairiga Katuka, chairman, Securities and Exchange Commission, (SEC) Nigeria; Mosun Belo-Olusoga, independent non-executive director, NGX Group; Emomotimi Agama, director-general, SEC; Okechukwu Crescent Itanyi, independent, non-executive director, NGX Group; and Nonso Okpala, non-executive director, NGX Group, during a Strategic Business visit to NSE India recently.

# Nigerian banks, others to struggle in 2025 under tight economic conditions- Fitch

**Onome Amuge**

FITCH RATINGS HAS CAUTIONED Nigerian and other African banks to brace for a challenging year ahead, as the agency's African Banks Outlook 2025 report indicates a cautious picture of the banking sector's financial prospects.

The report highlighted the susceptibility of African banks to domestic and global economic conditions, noting that although many African countries show strong resilience, a potential decline in commodity prices could pose significant challenges for the banking sector.

However, the rating agency also pointed out that reduced interest rates are expected to drive demand for credit, which, in combination with more stable exchange rates, may support investor confidence and encourage increased investment activity.

As highlighted by Fitch, African banks will continue to struggle with risks to their asset quality, stemming from the impact of high inflation and interest rates on households and businesses. These effects are expected to place pressure on the banks' impaired loan ratios.

Nevertheless, Fitch predicts that a small reduction in these ratios may occur, driven by the expected growth in lending, declining interest rates, and a moderation of inflationary pressures.

Despite the daunting challenges ahead, the agency forecasts that the majority of African banks will be equipped with the financial resilience to navigate potential asset quality risks. This resilience, it explained, will be driven by the banks' strong pre-impairment profits—bolstered by high interest rates, satisfactory loan growth, robust non-interest income, notably trading gains, and impressive operating efficiency. While Fitch anticipates that performance will likely decline in certain countries where lower interest rates may diminish yields on government securities, the overall outlook for the sector remains solid.

According to Fitch, a significant threat to African banks' profiles is the ongoing sovereign debt distress afflicting many countries in the region. With an average sovereign rating of 'B,' contagion risks to African banks are considered substantial, particularly given the high debt-servicing burdens facing several sovereigns.

On a more positive note, Fitch believes that President Bola Tinubu's administration's commitment to orthodox economic policies has improved Nigeria's credit profile prospects.

However, the rating agency has also identified challenges to Nigeria's economic recovery, such as inconsistent or poorly communicated policy implementation, which has hindered investors' confidence in the country.

The report noted further that despite the implementation of various reforms in the Nigerian foreign exchange market, such as the recent introduction of an electronic matching platform for all foreign exchange transactions, the country's FX policy still suffers from a lack of transparency in several key areas, including the true level of net reserves.

Fitch identified a widening gap between the official and parallel market rates in recent months, indicating a slower pace of progress on reforms and lingering strains in the foreign exchange market. Furthermore, the agency noted that Nigeria's fiscal policy remains uncertain, with the government's 2025-2027 Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) setting ambitious targets for reducing the budget deficit.

However, the assumptions underpinning the MTEF, such as oil prices and production levels ($75 per barrel and 2.06 million barrels per day, including condensates), are more optimistic than Fitch Ratings' projections ($70/bbl and 1.77 mbpd, respectively), adding to the uncertainty surrounding the country's fiscal sustainability and economic trajectory.

"The authorities have increased efforts to raise non-oil revenues even as oil-related revenues appear likely to fall short, but there is already a risk that they could face political challenges implementing their plans to raise the VAT rate to 10 per cent in 2025 from 7.5 percent currently," Fitch stated.

According to Fitch, the ability to raise fiscal revenues, particularly non-oil revenues, is a critical aspect of Nigeria's reform agenda and an essential factor in the country's credit profile.

Despite the recent hike in the value-added tax rate, Fitch anticipates that Nigeria's general government revenue as a percentage of gross domestic product will remain lower at around 10.3 percent in 2024-2025 than the median of 19 percent for countries in the 'B' category.

# Nigeria requires $20bn to meet economic goals by 2027- Edun

**Onome Amuge**

WALE EDUN, NIGERIA'S FINANCE minister and coordinating minister for the economy has urged the country to invest $20 billion to meet its economic targets by 2027.

The minister stressed the importance of this significant investment at a recent citizens and stakeholders' engagement in Abuja, focused on implementing presidential priorities and ministerial deliverables for the fourth quarter of 2024.

According to the minister, the additional 20 billion dollars per year was required to grow the economy by an average of 6.3 per cent in the medium term.

"We need significantly more growth, an additional 20 billion dollars is the target we need for social infrastructure to facilitate logistics for agriculture," he said.

Edun emphasised that the government would primarily rely on increased revenue to meet the ambitious $20 billion target. The Finance Minister also highlighted the crucial role that a robust tax revenue framework would play in securing the necessary funding.

According to Edun, sustainable economic growth was hinged on this strategy, stressing that increased taxation would ensure the government had the resources needed to meet its long-term goals.

"To achieve this target and grow the economy, the government can only secure the funds from revenue.

"Tax revenue needs to be increased to reach the desired levels," the minister said.

Edun stated that controlling the fiscal deficit and maintaining a stable exchange rate would be essential in boosting investor confidence in Nigeria.

## Nigeria's 2025...

Continued from Page 2

a seemingly ambitious 2.06 bpd so swiftly. These concerns, according to the economist, cast doubt on the budget's attainability.

Basil Abia, a policy analyst criticised President Tinubu's 2025 budget proposal as being unrealistic, particularly in terms of its projections regarding inflation and crude oil production.

According to Abia, reducing inflation to 15 percent by the following year is an improbable feat given the fact that crude oil production levels are below the two-million-barrel-per-day threshold.

Basil, who presented his argument in a television programme, remarked, "The projections are not realistic and the most important thing I think Nigerians should understand is what are the assumptions driving those projections.

"Now, if you say you want to do 15 per cent headline inflation rate on aggregate for 2025, the core drivers, you have to be able to show us that you are going to realistically drop down those drivers, reduce their efficacy, and their frequency."

Abia contended that it would be highly unlikely for Nigeria to achieve a headline inflation rate of 15 percent given that the current crude oil production levels hover around 1.5 million barrels per day, well below the two-million-barrel-per-day benchmark.

Bismarck Rewane, CEO of Financial Derivatives Company Limited (FDC), also raised doubts about the government's inflation target of 15 percent for 2025, dismissing it as too optimistic.

Rewane, who analysed the N49.74 trillion federal government's 2025 budget proposal in a presentation titled, "The Restoration Budget: Policies, Promises, and Aspirations, Lags and Impact", projected that the consumer price index would hover around 25 percent in the coming year, considerably higher than the government's target. While conceding that the Naira may appreciate and stabilize against the dollar at N1,550 in the parallel market by 2025, Rewane sounded a cautionary note on the government's ability to rein in inflation.

"Some of the key assumptions underlying the 2025 budget are over optimistic. The inflation target of 15 per cent, down from the current level of 34.6 percent sounds far-fetched. The benchmark price of Brent leaves no headroom for market swings. Furthermore, the reference to $40 billion of gross external reserves could be misleading," he stated.

According to the economist, a budget is more than just a name or label, and its actual impact on the economy hinges on its outcomes, not its presentation. He stated that the crucial components of economic management include the amount of spending, earnings, surplus or deficit, sources of funding, and economic objectives, all of which determine the effectiveness of a budget. Rewane pointed to a number of key economic indicators, such as the decline in GDP per capita from $1,597.4 in 2023 to $910.7 in 2024 and a decrease in national debt per capita from $438.2 in 2023 to $418.7 in 2024. He also noted that foreign debt service per capita increased from $46.54 in 2023 to $47.65 in 2024, while external reserves per capita dropped from $175 in 2023 to $172 in 2024.

Despite the generally unfavourable trend of economic indicators, the CEO of Financial Derivatives Company Limited found a ray of optimism in the government's exchange rate assumption of N1,500, arguing that this alignment with market realities contributes to both the budget's feasibility and the overall economic confidence.

He concluded that 2025 might prove to be less challenging for Nigerians when compared to 2024, noting that with appropriate and well-considered policies, the Nigerian economy could potentially achieve a growth rate of six percent in the forthcoming year.

Meanwhile, in response to the skepticism surrounding the 15 percent inflation target outlined in President Tinubu's budget proposal, Tanimu Yakubu, the director general of the Budget Office of the Federation, expressed confidence that the president possesses a well-defined plan of action to achieve this economic goal.

Yakubu defended the budget's 15 percent inflation target by citing the anticipated impact of increased domestic refining of petroleum products on prices. He argued that, with refined fuel products becoming more readily available within the country, prices would decrease, contributing to a drop in the inflation rate.

Furthermore, Yakubu revealed that the government plans to step up its oversight of budgeted projects, including the possibility of engaging external consultants, in order to guarantee cost-effective implementation of the 2025 budget. "We used to spend as high as one-third of our foreign exchange earnings to import refined products. With Dangote Refinery coming on stream and small local refineries adding to the supply, we think this will substantially reduce the pressure on the naira," he said.

The director general of the Budget Office of the Federation, posited that a combination of factors, including increasing investor confidence in the Nigerian economy and a renewed focus on agriculture, would ultimately lead to a decrease in inflation.

Specifically, he noted that rising investment in agriculture would contribute to increased food production, thereby curtailing food inflation and mitigating its effect on the overall inflation rate.

# NIPC targets tech, sustainability to boost Nigeria's investment appeal

Joy Agwunobi

NEWS

THE NIGERIAN INVESTMENT Promotion Commission (NIPC) has reiterated its dedication to fostering Nigeria's economic growth by retaining existing investments and attracting new ones through targeted collaborations and strategic initiatives.

The Commission announced plans to prioritise the promotion of fintech, agri-tech, and renewable energy as part of its broader strategy to position Nigeria as a hub for innovation and technology-driven investments.

According to Aisha Rimi, the executive secretary and CEO of NIPC, these sectors hold immense potential to stimulate economic growth and attract international investments. She made these known during a media briefing in Abuja, where she also unveiled the Commission's efforts to build a robust investor relations framework and enhance collaboration with sub-national governments to create a more conducive investment climate.

"We are focused on advancing these key sectors by promoting initiatives that encourage tech-based companies to establish operations in Nigeria.Our aim is to advocate for policies and incentives that will position Nigeria as a preferred destination for innovation-driven investments," Rimi said.

She highlighted NIPC's commitment to sustainability, noting

L-R:-Laila Barau, wife of the deputy Senate president; Fatima Abbas, wife of the speaker of the House of Representatives; Nana Shettima, wife of the vice president; and Oluremi Tinubu, first lady of Nigeria, during the 2024 Children's Christmas Brunch, held at the State House in Abuja recently

that the commission is actively promoting eco-friendly projects aligned with Nigeria's sustainable development goals. Rimi emphasised that partnerships with organisations focused on sustainability are pivotal to attracting socially responsible investors. "By aligning our strategies with the global shift toward sustainability, we aim to enhance Nigeria's appeal while advancing the green agenda," she stated.

The Commission's initiatives also align with President Bola Tinubu's 8-Point Agenda and the Nigerian Investment Certification Programme for States (NICP-S), which aim to position the country for long-term economic growth. "Together, these frameworks provide a foundation for championing Nigeria's investment narrative and driving a future marked by innovation, collaboration, and sustainable development," Rimi added.

As part of its capacity-building efforts, NIPC has launched several training programmes in collaboration with international donor agencies. These initiatives are designed to empower local entrepreneurs with the skills needed to compete globally, thereby creating a favorable environment for investments. Rimi noted that these programmes complement the Tinubu administration's commitment to human capital development as a cornerstone of national growth.

Strategic collaborations remain central to NIPC's approach, with Rimi affirming that the Commission will continue to engage with Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), state governments, and international partners. "Through partnerships with donor agencies, we have secured funding and technical support to strengthen our investment promotion activities," she said, adding that "this collaborative approach leverages global expertise and resources, enhancing the impact of our initiatives."

NIPC's partnerships with organisations such as JETRO, JICA, UNDP, GIZ, and UNIDO have also played a significant role in ensuring Nigeria meets international standards in investment promotion. Rimi explained that these collaborations have not only enhanced the Commission's capabilities but also helped attract investments that align with regional strengths and economic diversification goals.

By tailoring its investment promotion strategies to states with distinct regional advantages, NIPC aims to catalyse local economic development while complementing the broader objectives of diversification. "This approach ensures that investments contribute directly to regional growth, creating a ripple effect that supports national economic objectives," Rimi explained.

Rimi also stressed the importance of creating a unified brand identity for Nigeria as a leading investment destination. "With the media's support, we can craft compelling narratives that showcase Nigeria's successes, rich heritage, and unparalleled potential," she said. "This will reinforce our mission to establish Nigeria as a global economic powerhouse."

# Global partners invest $45 million to boost African vaccine production

Joy Agwunobi

NEWS

A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP COMPRISING the African Development Bank (AfDB), International Finance Corporation (IFC), and U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) have announced a $45 million investment aimed at enhancing vaccine production in Africa.

This collaborative effort is seen as a significant step toward improving public health and vaccine accessibility across the continent.

The organisations stated that the investment will increase vaccine production capacity, support local supply chains, and establish a solid distribution network aligned with the African Union's Vision 2040. This vision aims to meet 60 per cent of Africa's vaccine needs locally, reducing the continent's dependence on imported vaccines.

The financing agreement was made possible through the partnership of key stakeholders, including Institut Pasteur de Dakar (IPD), a renowned African institution with decades of experience in vaccine production and health innovation.

IPD's subsidiary, VaxSen, is focused on the sustainable commercialization and distribution of vaccines produced by the institute.

The $45 million investment addresses essential gaps in global vaccine supply chains, paving the way for a more resilient response to pandemics and preventable diseases.

The financing also aligns with several key development objectives, including African Union Vision 2040, as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-being, SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 9 on Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure.

Commenting on the partnership, Ousmane Fall, director of Non-Sovereign Operations and acting director of industrial and trade development at the African Development Bank, stated: "We are honoured to support this critical initiative, which aligns with our 2030 Vision and Action Plan for the Development of Africa's Pharmaceutical Industry. It demonstrates our strong commitment to (i) contribute to developing the maturity of the industry by scaling up local production capacities to increase the share and value of Africa's pharmaceutical production, (ii) support local manufacturers to serve national and regional health security needs, (iii) mobilise global partners and resources to develop manufacturing capacity, skills, and technology transfer in Africa, and (iv) provide long term finance to help established vaccine manufacturers to diversify their product portfolio of vaccines and technologies."

Makhtar Diop, managing director, IFC: "This partnership with the Institut Pasteur de Dakar demonstrates IFC's commitment to strengthening Africa's health infrastructure. By enabling local vaccine production, we are building a more resilient healthcare system to better address current and future challenges."

Nisha Biswal, deputy director at DFC, expressed pride in their previous support for IPD, noting, "DFC is pleased to have supported IPD with a $15 million loan and a $3 million technical assistance grant, which helped in the construction of the MADIBA facility. This facility will significantly enhance IPD's ability to produce a wider range of vaccines, moving beyond its traditional focus on yellow fever."

Amadou Sall, CEO of IPD, celebrated the partnership, saying, "This collaboration demonstrates the power of partnerships in transforming health systems in Africa. With this funding, we are getting closer to achieving vaccine sovereignty and ensuring that all Africans have access to life-saving vaccines."

Assietou Diouf, CEO of VaxSen, further emphasised the importance of the financing, stating, "VaxSen is dedicated to leveraging innovation and partnerships to address health equity challenges. This investment marks a pivotal moment in ensuring sustainable access to vaccines across Africa."

# Nigeria leverages digital innovation to advance agricultural transformation

business a.m.

NEWS

THE BILL & MELINDA GATES Foundation (BMGF), in collaboration with the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS), hosted a key stakeholder event to advance the development of a sustainable Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model for digital agricultural extension services (DAES).

The gathering, held at the Marriott Hotel in Ikeja, Lagos, brought together leaders from the public, private, and development sectors to explore innovative solutions that address the challenges faced by smallholder farmers in Nigeria and contribute to the nation's food security goals.

Smallholder farmers, who contribute significantly to Nigeria's food production, face numerous obstacles, including limited access to quality advisory services, fragmented private sector solutions, and underfunded public extension systems. These challenges hinder their adoption of innovative farming practices and efficient market access.

The proposed PPP DAES solution aims to overcome these barriers by ensuring long-term viability through a robust and sustainable business model, tailoring solutions to the specific needs and preferences of smallholder farmers and providing timely and relevant information on agronomy, market opportunities, and financial resources.

This initiative aligns with Nigeria's agricultural objectives of self-sufficiency and import substitution by prioritizing private sector leadership and driving innovation.

The event showcased findings from a scoping study on effective DAES solutions, highlighting innovative delivery methods that are cost-effective, scalable, and tailored to specific local contexts. Participants explored how these solutions can improve access to real-time, localized support for farmers and agribusinesses, fostering increased productivity, enhanced traceability, and improved market access for key value chains, including maize, cassava, and cocoa.

**Key Takeaways:**

Strong Commitment: The Gates Foundation reiterated its commitment to supporting Nigeria's agricultural transformation and empowering smallholder farmers.

Focus on Sustainability: Stakeholders reviewed findings from a scoping study and examined operational frameworks and funding models to ensure the long-term financial viability of the DAES system.

Emphasis on Inclusivity: Discussions highlighted the importance of integrating diverse technologies, such as USSD, IVR, and smartphone applications, to ensure accessibility for all farmers, particularly women and underserved communities.

Collaborative Action: The event fostered strong collaboration among stakeholders, with commitments from the private sector to co-invest in digital solutions and consensus on key user-centered product features.

**Onome Amuge**

# Afrexim Bank Warns of $110bn Food Import Burden for Africa by 2025

A RECENT REPORT BY THE African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) has revealed that African countries collectively spend $50 billion annually importing food, a figure that could balloon to $110 billion by 2025 if immediate measures are not taken.

Despite possessing abundant arable land and natural resources, many African nations are becoming increasingly dependent on imported food, a troubling trend that has resulted in mounting food insecurity and widespread under-nourishment.

The Afreximbank report underscores this issue, revealing that African nations, despite their agricultural potential, are unable to meet their own food needs.

"The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa forecasts an even steeper increase over the same period, to $110 billion, up sevenfold from $15 billion of food imports in 2018," it stated.

The reliance on imported food has left many African nations susceptible to external shocks, as noted in the report.

The report stated that the war between Russia and Ukraine has exacerbated the situation, specifically for countries that depend on Ukrainian wheat, as the conflict has disrupted wheat supplies and driven up prices.

It added that the ongoing instability in Ukraine has had a domino effect on wheat supplies, resulting in price increases that have rippled through the continent, causing severe strain on the food security of many African countries.

Citing data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the report discussed the devastating extent of food insecurity across the African continent. It noted that 20 percent of Africa's population, or approximately 282 million people, are undernourished, representing an increase of 57 million since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, the report stressed that over 846 million people in Africa faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2023, with about 315 million experiencing severe conditions.

According to the report, amid the rising tide of food insecurity across the African continent, Nigeria stands out as a particularly worrying example. With 28.8 percent of its population affected by hunger, Nigeria is seen struggling with a high prevalence of child malnutrition, as 18 percent of children are malnourished, 31.5 percent are stunted, and 6.5 percent are wasted.

The high rate of hunger in Nigeria is considered a major cause for concern, particularly for vulnerable segments of the population such as children, who are at risk of irreversible developmental delays as a result of poor nutrition.

According to Afreximbank, the complex issue of food security in Africa necessitates a holistic approach that addresses both the economic and social challenges that lie at its root.

The report asserts that, unless decisive steps are taken to reduce Africa's reliance on food imports, the continent will remain vulnerable to external disruptions, jeopardizing the stability and progress of its economies.

The bank emphasised that the urgency of the situation calls for a concerted effort by governments, financial institutions, and development partners to support African nations in boosting domestic food production and processing capabilities, thus enabling them to provide a more secure and reliable food supply for their populations.

Permanent Secretary, Career Management, Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs Fatimah Mahmood (4th L); former Chief Protocol, Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amb. Martine Shirley (L); former Minister of Information, Mr Labaran Marku(3rd L) and other participants during the Service Wide Training for Protocol Officers, Personal Assistants, Information and Public Relations Officers in Abuja recently.

## Globacom launches affordable roaming bundles for Nigerians in 40 countries

**Joy Agwunobi**

TELECOMMUNICATION GIANT, Globacom has unveiled a new range of flexible and affordable data roaming bundles, enabling Nigerians traveling abroad to stay connected for both business and leisure.

The initiative is part of the telecom giant's efforts to provide seamless communication for its customers across an expanded list of 40 countries.

In a statement announcing the development, the company emphasised the importance of keeping subscribers connected. "These roaming bundles are designed to ensure our customers can share moments with their loved ones, remain active on social media, and handle business engagements efficiently, no matter their destination," the statement read.

Globacom explained that the bundles cater to different needs, offering options such as 50MB of roaming data for N2,500, valid for 3 days, and 6GB for N50,000, valid for 60 days. Other plans include N5,000 for 125MB valid for 7 days, N10,000 for 1GB valid for 10 days, and N25,000 for 2.5GB valid for 30 days.

According to the telecom provider, subscribers can purchase these bundles by dialing *312# and selecting option 5. "Customers can activate their preferred roaming plan before departure or upon arrival at their destination," Globacom noted.

The company further added that prepaid customers automatically have roaming services activated, while postpaid subscribers need to enable the service before purchasing a bundle. Validity begins only when subscribers start browsing in the destination country.


To avoid unexpected charges, Globacom advised customers to connect to specific recommended networks listed on its website. "Subscribers must ensure they connect to the recommended networks. Failure to do so will attract Pay-As-You-Go charges," the statement added.

Globacom also assured users of regular notifications to track data usage and prevent sudden depletion. "We provide timely alerts to keep customers informed about their consumption and the remaining balance of their data bundle," it said.

The roaming bundles are available across 46 networks in 40 countries, including popular destinations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, and Brazil.

With this offering, Globacom aims to enhance the travel experience for Nigerians by providing affordable and reliable roaming services, reinforcing its commitment to innovation and customer satisfaction.

**Onome Amuge**

## FG lifts 5-year suspension on mining activities in Zamfara

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has officially lifted the ban on mining exploration in Zamfara State, over five years after the restriction was imposed due to security concerns.

This decision comes on the back of significant improvements in the security situation across the state, marking a crucial development towards reviving Zamfara's vast mineral potential.

Dele Alake, the minister of solid minerals development, spoke on the significance of the decision to lift the ban on mining exploration in Zamfara State, emphasising the state's rich mineral potential.

The minister, who confirmed the development to newsmen, stressed that Zamfara is home to vast deposits of valuable minerals, including gold, lithium, and copper, which could drive significant economic growth and development if properly harnessed.

Acknowledging the reasons behind the initial ban imposed on mining exploration in the northwestern state, Alake explained that the illegal mining activities that had once plagued the state were closely tied to banditry, thus making the ban necessary to address the security concerns at the time.

However, he also pointed out that the ban, while intended to tackle the underlying security issues, inadvertently created a thriving black market for illegally mined minerals, depriving the state and federal government of much-needed revenue.

"Zamfara's mining sector holds enormous potential for contributing to Nigeria's revenue. The improved security situation now provides an opportunity to regulate mining activities effectively and harness these resources for national growth," Alake stated.

According to the minister, the restriction on mining in Zamfara State was originally put in place to contain the escalation of insecurity that had been linked to illegal mining activities. However, the President Tinubu administration has made significant efforts in tackling this issue through intelligence-led security operations, dealing a major blow to the banditry that had once terrorised the region.

He added that the administration was able to neutralise several high-profile bandit leaders, including the notorious Halilu Sububu, who was apprehended in a covert operation.

"The existential threats that necessitated the ban have abated. With security operatives achieving remarkable milestones, Zamfara's mining activities can resume, ensuring the state begins to contribute meaningfully to national revenue," the minister said.

**Joy Agwunobi**

## Lagos, Access Bank collaborate on 704 affordable housing units in Ikorodu

THE LAGOS STATE GOVERNMENT, in collaboration with Access Bank, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop 704 housing units in Odo-Nla, Ikorodu.

This initiative is part of ongoing efforts to reduce the state's housing deficit and provide affordable housing for residents.

Babajide Sanwo-Olu, the governor of Lagos State, who signed and received the MoU at the Lagos House in Ikeja, commended Access Bank for partnering with the government on this project.

He highlighted the scheme, themed the "Lagos State Access Bank Housing Scheme," as a critical intervention aimed at addressing the severe housing challenges in Lagos State. The housing development will span 9.98 hectares of land and feature 44 blocks of two-bedroom apartments.

Speaking at the event, Sanwo-Olu noted that Nigeria's housing deficit stands at 14 million units, with Lagos accounting for a significant portion due to factors such as limited land availability.

"Bridging this gap requires bold interventions, innovative solutions, and collaborative efforts," he said.

He emphasised his administration's commitment to addressing this issue through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), creating opportunities for the private sector to work with the government.

"In collaboration with Access Bank PLC, we are embarking on a transformative housing project to deliver 704 two-bedroom apartments at Odo-Nla in Ikorodu," Sanwo-Olu explained.

He also shared details of the initiative's affordability model, which offers low-income earners a down payment as low as 10 percent, single-digit interest rates, and a repayment period of up to 20 years. According to the governor, the construction of the housing units is expected to take 24 months and will contribute to the socio-economic development of Ikorodu and Lagos State as a whole.

# Nigeria's challenges and her political governance framework

SUNNY CHUBA NWACHUKWU

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NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY, under the current dispensation, involves participatory electioneering campaigns. But it dramatically turns around to end inclusiveness of the electorate, mostly by successful candidates, after the social contract obligations on the part of the voters have been carried out and consummated. The voters immediately feel disappointed and embarrassingly edged out. These electorates (in most cases) are not given a fair chance either to further contribute ideas or have a say on how governance decisions are made. This style used by some politicians does not sufficiently ensure deliverance of democracy for the people. Consequently, the democracy that is practiced in Nigeria is deficient in its full definition and meaning because the political leaders in the country characteristically do not walk their talk in most cases. They are largely full of deceit which they display once they grab power after voting, by turning their backs on the very electorates that voted them into power; and they fail to fulfill their campaign promises afterwards.

Since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the nation's challenge is no longer stability in the transitional processes among political parties forming government through elections. The major problem now lies with the sincerity attached to the processes that serve the needs of the general public through institutions built to deliver open, accountable and responsive governance. This is observed to be a case of moral values deficiency within the entire system. Everyone is in a hurry "to make it" by all means (by crook or fowl means). An egalitarian society, for instance, ought to be a system where everyone is constitutionally guided and protected by law as citizens with equal rights, where social values and services are not discriminately rendered by those in authority (at all levels). This, actually, is direct democracy as practised in republican settings (even among communities where decisions are made through popular assembly). But there seems to be a lacuna in the sense that representative democracy, as presently practised in Nigeria, where elected citizens double as government officials on behalf of the electorate, end up not delivering the expected democracy dividends to their constituents. This is the peculiar case in Nigeria's socio-political system, and unless this problem is solved, the attainment of economic growth for the nation will continue to produce negative outcomes.

Democratic governance, seen as a tool that promotes rule of law, accountability and transparency, includes the nature of the processes and procedures applied in forming a government. This is ideally characterised by free, fair and credible elections where the electorate have the voting right to elect their political leaders without fear of any form of intimidation and manipulation during the polls. However, election malpractices are never ruled out in the system, hence the provision of election malpractices tribunals that take up cases that relate to rigging and other forms of unlawful activities; which also include vote buying. However, the eminent Nigerian professor of political science, Elo Amucheazi, once said of Nigerian politicians in a newspaper interview, "whether you vote or don't vote they will find a way of getting into power". This dubious means of grabbing power at all costs and by all means is basically characterised as a do-or-die affair, where people from opposing camps are exposed to the dangers of even losing their lives during the electioneering campaigns, at the voting venue, and during counting of votes. This is one of the major challenges requiring practical solutions because of the social consequences. Not obeying the rule of law during elections is political corruption.

Nigeria's numerous challenges — ranging from economic hardship, insecurity, energy poverty, infrastructural deficiency, and most importantly, food insecurity — ultimately manifest in the state or nature of the economy, with the negative outcome of economic recession, because of a skewed leadership structure with its obvious deficiency in meritocracy and competence. An aspect of the challenges faced by the nation is the unsustainable belief in the corporate existence of the country, without being unreasonably right on equitable resource control. The Federation model, suitable to our cultural arrangement, meant to be patriotically run with fiscal federalism where each federating unit controls its resources and contributes to the centre in a pluralistic society with about 389 ethnic groups, needs to be considered. It is not the current setting with a Federal Government that controls 68 policy areas in her exclusive list, and has states with just a few in the concurrent list. This particularly touches on the three things that ought to hold a country together — these are basically COHESION; PEOPLE'S INTERESTS; and MORAL VALUES. Nigerians need to be seriously worked on psychologically in these areas (through the advocacy programmes of the National Orientation Agency), to have a changed mentality from the wrong perception of themselves, especially when it pertains to tribal and religious issues.

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# Lookman's vision of rising above rejection

The Coaching Psychologist

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ADEMOLA LOOKMAN'S STORY exemplifies this truth. At 16, the young footballer faced rejection that would have crushed most aspiring athletes. Told he was "too small" and "not strong enough," Lookman's dream of a professional football career seemed destined to remain just that — a dream.

But for Lookman, rejection wasn't the end. It was a challenge. With resilience, focus, and an unyielding belief in his abilities, he transformed every setback into an opportunity to improve. In December 2024, at the age of 26, he was crowned the Confederation of African Football (CAF) Footballer of the Year, an achievement that has cemented his place among Africa's greats and inspired millions.

His opening words upon receiving the award, delivered in Yoruba, encapsulated his journey: "Èkálè, mo ń ki gbogbo yín. ńsń, mo dúpńń" — "Good evening, I greet you all. Thank you, I am grateful."

Lookman's victory resonates far beyond football. It's a story of perseverance, community, and hope — lessons that extend to personal and professional challenges alike. As we approach the dawn of a new year, his journey compels us to ask: How do we transform rejection into triumph, and how can his example guide us in our own lives?

**From rejection to resilience**

Born to Nigerian parents in England, Lookman grew up in London, playing football on local pitches while nurturing dreams of professional success. His skill was undeniable, but physical limitations and a crowded talent pool led to repeated rejections from major academies.

Rather than letting those experiences define him, Lookman focused on what he could control: his dedication to improvement. He joined Charlton Athletic's academy, a less glamorous starting point than some of his peers, but it provided him with the space to grow. There, he developed his technical skills and mental toughness, earning a place in Charlton's first team at just 18.

Success didn't come overnight. It took years of persistence, incremental growth, and seizing every opportunity to prove himself. His journey from Charlton to Everton, then to RB Leipzig and Atalanta, showcases the power of perseverance in navigating life's unpredictabilities.

**Positive psychology lessons from Lookman's journey**

Ademola Lookman's life reflects key principles of positive psychology and behavioral science. His ability to turn rejection into resilience provides a roadmap for overcoming challenges. Here are four key lessons from his story:

**1. Reframe rejection as feedback**

Lookman viewed every rejection not as a definitive judgment but as an opportunity to grow. Positive psychology emphasizes the importance of reframing failure as feedback — an approach that builds resilience.

*Actionable Advice:* When facing setbacks, ask yourself: "What can I learn from this?" Treat rejection as a temporary roadblock, not the end of the journey.

**2. Lean into your values and identity**

When Lookman received his CAF award, his use of Yoruba wasn't just a cultural nod; it was an acknowledgment of the community that shaped him. This connection to his roots gave him purpose and strength throughout his career.

*Actionable Advice:* Reflect on what grounds you — your values, identity, or community — and draw strength from them in moments of doubt.

**3. Cultivate a growth mindset**

Lookman's belief in his ability to improve was central to his success. Research in positive psychology highlights the power of a growth mindset, where individuals see challenges as opportunities for development.

*Actionable advice:* Focus on progress, not perfection. Celebrate small wins along the way, and remind yourself that growth is a continuous process.

**4. Build and lean on your support network**

Behind every success story is a network of supporters. For Lookman, coaches, mentors, and his family played a vital role in helping him navigate challenges and stay motivated.

*Actionable Advice:* Surround yourself with people who encourage and uplift you. Seek mentors who can provide guidance and accountability as you work toward your goals.

**Building on the lessons of 2024**

As we stand one week before the dawn of 2025, Lookman's story is a rallying cry for perseverance. It reminds us that setbacks are not barriers — they are stepping stones to something greater. Whether you're an athlete, a professional, or someone simply striving for personal growth, his example offers a clear path forward.

**Actionable steps to apply Lookman's lessons**

**1. Set clear goals:** Know where you're headed, and don't be afraid to adjust the route along the way.

**2. Embrace challenges:** See obstacles as opportunities to develop new skills and strengthen your resolve.

**3. Celebrate progress:** Recognise and reward small victories to keep momentum alive.

4. **Stay connected:** Lean on your community for support, inspiration, and accountability.

**A final word**

Ademola Lookman's journey from rejection to recognition is more than a football story. It's a testament to the power of resilience, the strength of community, and the beauty of pursuing one's dreams despite the odds. His success reminds us that perseverance transforms possibilities into realities.

As we prepare to step into 2025, let Lookman's story inspire you to pivot, refine, and move forward with purpose. The lessons of his journey are clear: with determination, belief, and support, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

Keep moving forward. The future is yours to shape.

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Business, Governance & Enterprise

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# Business opportunities government can seize for Nigeria's economic development

PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU is poised to develop the country economically with his economic policies which seem painful in the short run but beneficial in the long run. There are business opportunities that the Federal Government of Nigeria can latch onto for economic growth and development. Governments are in vantage position to do business because of their structure which means that they have access to foreign cheap funds than private sector participants. The country has so many needs that cannot yet be met and these provide opportunities for business development, especially in the area of housing, agriculture, manufacturing and transportation. The current estimate of the housing deficit of Nigeria, a country with over 220 million people, is 22 million housing units. This is without consideration for those living in substandard houses without water and paved or tarred roads.

Food prices are soaring every day! According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), prices of beans, tomatoes, Irish potatoes, garri, yam and other food items witnessed significant price increases in June 2024. The NBS said this in its "Selected Food Prices Watch" report for June 2024 released in Abuja. The report said that the average price of 1kg of brown beans increased by 252.13 percent from N651.12 recorded in June 2023 to N2,292.76 in June 2024. "On a month-on-month basis, 1kg of brown beans increased by 14.11 percent in June from the N2,009.23 recorded in May 2024." It also said that the average price of 1kg of tomatoes increased by 320.67 percent on a year-on-year basis from N547.28 recorded in June 2023 to N2,302.26 in June 2024. "On a month-on-month basis, 1 kg of tomatoes increased by 55.97 percent from the N1,479.69 recorded in May 2024."

Adams Smith (1723 - 1790), a Scottish Economist, stated that there are three basic needs of man which are: food, shelter and clothing. He stated that "they who feed, clothe, and lodge the whole public (the working class) should have to be fed, housed and lodged well". The three essentials of food, houses, and clothes are good issues to develop business opportunities around as their impacts will be more conspicuously felt than any other. A hungry man, a homeless man and clothingless man is not a man. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) supports governments and partners to design the right policies and programmes to end hunger, promote food security and promote sustainable agriculture for millions of people around the world. Government can create business opportunities around agriculture by encouraging citizens to go into agribusiness! Agriculture business is a sustainable business and can never go into extinction because of the importance of food in life.

What the late chief Obafemi Awolowo did to position the South West of Nigeria as a 'numero uno' and 'primus inter pares' region in Nigeria was to establish farm settlements in the rural areas of Western Region where cash crops were the focus for export. While citizens were building with mud, the late Obafemi Awolowo built the houses in his farm settlements with blocks which were stronger, elitist and costlier than building with mud. People were ready to take up houses in the settlements and contribute to the development of the region. The South West, thereby, became the infrastructural hub of Nigeria with many firsts with proceeds from agriculture produce. Awolowo demonstrated that a strategy for sustainable development can be created around agriculture in Nigeria. It led to competition between the west, north which grew groundnut, cotton and beans' and east/south-south which grew palm kernel, yam and vegetables.

It is hereby proposed that governments should establish farm estates with two bedroom flats and minimum of four acres of land (about 16,180 square metres) each as farmsteads. The farmsteads will be located beside each other while the houses will be located near each other with infrastructure like tarred road, internet facilities, pipe borne water from central water system, clinic, schools for children and playing ground. Government will be using one stone to kill two birds if they can invest in farm estates to be established in all the states of the federation. The unemployed youths will be engaged and housing units will increase in the farm settlements. Nigeria national assets will also increase as the farm estate will remain a public asset on lease. The total national assets of the United States of America include physical assets of at least $269 trillion (1576% of GDP) and debts of $145.8 trillion (852% of GDP) to produce a net worth of at least $123.8 trillion (723% of GDP).

Lagos, Rivers, Edo, Bayelsa, Borno, Kebbi, Kwara, Niger, Ondo, Ogun, Akwa Ibom, Kogi and Cross River States will have some mega fish farm estates because of their water bodies. Those farm estates to be established who specialise in cotton farming, mostly in the north, and central part of the country, will supply our textile industries with raw materials. This will rejuvenate our moribund textile industry and reposition Nigeria as a textile manufacturer of note in Africa. With the fact that Nigerians are generally underfed and fish import totalling $65 billion, this project alone has the potential of earning a trillion naira for the nation at the end of the first year of execution.

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NJ AYUK

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# African Energy 2024: Surging investment, waves of change

## Capex trends all demonstrate that investors won't limit themselves to mature fields: Eyes are on fresh locations, fresh facilities, and fresh opportunities in Africa

I'VE SAID FOR YEARS THAT African energy is a vital investment. Backers clearly agree — to the tune of $47 billion. That's how much capital expenditure (capex) 2024 saw in African oil and gas, showing a 23 percent increase from last year. Better yet, we expect growth to continue through the end of the decade.

This capex activity is a welcome sign that energy majors are deepening their long-term interests in Africa. And as our 2025 State of African Energy report details, their momentum has created unique opportunities for local communities, indigenous companies, and national oil companies (NOCs) from other continents.

**Emerging players**

While the majority of 2024's capex was driven by established producers like Angola and Nigeria, emerging players are making noise in the industry. Take Senegal, which saw its first offshore oil production this year. Ghana, following a five-year slump, increased oil output during 2024 by 10 percent and gas output by 7 percent.

Exploration hotspot Namibia also deserves a special mention: The Southern African nation aims to drill over 12 offshore wells next year, begin production by 2029, and become one of the top-five African producers by the 2030s. Good work for a nation that only discovered its enormous reserves in 2022! I frequently cite Namibia because it proves that a complete newcomer can attract serious foreign investment with smart, swift policy changes — and poise itself to shake up the energy industry.

**Increased exploration**

An exciting question remains: Just where will we find the next Namibia? Thanks to a resurgence in exploration, another hotspot may be around the corner. There were 1,060 wells drilled in Africa this year — more than any time since 2015. Africa has also become a global leader in drilling high-impact wells, which have the potential to significantly increase overall reserves. That strategy is already paying off: Notable 2024 finds include Namibia's Mopane complex, which holds approximately 10 billion barrels of oil equivalent (boe) – "one of the world's largest offshore finds," according to Offshore magazine. Even while global exploration as a whole remains stagnant, Africa is stepping up to meet growing energy demands.

When exploration is successful, new fields follow. We also expect to see African greenfield spending exceed brownfield by 10 percent by 2030. These capex trends all demonstrate that investors won't limit themselves to mature fields: Eyes are on fresh locations, fresh facilities, and fresh opportunities in Africa.

**A gas future**

As we highlight in our 2025 report, one of those opportunities is natural gas. Africa holds nearly 18 trillion cubic meters of reserves, which will prove essential for a just energy transition as natural gas can provide significant near-term emissions reductions while fostering energy security and economic development. Global demand for this clean-burning resource is also growing, particularly in Asia. That's why I'm glad to see a greater emphasis on developing natural gas resources. In 2023, capex spending on natural gas was about 30 percent, but this is projected to grow 10 percent by 2030. It's another sign that more investors are thinking in the long term about Africa, and interested in being part of a just energy transition.

Take Senegal, where the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim gas field will begin production next year. A Final Investment Decision is also expected in 2024 on Yakaar-Teranga. The West African nation is another fantastic example of how operator-friendly policies, political stability, and vast reserves can attract significant foreign investment: I'm excited to see Senegal transform itself from an oil importer to a gas exporter.

**M&A opportunity**

The past year saw a huge increase in divestment by O&G majors: Large IOCs are aggressively streamlining their African portfolios. As a rule, they're selling mature, high-emission, and high-cost assets. While large divestments often signal trouble, they're actually creating some promising changes for African O&G.

For one, Asian and Middle Eastern nations are purchasing more assets: Dubai, Qatar, the U.A.E., Malaysia, and Chinese NOCs acquired stakes in Egypt, Mozambique, Namibia, Kenya, and South Africa this year. As global demand for energy grows, particularly in Asia, I'm glad to see these nations looking to Africa for long-term solutions.

Foreign divestment also matters because it's creating opportunities for indigenous companies. Thanks to a recent Shell acquisition, Aradel Holdings became Nigeria's most valuable oil company. In Angola, IOC Afentra has acquired Azule's (a joint BP and Eni venture) assets and plans to dramatically increase the nation's overall output.

"Having the big players sell to independents is the future," oil trader Trafigura said in a statement.

It's a promising pattern: Majors sell off mature assets and use the capital to invest in fresh fields and facilities. Independent foreign or indigenous companies use their acquired assets to expand but are spared the expense of building facilities from the ground up. These smaller companies are also strongly motivated to further develop and reduce emissions from these existing fields — an environmental and financial win for everyone.

The Angolan government clearly agrees, encouraging regional players with tax incentives and reduced government profit shares. It will be truly fascinating to watch this industry shakeup in Nigeria and Angola, which have been dominated for decades by majors.

It's no secret that Africa needs O&G majors to stay: They drill over half of our exploration wells and hold a quarter of the continent's equity production. However, I'm thrilled to see indigenous companies growing and harnessing these assets to their fullest extent.

**Conclusion**

Just what prompted this surge in African capex? A great deal of credit goes to common sense policy changes in nations such as Namibia, Senegal, Mauritania, Egypt, and Angola. We can also point out that the COVID-19 pandemic artificially slowed capex for several years, so an uptick was inevitable once the world opened up again.

However, I believe a lot of it comes down to economic reality: Global energy needs are rising. Africa has vast, untapped resources. I urge all parties to continue building a thriving energy industry that takes Africa – and the world – into the next century.

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Economics Commentary

# Nigeria's Cybersecurity Levy: Doing more harm than good?

MARCEL OKEKE

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WHILE THE CACOPHONOUS debates about the Tax Reform Bills are ongoing, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has since stealthily commenced the enforcement and collection of the controversial Cybersecurity Levy it suspended early in the year. The levy was first introduced by the FGN through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in May 2024, pursuant to the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015. It was however quickly suspended, as it generated so much public angst, criticism and opposition.

The Cybersecurity Levy, according to the CBN, is a 0.5 percent tax on all electronic transactions, aimed at raising funds for boosting cybersecurity infrastructure and protecting Nigerians against cyber threats. The levy applies to all electronic transactions, including those made by banks, mobile money operators, and payment service providers.

The levy, which faced stiff opposition from the general public and specific critical stakeholders, was promptly stopped; and the government promised to rework its implementation strategy. However, surreptitiously, the apex bank, just before the sustained opposition and resentment to the Tax Reform Bills now with the National Assembly, has reinstated the Cybersecurity Levy.

Since the month of October 2024, not a few persons have reported the effect of "FGN Electronic Money Transfer" deductions from their accounts, each time they send/pay money electronically. These deductions (also experienced by this writer) have rather looked arbitrary; and ranged from N100 to some thousands of naira per transaction.

An official of the Bank Customers Association of Nigeria (BCAN) who spoke with this writer on the subject, confirmed noticing such deductions in his own accounts by his bank — one of the tier-one banks. The ABCAN official (who opts not to be named) also confirmed reports and complaints already lodged by some of their members regarding the strange tax and its arbitrariness.

The latest levy by banks on electronic transactions is in addition to some other existing charges — such as NIP charge plus Value Added Tax (VAT), ranging from N50 to N100; Card issuance fee (N1000 to N3000); Card maintenance charge (N500 to N1000), etc.

One of the critical stakeholder-groups that kicked against the Cybersecurity Levy when it was first introduced in May 2024 was the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) which expressed concerns about the timing and implementation of the Levy. The NESG was particularly worried about the potential impact of the levy on financial inclusion drive, and the economy generally.

The NESG argued that the Cybersecurity levy could lead to increased transaction costs, reduced financial inclusion, and decreased economic growth. The NESG therefore called for "a more targeted approach", suggesting that the levy should be applied only to high-end individuals and specific transactions.

Apparently in tune with the NESG's stance, the CBN altered the cybersecurity levy rate from 0.5% to 0.005% in its fiscal guidelines for 2024-2025. And notwithstanding the stiff resistance to the levy all along, the CBN has continued with the levy under the revised rate, as part of its new monetary and exchange policy.

Although the FGN has finally discretely commenced the implementation of the cybersecurity levy (now at a reduced rate) it remains curious that the Cybersecurity Act 2015, which had been dormant, must be 'activated' at a time of so much economic instability and misery. The very poor economic situation, high inflationary spiral and hardship as feared by the NESG have not abated in any appreciable manner.

Particularly, inflation which has eaten up the purchasing power of the citizenry was at 34 percent in May 2024 when the cybersecurity levy was introduced, the rate has hit almost 35 percent by end-November 2024. Also, while the average naira exchange rate against the dollar in May 2024 was about N1530/$, it has deteriorated to an average of N1700/$ by mid-December 2024.

The deterioration of these indicators translate to impoverishment of the citizenry, and worsening of their economic condition. Therefore, the imposition of more taxes on the people, no matter how insidiously, means further depressing of their livelihood and wellbeing. It is even anachronistic for the FGN to be pursuing financial inclusion and imposing levies on Internet/Digital (banking) transactions simultaneously.

For over a decade, the CBN has been implementing a financial inclusion policy — aimed at improving the availability and accessibility of financial services to all individuals and businesses in the country. This is regardless of their income level, geographic location, or social status.

The cybersecurity levy (on electronic transactions) is therefore a direct counterpoise to the banking inclusion drive — as it is an additional cost to the people. The levy works against banking (services) penetration, in favour of financial exclusion — leaving more people without access to formal financial services.

All these get more worrisome when it is noted that there has been a National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) — aimed at increasing financial inclusion in Nigeria. This, apparently, was why the cybersecurity levy plank of the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 has been kept in abeyance by successive governments until the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration.

Under the NFIS, the CBN has licensed several mobile money operators to provide financial services to the unbanked and underbanked populations. The apex bank has also introduced agent banking to increase access to financial services in the rural and underserved areas.

The CBN and other stakeholders have since launched financial literacy programmes to educate Nigerians on the importance of financial inclusion and how to access financial services. The cybersecurity levy which now tax people that get financially included is, without an iota of doubt, a huge disincentive to financial inclusion.

Apparently at its wits end on revenue generation, the Tinubu-led administration has kept combing all nooks and crannies, taxing Nigerians even as the economy keeps wobbling. This, obviously, accounts for why most Nigerians now prefer to have their business transactions in cash: a direct opposite of the 'cashless economy' mantra.

Ironically, even the cash has been made scarce — by a collusion of the CBN, the deposit money banks (DMBs) and the Point-of-Sale (PoS) operators. The apex bank has suddenly become a toothless bulldog, barking out endless threats to the banks, as they connive with other players in selling banknotes to the public.

The upshot of this has been the return of the era of huge crowds and "tally numbers" in most banking halls across the country. Not a few persons get frustrated on a daily basis desperately seeking to access cash for their business transactions. Coincidentally, the CBN has barely been watching as practically all Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) everywhere in Nigeria now remain 'empty boxes.'

As the Yuletide sets in, the apex bank has even placed a limit of one hundred thousand naira on the cash that a customer can access through the PoS in a day. The DMBs, on their part, have each placed a limit of not more than twenty or fifty thousand naira cash that can be withdrawn by a depositor in one day.

All these go to show the desperation and preference of most bank customers to now access, carry, and do business in cash, as against electronic transactions. Although this predilection may not be entirely due to the impact of the cybersecurity levy, the hike in transaction costs embedded in the taxes, fees and charges of the DMBs have become a disincentive to electronic/digital banking.

This is why when the cybersecurity levy first came into place in May 2024, it was widely described as "one more tax too many." This suggests that there have been so many other taxes before its addition: thus, increasing the burden of too many taxes and levies on the people. But, truly, Nigerians now need their economic burdens lightened. Obviously, not through palliatives!

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# Time for France to embrace Nigeria fully

OLAYINKA BAMIDELE

*Olayinka Bamidele, a commentator on current affairs, contributed this piece from Lagos*

FRANCE HAS A COMPLICATED relationship with Africa, dating back to colonialism, with very ugly vestiges of the past dotting the West coast. But the country is determined to forge a new bond with the continent, and Nigeria is its focal point. Nigeria holds a promise the French finds difficult to resist. With 400 million people, the African giant will be the third most populous country in the world in less than 30 years, after India and China; and most of them would be young people under 30. But there's more to Nigeria than demographics. It is an economic, cultural and continental powerhouse. Our music, cuisine, films and fashion have captured global interest, heralding a forthcoming gush: the rise of ''Made in Africa''. Penultimate week, President Bola Tinubu led a delegation of government officials and Nigeria's business leaders, on a state visit to France, with the involvement of the France-Nigeria Business Council (FNBC), to explore business partnerships, investment and deepen existing opportunities.

Chaired by Aigboje Aig-Imoukhuede, a prominent Nigerian business leader, the council provides a platform for the private sector of both countries to exchange ideas and enhance economic ties. Established under the patronage of President Emmanuel Macron in 2018, FNBC plays a crucial role in fostering international partnerships that enhance economic development, cultural exchange and investment opportunities between the two countries. FNBC is featured prominently in several events, including bilateral talks between the two leaders, during the President's three-day state visit. On Thursday, November 28, there was a formal meeting of FNBC at the Marigny - the official Paris hotel used to host foreign leaders - held in the presence of President Tinubu and President Macron as part of the state visit. The meeting emphasized Nigeria's business environment and profitability. Aig-Imoukhuede stated that "this was a special relationship at a special time", a powerful remark emphasising the opportunities in Nigeria's business environment and scope for generating corporate profits. It was a fitting counterweight to the noisy negative narratives on social media. There were also speeches by the French Minister for Finance and his Nigerian counterpart, Mr Wale Edun.

In attendance from the Nigerian business sector were Aliko Dangote, chairman of Dangote Industries Limited; Roosevelt Ogbonna, CEO of Access Bank, Nigeria's largest bank by assets and customer base, and other business leaders.

Among French business leaders who met with their Nigerian counterparts were Patrick Pouyanne, chairman and CEO of Total Energies; Rodolphe Saade, chairman and CEO of CMA CGM, a shipping and logistic company; Bernard Arnault, chairman and CEO of the LVMH Group, a multinational conglomerate specialising in luxury goods. There was also, Eva Berkene, CEO of Eutelsat, one of the world's leading satellite operators with a powerful fleet of satellites serving users across Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas; Olivier Blum, CEO of Schneider Electric, a multinational corporation that specialises in the digital transformation of energy management and transformation and many other business icons.

Such a fine collection of French business leaders is the right audience we should be talking to about the energy of Nigeria that produces, innovates, invests, consumes, excels and is fearless. Our optimism despite our challenges makes Nigeria one of the most hopeful nations on earth – a trait shared across its vibrant population. The world should know about Nigeria's rising middle class, counted in millions; our businesses that are expanding across Africa and putting their footprints far and wide; our unicorns like Flutterwave and Moniepoint and Africa's young entrepreneurs who are designing digital, energy and urban solutions to tackle the continent's pressing challenges.

France has a unique opportunity in Nigeria, and there is indeed a special bond between both countries, not just because President Macron once lived in Lagos, but because France, like Nigeria, is an economic and cultural powerhouse. France, too, entertains the world through music, cinema, culture and innovations. Just as Nigeria is a gateway to Africa, France is a gateway to Europe, and there's plenty for both countries to discover in each other. Building on this capital, France must not miss the Nigerian moment. It must not overlook the "Made in Africa" revolution, which is poised to redefine industries worldwide. Investing in Nigeria and forging partnerships with Nigerian businesses means boarding the train of Africa's industrialisation on time.

NOTES FROM ACCRA

FRANCIS KOKUTSE

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# Ghana's election's first female vice president ... and more!

AS COUNTRIES IN THE WEST Africa region continue to grapple with how to improve the participation of women in politics, Ghana has taken the lead to produce the first female Vice President, following the results of the December 7, 2024 election that has returned former President John Mahama, as leader of the country.

The fortunate lady is Naana Jane Opoku-Agyeman, a former first woman to become the vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Coast, and later served as minister of education under President Mahama from 2012-2016. Apart from the first female vice president that the election has produced, the county has gone back for former Mahama who lost to President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo in 2016 and 2020. Mahama's coming back is just like the story of the late President of Benin, Mathieu Kerekou.

There is also the need to hail Ghana for other aspects of the election. In a region that looked like one that was going back to the old days of military regimes, Ghanaians have given hope that the use of the ballot box can change regimes, and they did it in a grand style. The current vice president, Mahamudu Bawumia, who was the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate, did not even wait for the Electoral Commission (EC) to start announcing its figures before he came out to concede defeat, based on his own party's collation of results around the country.

That singular move by Vice President Bawumia has been hailed by many. Though there has been some isolated violence in some parts of the country over Parliamentary results, on the whole, the election was one that surprised many. In the run-up to the election there were those who had thought that the country was on the verge of a military takeover because of the hardships that had engulfed the country. But it did not happen as the people waited patiently to vote the ruling party out.

By the time the EC had come out to announce former President Mahama as winner, the whole country was aware that he was the right person to be inaugurated on January 7, 2025. The EC chairperson, Jean Mensa said, Mahama, who was the main opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) candidate won with 6,328,397, representing 56.55 percent of votes cast.

Addressing the media when she announced the figures, Mensa said "as a country, we take pride in the fact that our electoral processes initiated since 1992 uphold and guarantee the voters' choice. We take pride in the fact that the voters' choice as expressed at the polls is sacrosanct." The success of this year's election showed that the country has really accepted the use of the ballot box to show their preferred candidate for presidency.

It also shows that former President Mahama, who will take office in January, has a lot of work to do because the country is facing serious economic problems resulting in high prices of goods and a serious unemployment of the youth. This means that, from the day he takes office, the new government will be expected to provide solutions.

In his victory speech, former President Mahama paid glowing tribute to Opoku-Agyeman, stating that her "decency, humility, and sense of responsibility" added so much to his campaign around the country. "The eyes of every young girl and woman, not only in Ghana, but in nations across this continent and the world, are going to be on you from today. And as you said, you have not only opened the door, but you are going to keep the door open for many other women," he added.

He said Opoku-Agyeman's name "has become synonymous with breaking boundaries," and has through that "opened the door of opportunity for many of our female citizens. Because of you, the people of Ghana can today celebrate the fact that we have made history by electing our first woman as Vice President."

Turning to the country's economic situation, former President Mahama said, "these eight years have witnessed some of the darkest periods of our governance. The crises our beloved country has been through these past years have left a scar on our national psyche, which may take some time to erase. This mandate also serves as a constant reminder of what fate awaits us if we fail to meet the aspirations of our people and govern with arrogance."

He promised to "salvage our country and reset it. It would have to start with a reset of the relationship between citizens and elected officials. We must never forget that the people of Ghana have chosen us to represent their wishes and their best interests."

Accordingly, former President Mahama promised to "initiate important governance reforms as well as severe measures in the next four years to reset our nation and bring it back on track as the Black Star of Africa," adding that, "the journey is not going to be easy, because the outgoing government has plunged our dear nation into an abyss."

When he takes over office in January 2025, he will have to deal with the on-going situation in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, who have given notice to withdraw from the regional grouping, the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS). He has the charisma and with his emphatic win, he can have the trust of the leaders of the three countries to reconsider their position. What might have been the problem is that the current leaders of ECOWAS have not been able to win over the leaders of the three countries in their dealings with them.

It was clear that there were problems with democratic rule in these countries, unfortunately, ECOWAS leaders looked aloof, this was the reason the coups returned. The people welcomed the coupists and therefore, what should have been done was not to use sanctions but negotiate with these leaders to return the countries to democratic rule.

ECOWAS itself had a problem. There was not quite any chemistry among the leaders as it used to be. In the past, there was this show of friendship among the leaders. Unfortunately, over the past few years, the leaders arrived at meetings as if they were forced to attend. Former President Goodluck Jonathan, John Mahama and Faure Gnassingbe always showed that they were real friends. Before that, President Olusegun Obasanjo and former President John Kufuor openly flaunted their close relationship. This made ECOWAS show leadership.

Sadly, what we have now is a loose relationship between the leaders. President Bola Tinubu of Nigeria and former President Mahama have enjoyed a close relationship for quite a long time. It means that these friendships will be used to push a new agenda for ECOWAS.

The election of former President Mahama must also be seen as a good omen for the West Africa region, because he is a very affable person who is always looking for ways to maintain peace. He has shown his total commitment to the growth of ECOWAS and has always pushed the integration agenda. Therefore, as he prepares to take the oath of office, the West Africa region must welcome him as someone who is coming to move the organisation in a new direction.

It is sad that as the region prepares to celebrate the 50th anniversary of ECOWAS, the integration that was envisaged at the time it was formed seems lost to the current leaders. There is hope that Mahama will make the dreams of the founding fathers a reality.

If he succeeds in helping to rebuild ECOWAS, the people in the region will forever be grateful to him. Therefore, he should not just take rebuilding Ghana as his only job, he must look beyond the territory of Ghana. This way, he would leave behind a bigger legacy!

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# Technology, partnerships are paving way for global trade

## Modern customs operations are complex and highly demanding, with millions in revenues depending on a smooth flow of goods through points of entry

THE WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANISATION (WCO) Technology Conference in Rio de Janeiro took place last November, but its energy and excitement remain vivid. It was clear that the global customs community recognises the urgent need for transformation. Delegates from around the world agreed that the traditional customs processes are no longer sufficient to meet the demands of modern global trade.

Digital innovation is the key to unlocking the potential of our customs operations. By embracing advanced technologies, we can streamline processes, enhance security, and facilitate the seamless flow of goods across borders.

**Technology is no longer simply a tool**

Modern customs operations are complex and highly demanding, with millions in revenues depending on a smooth flow of goods through points of entry. Speed, accuracy, security, and resilience are key factors in ensuring this seamless process, and manual processes have made way for digital innovation provided by highly specialised service providers like Webb Fontaine. In their hands, technology has evolved from a mere tool to become the foundational framework of successful modern customs processes.

Technologies like AI, machine learning, and data analytics are fundamentally transforming customs operations, where every single touchpoint within a customs operation - each shipment, inspection, and cross-border movement - generates valuable data. Technology enables users to make sense of this data with solutions like centralised data systems and Single-Window platforms.

**Partnerships to elevate transformation efforts**

However, having access to the technology without the specialist insights needed to use it to its full potential, serves no purpose. If technology is one of the pillars of an evolving customs operations, the other is strategic partnerships — having the right partner with expertise to help customs authorities use these technologies effectively. But, how to choose the right partner?

To this end, effective collaborations are as critical as the technologies themselves. Customs authorities should form strategic partnerships with those who can provide unique insights, those who know that international trade doesn't happen in isolation, and those who understand the specific needs of each stakeholder in the trade process.

**The importance of a holistic approach**

This highlights the need for a holistic approach that considers the interdependencies among stakeholders and the various moving parts in the customs process. For instance, Webb Fontaine's Webb Customs is an advanced customs management system designed to modernise customs clearance processes while addressing the significant challenges in customs administration. It has been successfully deployed in Armenia, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Bahrain, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates, Benin, and Nigeria.

Understanding the industry's complex nature, Webb Customs is a modular system that adapts to the needs of various customs authorities and operational environments. The outcomes are reduced trade barriers, efficient trade, and compliance with international standards, leading to smoother and faster clearance of goods. All are facilitated by the dual pillars of technology and human expertise.

In our vision, the future of customs is clear: Transforming customs operations is possible by adopting innovative technologies and forming strategic partnerships with the right providers to enhance efficiency, security, and compliance worldwide.

At Webb Fontaine, we're passionate about shaping this future. We're proud to have helped numerous countries around the world streamline their customs processes, and we're excited to continue our mission of empowering customs authorities and facilitating global trade.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE - BUSINESS A.M. PARTNERSHIP

PROJECT SYNDICATE

# The West Is Not Dying, but It Is Working on It

**YANIS VAROUFAKIS**

*Yanis Varoufakis, a former finance minister of Greece, is leader of the MeRA25 party and Professor of Economics at the University of Athens.*

ATHENS – A motley crew of centrist pundits in Europe, the Global South, and, following Donald Trump's election victory, the United States believe that the West is in decline. To be sure, never has so much power been concentrated in the hands of so few people (and postcodes) in the West, but does that alone mean Western power is doomed?

In Europe, there is good reason to embrace the narrative of decline. Just as the Roman Empire shifted its capital to Constantinople to extend its hegemony by another millennium, abandoning Rome to the barbarians, so did the West's center of gravity shift to the United States, abandoning Britain and Europe to the stagnation that is rendering them inert, backward, and increasingly irrelevant.

But there is a deeper reason for the pundits' gloomy sentiment: the tendency to confuse the decline of the West's commitment to its own value system (universal human rights, diversity, and openness) with the West's decline. Like a snake shedding its old skin, the West is gaining power by shedding a value system which sustained its ascendancy during the twentieth century but which, in the twenty-first, no longer serves that goal.

Democracy was never a prerequisite for the rise of capitalism, and what we now think of as the West's value system is not a prerequisite for it, either. Western power was built not on humanist principles but, rather, on brutal exploitation at home coupled with the slave trade, the opium trade, and various genocides in the Americas, Africa, and Australia.

During its ascendancy, Western power went unchecked abroad. Europe sent millions of colonists to subjugate peoples and extract resources. Europeans pretended the natives they saw were not human and declared their land terra nullius, a land without a people for settlers craving that land – the first act of every genocide from the Americas, Africa, and Australia to Palestine today.

But, while unassailable abroad, Western power was challenged at home by its wretched lower classes who rose up in response to economic crises caused by the inability of the many to consume enough of the goods they were producing in the factories belonging to the few. These conflicts spilled over into industrial-scale warfare between Western powers vying for markets, culminating in two world wars.

As a consequence, the West's elites had to make concessions. Domestically, they acquiesced to public education, health systems, and pensions. Internationally, outrage at the West's cruel wars and genocides led to decolonization, universal declarations of human rights, and international criminal courts.

For a couple of decades after World War II, the West basked in the warm glow of distributive justice, the mixed economy, diversity, the rule of law at home, and a rules-based international order. Economically, these values were served extraordinarily well by the centrally planned, US-designed global monetary system known as Bretton Woods, which allowed America to recycle its surpluses to Europe and Japan, essentially dollarizing its allies to sustain its own net exports.

But then, by 1971, America had become a deficit country. Rather than tighten its belt in Germanic style, the US blew up Bretton Woods and blew out its trade deficit. Germany, Japan, and later China became net exporters, whose dollar profits were sent to Wall Street to buy US government debt, real estate, and shares in companies that the US allowed foreigners to invest in.

Then, the American ruling class had an epiphany: Why manufacture stuff at home when foreign capitalists could be relied upon to dispatch both their products and their dollars to the US? So, they exported whole production lines abroad, triggering the deindustrialization of America's manufacturing heartlands.

Wall Street was at the heart of this audacious new recycling mechanism. To play its role, it had to be unrestrained. But wholesale deregulation needed an economics and a political philosophy to support it. Demand created its own supply, and neoliberalism was born. Before long, the world was awash in derivatives surfing the tsunami of foreign capital inundating New York's banks. When the wave broke in 2008, the West nearly broke with it.

Panicked Western leaders authorized the minting of $35 trillion to refloat the financiers while imposing austerity on their populations. The only part of these trillions that was actually invested in machinery went to building up the cloud capital that gave Big Tech its pervasive power over Western populations' hearts and minds.

The combination of socialism for financiers, collapsing prospects for the bottom 50%, and the surrender of our minds to Big Tech's cloud capital gave birth to a Brave New West, whose overweening elites have little use for the last century's value system. Free trade, anti-trust rules, net zero, democracy, openness to migration, diversity, human rights, and the International Court of Justice were treated with the same contempt with which the US treated friendly dictators – its "own bastards" – after their usefulness ended.

With Europe rendered impotent by its inability to federate political power after it had federated its money, and the developing world more in debt than ever, only China is left standing in the West's way. The irony, however, is that China does not want to be a hegemon. It just wants to sell its wares unimpeded.

But the West is now convinced that China poses a lethal threat. Like Oedipus's father, who died at his son's hand because he believed the prophecy that his son would kill him, so the West is working tirelessly to push China to take the plunge and seriously challenge Western power, such as by turning the BRICS into a renminbi-based Bretton-Woods-like system.

In 2024, the West continued to grow stronger. But, with its value system in the gutter, so did its penchant for engineering its decline.



VISIONARY VOICES

# To Prosper, India Must Close Its Gender Employment Gap

**KANIKA MAHAJAN**

*Kanika Mahajan is Associate Professor of Economics at Ashoka University.*

NEW DELHI – While female workforce participation consistently lags behind men's globally, there are deep regional disparities, with the largest gender employment gaps found in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and South Asia.

India is a striking example of this dynamic. Among women aged 25-60 in rural areas, the labor-market participation rate dropped sharply from 54% in 1980 to 31% in 2017 (National Sample Survey (1980) and Periodic Labor Force Survey (2017)). In urban areas, the decline has been less dramatic, from 26% to 24%. Meanwhile, male employment rates remained relatively stable, further widening the gender gap in the world's most populous country.

Given the well-documented economic benefits of higher female employment, Indian policymakers are eager to reverse this trend. Projections suggest that increasing the female workforce participation rate by just ten percentage points could increase India's GDP by 16%. In fact, improving female employment rates worldwide could add $12 trillion to global GDP.

To encourage women to enter the labor market, policymakers must first understand the root causes of India's low female workforce participation rate. Early research points to a range of supply-side barriers, such as the U-shaped relationship between income and education, the unequal division of domestic labor (particularly childcare and eldercare), and social norms that discourage women from working outside the home. The problem is also exacerbated by the preference for non-working women in the marriage market, limited mobility, inadequate skills training, and safety concerns at work and in public spaces.

Many of these barriers are rooted in household dynamics, but governments can still play a pivotal role in addressing them. One way is to support export-oriented industries. While supply-side constraints affect economies across MENA and South Asia, countries like Bangladesh have experienced a rise in female employment thanks to growing demand from export-driven sectors. This mirrors the experience of Southeast Asian countries, where export-oriented manufacturing has led to a surge in women entering the labor market.

History also offers valuable insights. In the United States, the female employment rate rose dramatically in the space of 100 years, from less than 5% in 1890 to more than 60% in 1990. The critical turning point came during World War II, when labor shortages led to higher wages, greater acceptance of women in traditionally male-dominated jobs, and the emergence of alternative care options.

In India, much of the policy debate has focused on the demand-side barriers that women face in the job market. Labor demand has not been favorable to Indian women, as mechanization in the agriculture sector reinforces gender disparities while the lack of decent jobs and the dominance of small firms – many of which fail to provide essential amenities like maternity leave and child care – limit women's work opportunities.

The impact of such barriers is compounded by insufficient support for female entrepreneurship and widespread employer discrimination against married women and mothers. Moreover, well-intentioned regulations like the Maternity Benefit Act and the POSH Act, intended to increase the number of women in the workforce, also raise the cost of hiring them, inadvertently creating additional obstacles.

Recognizing that low female employment impedes economic growth, the Indian government has allocated an unprecedented 6.5% of its latest annual budget to programs promoting gender equality in housing, pensions, education, and health care. The budget also boosts funding for initiatives aimed at improving women's safety, mobility, and caregiving options, such as establishing targeted skills-training programs, hostels, and child-care facilities for working women, and expanding market access for enterprises run by women-led, community-based self-help groups.

But the real test will be the quality and reliability of these services. If child-care facilities provide substandard care, or hostels fail to ensure women's safety, participation will remain low. Moreover, skills programs in India have had little success outside major cities. A recent study in Uttar Pradesh found that just 11% of graduates of industrial training institutes were able to secure employment. International studies also suggest that insufficient job opportunities may limit the impact of skill-building initiatives. Creating quality jobs offering higher wages is crucial for supply-side measures to be effective.

When men struggle to find jobs, integrating women into the workforce becomes even more challenging. Notably, nearly 12% of Indian men aged 20-35 in urban areas who completed schooling were unemployed in 2022. For this reason, the government's latest budget includes several initiatives to boost employment. One such program aims to encourage internships, with the government providing firms a monthly allowance of ń5,000 ($60) and offering labor-market entrants a one-time wage-assistance subsidy of up to ń15,000. Employers will also be eligible for up to ń3,000 per month for two years following every new hire, offsetting their social-security contributions. Other measures to expand small firms' access to credit markets include doubling the limit for small loans by public-sector banks to micro enterprises from ń1 million to ń2 million.

But the effectiveness of some of these measures remains uncertain, given that top firms are likely to hire the most skilled candidates even without government intervention. Employers will increase hiring only when the benefits outweigh the costs. As long as burdensome regulations, inflexible labor laws, infrastructure bottlenecks, and unfavorable industrial and trade policies persist, job creation will continue to stagnate. By fostering a business-friendly economy – one that simplifies firm entry and exit and removes barriers to growth – India could both empower women and unlock its economic potential. It's a lesson many countries cannot learn soon enough.

# People-centric leadership way to navigate complex global challenges, says NGX Group CEO

**Onome Amuge**

TEMI POPOOLA, GROUP MANAGING director and chief executive officer of the Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX Group), has called for a renewed focus on authenticity and people-centric leadership as a way to navigate the multifaceted challenges of a globalized world.

He made this call in a keynote address at the Taj Lands End Leadership Summit in Mumbai, India. His address which centred on the theme: 'Authenticity, Leadership, and Hope for the Future,' provided a platform for the Nigerian business leader to share a narrative that was equal parts personal and strategic.

Popoola's reflections were grounded in his diverse life journey, which spans an upbringing in the United Kingdom and Nigeria, a robust academic foundation in chemical engineering and finance, and a career marked by leadership excellence across continents and sectors. He highlighted how these experiences shaped his global perspective and ability to drive innovation within complex organizational structures.

At the core of Popoola's message was the importance of authenticity in leadership. He stressed that leaders must embrace self-awareness and empathy to build cohesive teams capable of delivering exceptional outcomes. As the leader of one of Africa's most prominent stock exchanges, he underscored that the strategic act of hiring and retaining the right talent and fostering a culture of collaboration is pivotal for long-term success. Drawing from his experiences, he shared how challenges in leadership have been mitigated through lessons learned from mentors and the wisdom found in books, both of which continue to shape his decision-making process.

On the personal front, he candidly discussed the challenges of balancing professional success with personal commitments, "Leadership is not just about the boardroom; it is about showing up authentically in every aspect of life," he remarked. He further reflected on the vital role of spirituality and lifelong learning, crediting these pillars for providing strength and resilience during periods of uncertainty.

L-R: Zubaida Umar, director-general, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA); Bello Lawal, national president of the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON); and Evan Enekwe, director-general of ALGON, during a courtesy visit by officials of the Association to NEMA Headquarters in Abuja recently.

In a world marked by rapid change and emerging challenges, Popoola expressed optimism for the future, particularly in developing nations like India and Nigeria. He described the youth in these regions as untapped reservoirs of innovation and growth, urging leaders to strategically invest in their development to unlock transformative potential.

He further articulated a clear vision for leadership that resonates across industries and geographies. He called on leaders to prioritize authenticity, champion continuous learning, and harness the power of human capital to address both immediate challenges and future opportunities. His address was not only a call to action but also a strategic framework for navigating the evolving dynamics of global leadership.

"Popoola's thought leadership at the Taj Lands End Leadership Summit reaffirmed his position as a leading voice in the global discourse on leadership, authenticity, and sustainable development," NGX noted.

# Nigeria's $42.01bn reserves to sustain over nine months of imports in 2025- CBN

**Onome Amuge**

THE CENTRAL BANK OF NIGERIA (CBN) has provided a glimmer of hope to Nigerians, indicating that the country's external reserves, which currently stand at $42.01 billion, will be sufficient to finance imports for over nine months in 2025. In addition, the apex bank has assured the public that the nation's economy is expected to perform better in 2025, allaying fears of impending financial uncertainty.

Olayemi Cardoso, the CBN governor, stated this during a performance index report presentation to the Senate Committee on Banking, Insurance and other Financial Institutions.

Cardoso made the remarks just as the CBN introduced policy interventions to enhance the use of electronic payment channels for agency banking operations in the country.

The move also seeks to boost ongoing efforts by the apex bank to advance a cash-less economy, and address identified challenges, combat fraud and establish uniform operational standards across the industry.

The development is in alignment with a recent circular dated December 17, 2024, in which the CBN's Payments System Management Department, led by Oladimeji Yisa Taiwo, disclosed a policy review geared towards improving the use of electronic payment channels in agency banking operations across Nigeria. The circular was addressed to all Deposit Money Banks, Microfinance Banks, Mobile Money Operators, and Super-Agents

The CBN governor, during the session with the senators, stated; "External Reserves rose from $38.35 billion it was on September 30, 2024, to $42.01billion as of December 12, 2024."

According to Cardoso, the surge in external reserves from $42.01 billion to over $43 billion within the third quarter of 2024 was largely driven by crude oil-related taxes and third-party receipts. He further clarified that the country maintained a current account surplus and observed marked improvements in the trade balance.

"Our external reserves level can finance over 9.09 months of import of goods and services or 13.91 months only, higher than the international benchmark of 3.0 months and a robust buffer against shocks," he stated.

As concerns continue to mount over currency shortages in the Nigerian economy, CBN Governor Olayemi Cardoso has warned of severe penalties against bank branches found to be illegally distributing new naira notes to currency hawkers and unscrupulous elements.

Cardoso reemphasized that the new policy, which imposes a N150 million fine on such errant branches, remains in effect. The CBN Governor also reiterated his confidence in the country's economic outlook for 2025, affirming that policies and measures currently in place will pave the way for a more robust and thriving economy.

In a promising sign for the Nigerian economy, Cardoso revealed that diaspora remittances via International Money Transfer Operators (IMTOs) soared to $4.22 billion in the first 10 months of 2024, almost doubling the $2.62 billion recorded in the same period in 2023. He also affirmed that the increase in remittances translated to 61.1 percent growth in one year.

Cardoso detailed that remittances continued their upward trend in the last two months, increasing from $336.61 million in September 2024 to $402.38 million in October 2024, a notable surge in just a month.

# NGX rally nets N1.061trn in weekly gains for equity investors

**Onome Amuge**

THE NIGERIAN stock market is on a high, with investors reaping N1.061 trillion in profit over the past trading week on the Nigerian Exchange (NGX). The impressive rally is considered a reflection of the growing investor confidence in the Nigerian market and follows on the heels of the previous week's gain of N707.61 billion.

Investors pocketed N1.061 trillion in profit across four of the five trading sessions in a week that saw the NGX bask in the glory of bullish sentiments.

The market capitalisation, in a similar show of strength, surged from N60.242 trillion to N61.303 trillion. The All-Share Index (ASI), an indicator of the overall performance of the market, also appreciated 1.76 percent, climbing from 99,378.06 points recorded the previous week to a closing figure of 101,129.09 points.

The Nigerian stock market commenced the week on a positive note, as investors bagged N330.24 billion profit at the end of the trading session on Monday, December 16, 2024.

The bullish momentum continued to roll into the next trading day, with investors experiencing N77.78 billion gain by the close of Tuesday, December 17, 2024.

The bullish market rally persisted as investors raked in N258.56 billion profit at the close of Wednesday, December 18, 2024.

The bullish sentiment remained strong into Thursday, December 19, 2024, with investors grabbing N467.11 billion profit by the end of the trading session.

The winning streak of the Nigerian stock market came to an abrupt halt on Friday, December 20, 2024, as the bears resurfaced, resulting in a loss of N72.09 billion for investors at the close of the trading session. The negative close broke the market's eight-day profit-making run, a temporary pause in the bullish rally.

Investors traded a total of 2.536 billion shares valued at N91.382 billion across 51,406 deals on the NGX, representing an increase in both volume and value compared to the previous week's figures of 2.729 billion shares worth N49.845 billion in 43,298 deals.

The Financial Services Industry was dominant on the NGX, taking the lead in both volume and value with 1.680 billion shares worth N23.486 billion exchanging hands across 22,766 deals. This dominance translates into a 66.24 percent contribution to the total equity turnover volume and 25.70 percent of the total equity turnover value.

The ICT industry came in second place in terms of equity turnover, with a total of 201.287 million shares valued at N3.155 billion changing hands across 2,840 deals.

In third place was the Services Industry,with 182.275 million shares worth N7.961 billion in 3,019 deals, solidifying its position as a major player in the Nigerian stock market.

Sterling Financial Holdings Company Plc, Wema Bank Plc, and E-Tranzact International Plc took center stage in the market, collectively accounting for 24.61 percent of the total equity turnover volume and 4.36 percent of the total equity turnover value during the week. This is as investors traded 623.895 million shares worth N3.981 billion across 1,544 deals in these top three stocks.

In a sign of healthy market sentiment, the number of Nigerian equities that appreciated in price during the week under review climbed to 61 from the 51 stocks that gained value the previous week. The number of equities that depreciated in price decreased to 26, down from 35 the week before. This shift in market dynamics was supported by the fact that 66 equities remained unchanged, a slight decline from the 67 equities that held their ground in the previous week.

MRS Oil Nigeria Plc recorded the highest share price increase at 36.36 percent, followed closely by Eterna Plc, which recorded a 32.36 percent rise in its share price. Honeywell Flour Mill Plc also joined the ranks of the top performers, with its share price appreciating 31.52 percent.

On the other end of the spectrum, John Holt Plc topped the list of decliners, with its share price plunging 18.67 percent. Multiverse Mining And Exploration Plc wasn't far behind, with its share price taking a hit of 18.58 percent. University Press Plc rounded out the top three decliners, recording a 16.27 percent decline in its share price.

## STOCKS MARKET

| | NSE | NSE 30 | FTSE 100 | DOW JONES | S & P 500 | FTSE/JSE | NASDAQ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 101,129.09 | 3,726.88 | 8,084.61 | 43,090.92 | 5,460.48 | 79,707.11 | 17,732.60 |
| CURRENT | 0.12% | +0.18% | 0.26% | -0.12% | -0.41% | 0.93% | 0.71% |
| YEAR TO DATE | 32.85 | +6.71 | -20.71 | 3.79% | 14.48% | 3.66% | 11.16% |

### TOP TRADERS

| Company | Volume | Value |
|---|---|---|
| ZENITHBANK | 60410012 | 2728940774 |
| UBA | 43454560 | 1470970007 |
| STERLINGNG | 43319185 | 216300685.2 |
| UNIVINSURE | 28313872 | 12415110.18 |
| GTCO | 23512588 | 1303817099 |

### TOP GAINERS

| No | Equity | Opening | Closing | %Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | HONYFLOUR | N 5.50 | N 6.05 | 10.00% |
| 2 | UNIVINSURE | N 0.40 | N 0.44 | 10.00% |
| 3 | UACN | N 27.50 | N 30.25 | 10.00% |
| 4 | LEARNAFRCA | N 3.53 | N 3.88 | 9.92% |
| 5 | NAHCO | N 41.95 | N 46.10 | 9.89% |

### TOP LOSSERS

| No | Equity | Opening | Closing | %Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | MULTIVERSE | N 5.10 | N 4.60 | -9.80% |
| 2 | ARADEL | N 730.40 | N 664.00 | -9.09% |
| 3 | INTENEGINS | N 1.60 | N 1.47 | -8.13% |
| 4 | WAPIC | N 1.78 | N 1.70 | -4.49% |
| 5 | NB | N 30.00 | N 29.00 | -3.33% |

## COMMODITIES

| SYMBOL | PRICE | CHANGE | %CHANGE | VOLUME |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| OIL | 80.12 | -0.01 | -0.01 | 540 |
| BRENT | 82.64 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 91,282 |
| NAT GAS | 2.182 | 0.054 | 2.54 | 10,501 |
| RBOB GAS | 2.451 | 0.001 | 0.04 | 1,658 |
| GOLD | 2,402.90 | 3.8 | 0.16 | 51,560 |
| SILVER | 29.24 | -0.059 | -0.2 | 16,227 |
| COPPER | 968.6 | -5.3 | -0.54 | 7,361 |
| PALLADIUM | 4.231 | -0.006 | -0.14 | 20,751 |
| WHEAT | 900 | -2.3 | -0.25 | 1,493 |
| SOYBEAN | 501.5 | UNCH | UNCH | 0 |
| CORN | 551 | 8.25 | 1.52 | 6,825 |
| SUGAR | 1,112.25 | 15 | 1.37 | 3,621 |
| COFFEE | 411 | 6.25 | 1.54 | 21,948 |
| COTTON | 18.65 | -0.01 | -0.05 | 3,867 |
| ROUGH RICE | 238.7 | 0.5 | 0.21 | 1,412 |
| COCOA | 71.06 | 0.36 | 0.51 | 1,828 |
| | 14.39 | 0.15 | 1.05 | 54 |

**Stories by Bamidele Famoofo**

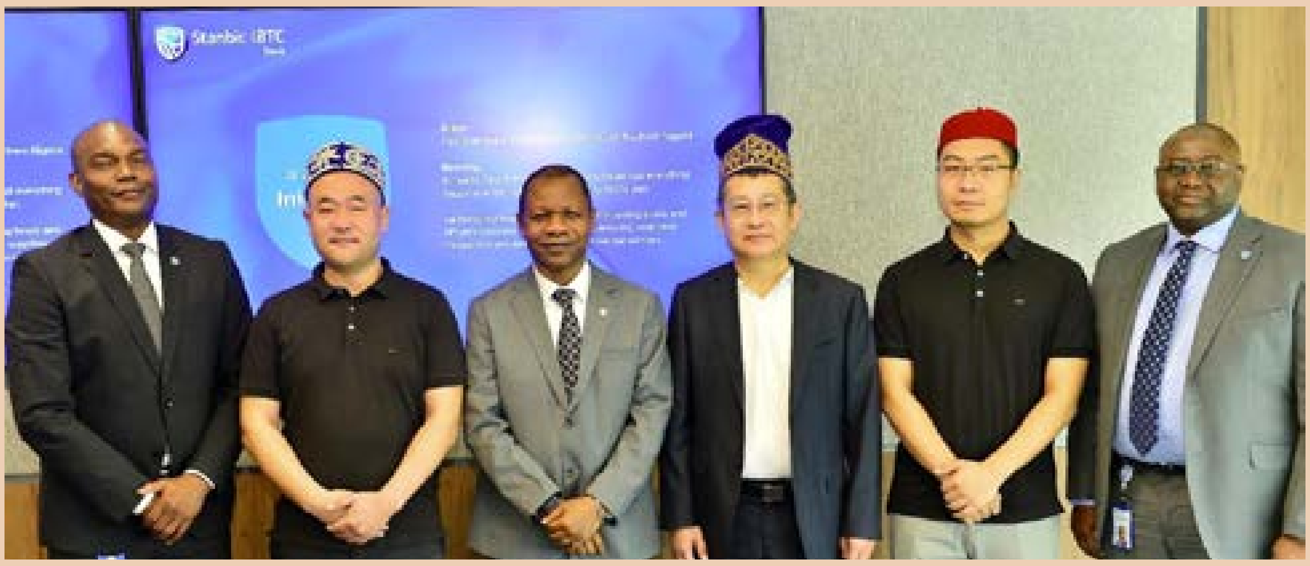
# USDA votes $300m to diversify U.S. agricultural export in emerging markets

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced the second round of Regional Agricultural Promotion Program (RAPP) grants, which is intended to allocate $300 million to (67 partners) once all legal and administrative requirements are satisfied, expanding American food and agricultural exports in emerging global markets.

This latest investment brings total RAPP funding to $600 million in 2024.

The new grants aim to diversify export markets in regions with rising consumer demand and purchasing power, including Africa, Latin America/the Caribbean, and South/Southeast Asia. These regions offer significant opportunities for U.S. producers seeking to establish a stronger foothold in dynamic and growing markets.

"RAPP is a critical tool for helping U.S. producers and agribusinesses stay competitive in today's global trading environment," Secretary Vilsack said. "The Biden-Harris approach to trade is delivering results for U.S. agriculture through record exports and improved relationships with current and future trading partners, and this investment supports actions that build on the global demand for American agriculture's high-quality products."



L-R: Remy Osuagwu, executive director, business and commercial banking, Stanbic IBTC Bank; Qi Jiansheng, assistant general manager, China Africa Investment FTZ; Wole Adeniyi, chief executive, Stanbic IBTC Bank; Deng Yu, executive president, New South Group Co Limited; Gao Jian Zhong, director, investment promotion, New South Group Co, Limited; and Babatunde Akindele, head, commercial banking, Stanbic IBTC Bank, during a courtesy visit to Stanbic IBTC Towers, in Lagos recently. IMAGE BY PIUS OKEOSISI

Under the Biden-Harris administration, U.S. agricultural exports have grown significantly, posting the three highest years in history in 2021, 2022, and 2023 – including a record of nearly $196 billion in 2022 and nearly $175 billion in 2023. USDA and the United States Trade Representative (USTR) have helped to secure over $26.7 billion in agricultural market access since the start of the Biden-Harris Administration.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the actions of USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service helped preserve $8.8 billion in total U.S. agricultural exports. Since 2022, USDA has issued $9.4 billion in loan payment guarantees to facilitate the diversification of U.S. agricultural export markets. USDA also leveraged $2.3 billion in Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds in 2024 to help U.S. agriculture export market development efforts and combat global food insecurity. In addition to RAPP, $100 million was targeted for aid to address the unique challenges for speciality crop producers seeking to enhance market growth opportunities by exporting. Separately, USDA is using $1 billion of the CCC funds to support international food assistance programs and strengthen global food security, which benefits U.S. agricultural producers.

This second round of funding reinforces USDA's commitment to diversification, with $25 million set aside for projects focused on Africa. Proposals for this round exceeded the available funding, with eligible entities submitting more than $1 billion in project requests.

The first $300 million in RAPP funds, announced in May 2024, has already helped U.S. producers tap into new overseas opportunities. RAPP builds on the success of the Agricultural Trade Promotion Program (ATP), launched in 2018 to mitigate the risks of over-reliance on a few large markets.

Applications for the second round of funding opened in August 2024, and USDA received proposals from agricultural trade organizations, state regional trade groups, agricultural cooperatives, and state agencies. These projects will play a critical role in establishing new market opportunities and sustaining existing ones for U.S. producers.

Secretary Vilsack announced in October 2023 that USDA would use $1.2 billion from the Commodity Credit Corporation to establish RAPP, with a focus on diversifying international demand for U.S. agricultural exports beyond established markets such as China, Mexico, and Canada, which collectively account for nearly 50 per cent of current export sales.

RAPP focuses on parts of the world where the middle class is growing and the desire for high-quality food and farm products is on the rise, but where U.S. exporters may not yet have an established presence or firm foothold.

# Afreximbank, Ecobank partner on trade and compliance for African businesses

AFRICAN EXPORT-IMPORT BANK (Afreximbank) and Ecobank Group have embarked on a collaboration aimed at simplifying trade and compliance for businesses in Africa by integrating Ecobank's Single Market Trade Hub and Afreximbank's MANSA Digital Repository Platform.

With the collaboration, African businesses will benefit from seamless shared services across the two platforms, with users of the Single Market Trade Hub able to easily leverage MANSA's comprehensive database for efficient know-thy-customer (KYC) and customer due diligence (CDD) checks while MANSA platform users would, in turn, be able to directly connect to the Single Market Trade Hub to explore trade opportunities to expand their businesses across Africa.

The Ecobank Single Market Trade Hub connects registered businesses across Africa on a single platform, helping them benefit from opportunities in the unified market of 1.4 billion people created by the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). It serves as a one-stop repository for the AfCFTA by providing small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) and corporates with insights about the agreement while its online match-making feature enables importers and exporters to upload their profiles and showcase goods and services they offer, or wish to source, to find partners within Africa.

Once a match is found, connections are made via the platform and the transaction can be concluded by leveraging Ecobank's trade and payment solutions in 35 African markets.


The MANSA Digital Repository Platform, or MANSA, is a one-stop shop for due diligence matters on all African entities. As a centralised digital repository, MANSA seeks to eliminate information asymmetry and to increase intra-African trade and trade with the rest of the world. It drives and promotes good governance culture among African SMEs and creates visibility for their businesses while also supporting African entities to expand, diversify and add value to their export at both the local and international levels. Entities onboarded unto MANSA are allotted an Africa Entity Identifier (AEI) code which enables them to leverage other Afreximbank products and initiatives.

MANSA is also a key digital solution at the Africa Trade Gateway (ATG) marketplace which houses a suite of digital platforms designed as a single window to enable Afreximbank to better deliver on its mandate, providing critical services to support and promote intra-African trade and the implementation of the AfCFTA. The platform enables African entities to accelerate their business activities at the ATG marketplace by working with verified information on trusted counterparties.

The new collaboration is, therefore, enabling Ecobank and Afreximbank to provide a central solution to the key challenge of KYC compliance and access to business across 35 countries in Africa. The improved interoperability is expected to further streamline cross-border trade and compliance in Africa, fostering greater financial and economic integration on the continent.

Afreximbank is a pan-African multilateral financial institution established to finance and promote intra- and extra-African trade while Ecobank Group is a leading private pan-African banking group with unrivalled African expertise.

Quoted Insurers

| Security | P/close | Open | High | Low | Close | %Change | Volume | Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AIICO | 1.13 | 1.13 | 1.15 | 1.1 | 1.12 | 0.88 | 8,279,352 | 9,303,879.55 |
| CORNERST | 2.11 | 2.11 | 2.32 | 2.11 | 2.32 | 9.95 | 2,423,416 | 5,510,742.85 |
| LINKASSURE | 0.95 | 0.95 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5.26 | 605,923 | 601,058.77 |
| MANSARD | 5.41 | 5.41 | 5.46 | 5.36 | 5.46 | 0.92 | 1,719,208 | 9,345,573.53 |
| NEM | 7.7 | 7.7 | - | - | 7.7 | 0 | 136,486 | 1,061,142.05 |
| SUNNUASSUR | 1.18 | 1.18 | - | - | 1.18 | 0 | 111,164 | 140,714.92 |



**Stories by Joy Agwunobi**

# PenCom empowers retirees with new lump sum access, tech-driven reforms

THE NATIONAL PENSION COMMISSION (PenCom) has rolled out a series of transformative measures aimed at enhancing retirees' access to their Retirement Savings Account (RSA) balances.

These initiatives allow retirees to access a significant portion of their RSA balance as a lump sum, provided they have used part of the funds to secure pension benefits that meet at least 50 per cent of their final salary before retirement. This reform enables retirees to withdraw up to 70 per cent of their RSA balance as a lump sum if their monthly pension meets the required threshold.

Speaking at the PenCom Journalist Workshop in Lagos, themed "Tech-Driven Transformation: Shaping the Pension Landscape," Omolola Oloworaran, PenCom's director-general, shared insights on these groundbreaking measures.

According to Oloworaran, PenCom's revised program withdrawal template aims to simplify access to voluntary contributions and adjust the en-bloc payment threshold in line with the new minimum wage. "These steps are designed to streamline the retirement process, making it more efficient and user-centric," she explained.

One significant change, according to Oloworaran, is the removal of the previous cap on lump sum withdrawals, which was limited to 50 per cent of the RSA balance. With this adjustment, retirees who have sufficient funds will be able to access a larger lump sum.

"The revised Programmed Withdrawal Template Version 2 provides retirees with the ability to withdraw a lump sum from their RSA balance, ensuring that the amount left after the withdrawal is enough to procure an annuity or fund a programmed withdrawal that will cover at least 50 per cent of their annual remuneration at retirement," she stated. Oloworaran further emphasised that the new guidelines remove the age limitation on lump sum withdrawals, now allowing retirees aged 65 and above to access their benefits. "This new rule applies to employees retiring under the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) who have not been programmed as of the release date of the revised template," she noted. She added that the guidelines also cater to retirees who opt for either the programmed withdrawal or the Retiree Life Annuity (RLA) option at retirement. The revised guidance also offers a standardised procedure for Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs) to calculate retirement benefits, including lump sums, monthly or quarterly pensions, and arrears. "This new approach takes into account variables such as age, gender, final salary, RSA balance, and adjusted mortality tables, ensuring a fair and accurate calculation of retirement benefits," Oloworaran explained.

Oloworaran also discussed PenCom's commitment to using technology to modernise the pension landscape. "The theme of this workshop, 'Tech-Driven Transformation,' highlights the role of technology in shaping the future of pensions. Technology is a vital tool that is transforming every sector, and the pension industry is no exception," she stated.

According to her, PenCom has embraced this transformation wholeheartedly, with over 10.5 million contributors and pension assets exceeding ń21.9 trillion as of October 2024.

While acknowledging the progress made, Oloworaran also pointed out some ongoing challenges. "Inflation continues to diminish the purchasing power of pensioners, and we are actively seeking innovative solutions to counteract this," she noted.

Additionally, she highlighted the issue of delays in the payment of accrued rights, a problem that PenCom is working to resolve with the federal government. "Recently, ń44 billion was allocated in the 2024 budget to settle accrued pension rights for retirees from March to September 2023," Oloworaran revealed. "We are committed to working with the government to ensure retirees receive their benefits without delay or undue stress," she added.

Reflecting on PenCom's achievements, Oloworaran noted that her team has focused on strengthening compliance, improving service delivery, diversifying pension assets, and expanding pension coverage to include more Nigerians, particularly those in the informal sector. "We are especially passionate about the micro-pension initiative. It's about ensuring no one is left behind, regardless of their income level," she explained.


L-R: Joseph Amenaghawon, strategy and growth adviser, BudgIT; Oludamilola Onemano, gender and research analyst, BudgIT; Gabriel Okeowo, country director, BudgIT; Tinuola Akinbolagbe, MD/CEO, Private Sector Health Alliance of Nigeria (PSHAN); Muyiwa Olowoporoku, head, memberships and partnerships, PSHAN; and Rukayyat Sadiq, focal lead, ADHFP, at the memorandum of understanding Signing ceremony between PSHAN and BudgIT held, at PSHAN's head office, in Lagos recently.

She further emphasised the role of technology in driving this initiative, from mobile enrollment to real-time account management and benefits administration. "We plan to leverage technology to scale up the micro-pension plan and reach even more Nigerians," she affirmed.

In addition to the micro-pension initiative, PenCom has introduced several other technological advancements. "In October, we launched the e-Application Portal for Pension Clearance Certificates (PCC), replacing the previous manual process. Since its launch, over 38,000 PCCs have been issued, significantly enhancing compliance and streamlining business operations," she said.

Furthermore, the Pension Industry Shared Service Initiative, currently in the advanced stages of implementation, aims to digitise pension contributions and remittances, ensuring seamless processing and reducing discrepancies in contribution records.

Oloworaran further stressed the human impact of PenCom's initiatives. "What excites me most about our work is the ability to transform lives," she said, adding "Every time I meet a pensioner living comfortably because of the contributions made during their working years, it reaffirms why we do this. Similarly, hearing from young entrepreneurs or artisans who have signed up for the micro-pension scheme strengthens my belief that we are headed in the right direction."

# Bboxx,Radiant Yacu launch affordable EV insurance for 130,000 motorbike riders

BBOXX, AN INNOVATIVE DATA-DRIVEN platform, has partnered with Radiant Yacu, a leading insurance provider, to introduce Bboxx Protect, a game-changing microinsurance product designed to offer affordable, comprehensive coverage for electric motorbike (EV) riders in Rwanda.

This initiative targets 130,000 motorbike riders across the country and aims to alleviate the financial challenges associated with transitioning from traditional internal combustion engine bikes to electric vehicles, while ensuring crucial protection for motorbike owners.

Bboxx Protect stands out due to its affordability, with a pay-as-you-go (PAYGo) model that reduces insurance premiums by more than 40 per cent compared to the market average. This makes it an ideal option for motorbike owners, many of whom previously only had access to basic third-party coverage. According to Bboxx, the product can save riders up to 44 per cent annually on insurance costs, enabling them to invest in other essential aspects of their lives, such as family welfare and household needs.

The product provides exclusive coverage for Bboxx Ride customers and includes protection against material damage, fire, third-party liabilities, life insurance, and total permanent disability. While the initial rollout targets 1,500 riders, the long-term goal is to expand coverage to 130,000 motorbike riders across Rwanda who are currently relying on basic third-party insurance.

Alongside offering affordable insurance, Bboxx noted that the Bboxx Protect introduces a cutting-edge feature: smart data monitoring. By leveraging technology to predict and prevent road accidents, this feature aims to reduce accident rates, offering riders a safer and more reliable experience.This data-driven approach not only benefits the riders but also allows insurers to better manage risks through real-time insights.

The partnership with Radiant Yacu brings crucial expertise in the management and implementation of microinsurance solutions. As the underwriter of Bboxx Protect, Radiant Yacu will play a pivotal role in the distribution and support of the product, locally known as Bboxx Ingoboka. The company also highlighted that this collaboration is a significant step in addressing Rwanda's low insurance penetration, which currently stands at less than 2 per cent.

Anthony Osijo, CEO of Bboxx, emphasised the company's strengthened commitment to its markets with the introduction of Bboxx Protect.

He stated, "With the launch of Bboxx Protect, we are reinforcing our dedication to existing markets while ensuring affordable and comprehensive insurance for motorbike riders, a group that has long been overlooked."

According to Osijo, "By reducing financial risks and providing enhanced security, we are empowering thousands to safeguard their livelihoods, while contributing to a cleaner and more sustainable future."

Ovia K. Tuhairwe, CEO of Radiant Yacu, highlighted the significance of their strategic partnership with Bboxx, noting, "Through our collaboration, we are introducing a groundbreaking microinsurance solution that equips motorbike riders with the financial protection they need as they transition to electric vehicles. This affordable, tailored insurance not only fosters a safer, greener economy, but also tackles Rwanda's low insurance penetration. Our partnership will increase accessibility to insurance for underserved communities, drive financial inclusion, and contribute to long-term economic growth across the country."

STRATEGY

# The Power of AI to Shape Negotiations

**Horacio Falcao**

*Professor of Management Practice of Decision Sciences*

HOW TO HARNESS THE vast potential of AI to enhance negotiation outcomes – while navigating its challenges.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could outsource the complex, laborious and often emotionally intense process of negotiating to technology? Until recently, the idea of merging negotiation and AI was but a dream. However, the launch of more sophisticated AI systems has raised the bar for how negotiations could evolve and how we approach the process.

Negotiation has traditionally been seen by many as an art – an intensely human-centric task that requires mixing collaborative and competitive moves to overcome complexity, information asymmetry and suspicion to arrive at an acceptable outcome. Only in the past decades has it evolved into a science focused on codifying a systematic way of problem-solving to achieve success.

The recent interplay between AI and negotiation marks a paradigm shift in the latter. Today, agents powered by large language models (LLMs) emulate human behaviour based on social science techniques, while other AI tools draw on economics and game theory methods. As the technology advances, it is helpful to anticipate how it could shape negotiation strategies, alongside the possible risks involved.

**Assistance vs. automation**

In an article published in the Journal of Strategic Contracting and Negotiation, I explore the evolving interplay between negotiation and various AI technologies. Broadly speaking, there are three main ways in which AI can be used to provide more tailored support for negotiations: assistance, semi-automation (the AI agent only closes the deal after final consultation with a human negotiator) and automation (the AI agent closes the deal without final consultation with a human negotiator).

**Assistance**

Generic LLMs like ChatGPT, BERT and LaMDA can be used during the preparation stage or act as negotiation assistants. They can gather relevant market information, provide advice on best practices, act as a sparring partner in role-playing scenarios, and so on.

These tools have significantly lowered the preparation costs of obtaining relevant information, learning and adopting essential advice and assembling a robust strategy. When employed as a negotiation preparation assistant, generic LLMs can increase the average quality of the output at a fraction of the time and cost. However, at present, the advice can be generic, the information can be wrong and the role plays are still glitchy. Future LLMs are expected to fix these weaknesses.

**Semi-automation and automation**

Many negotiators lack the necessary expertise to leverage AI beyond the assistance level. That said, the technology can be used in a semi-automated or automated capacity to drastically reduce decision costs and help negotiators evaluate the variables and rules to reach an ideal outcome.

The adoption of AI-supported negotiation systems by corporations can result in competitive advantage, short-term gains and an early learning curve. This requires investing time and money to change existing processes and systems. It could therefore take some time before we see a marked shift towards semi-automated or automated negotiation agents.

**The possibilities of AI**

So, what does AI bring to the negotiation team? In a nutshell, it has the potential to compensate for human shortcomings, provide machine-efficiency advantages and reinvent how we negotiate.

Human negotiators are limited by emotions, cognitive biases and ignorance over best practices, all of which can hinder our ability to craft and agree to optimal solutions. While AI systems trained on historical data can also develop biases, these can be reduced or eradicated more easily than with humans. Indeed, LLMs have an easier time remaining rational and sticking to best practices, as they don't experience emotions (although they can mimic them).

Negotiations today are seldom recorded, leaving us ignorant over what took place – including potential unethical or illegal practices. Using AI could increase the traceability and transparency of the process and allow for audits and learning loops. This can help organisations improve negotiation skills, outcomes, fairness and accountability.

At the moment, those employing AI in negotiations are using it to help them negotiate better, but the processes are essentially the same. An exciting opportunity would be using AI to rethink or redesign how we negotiate. For instance, AI can handle so much data at once that either side can share their interests and preferences in an AI "black box" or mediator, where neither party learns the limits or secrets of the other. AI can use the huge volume of information to produce optimal solutions that humans are unlikely to craft on their own via standard negotiation practices.

The complexity of negotiating too many issues at once can be cognitively overwhelming for humans, which reduces or caps value creation. But with AI's vast computational ability, negotiations could juggle an enormous number of issues simultaneously to identify trade-offs and find optimal solutions quickly – and with fewer communication or relationship risks.

What's more, AI may have an easier time sticking with best practices, such as tit-for-tat moves. It can start positively (as it does not feel fear), reciprocate negative moves (not to punish or escalate, but to teach the counterparty) and forgive and return to collaboration in response to a positive move (as it does not feel the need for revenge or retribution). AI can also resist bias exploitation, power moves or manipulation, which could make it a great negotiator against win-lose tactics.

**Challenges and pitfalls**

Despite these opportunities, there are kinks in the emerging AI and negotiation partnership. For starters, AI-automated negotiations are currently limited to small-value, few-issue, repetitive and long-tail negotiations. This is to contain the losses and risks from AI glitches and the inability to automate some essential parts of more complex processes, such as trust-building. At the moment, LLMs are still confined to an assistance or training role.

Additionally, as automated negotiations become commonplace, some companies or individuals may be incentivised to discover, hack and exploit the virtual agents' rules, decision trees, patterns or weaknesses. Semi-automated processes, or those that put the final decision in the hands of human negotiators, may prevent such exploitation, though at the cost of efficiency.

Another hurdle may be automated agents created to intentionally negotiate using win-lose strategies or to exploit collaborative agents and humans. Currently, most designers of automated or semi-automated agents claim to promote value creation and optimisation to increase gains for all parties. Unfortunately, such environments could invite exploitation. Companies claiming, factually or otherwise, the superiority of their agents can become a tempting proposition for powerful clients who can impose their choice of agents on their smaller counterparts.

Even if not deliberate, AI-powered negotiation agents are likely to develop biases and create unfair deals or unethical interactions, especially when trained to be purely utilitarian. It's therefore necessary to instil ethical, legal and optimisation principles in upcoming AI algorithms to avoid the negative consequences of AI biases.

AI-powered agents can also hallucinate or be too sensitive. For instance, an agent may stop the conversation at the slightest (mis)perception of an ethical violation. Or, it can walk away after receiving a threat, an insult or even just a persistent request it had denied once before. Ending negotiations at the slightest infraction or disagreement might be necessary for compliance purposes and could raise the ethical bar for future negotiations. However, in the short term, it may significantly reduce the number of closed deals, which is a luxury some organisations cannot afford.

The expansion of AI's role in negotiations also brings legal concerns like data privacy, confidentiality and compliance. For example, disclosing confidential details information in a negotiation could be a common practice to build trust or untangle impasses. However, in a semi-automated or automated negotiation, confidential information captured risks being divulged, leveraged or exploited at another time without consent.

Another legal concern revolves around liability for AI-issued decisions or AI misbehaviour. The technology can make mistakes that result in unacceptable or illegal behaviours or extremely unprofitable outcomes. In such cases, can an individual sue a company for being discriminated against? If an unprofitable deal is closed by a company's AI, can it blame the AI's mistake to excuse itself from performing its obligation? Who is responsible for such errors?

In short, AI negotiation agents still have several shortcomings and face significant challenges – but none seem unsurmountable. The reliability of technology-based solutions tends to increase with time, as problems are continuously identified and addressed to improve the system. Eventually, the balance will likely tilt towards the success of automated and semi-automated processes, even if they may not fully substitute human-to-human negotiations.

**The road ahead**

AI has already begun to dramatically reshape the negotiation landscape. Although the technology could overcome human limitations to enhance negotiation outcomes, it also introduces challenges related to biases, strategy, trust, ethics, reputation and the adaptation of human-centred negotiation approaches.

As the technology continues to evolve, researchers, practitioners and developers need to think about how to navigate these challenges carefully. The integration of AI into negotiation processes requires a balanced approach to harness its advantages while mitigating risks, all while ensuring that the technology is beneficial, ethical and effective. If this is achieved, this exciting collaboration will continue to blossom.

RESPONSIBILITY

**THOMAS KEUSCH**

*Assistant Professor of Accounting and Control*


# How NGO Activism Can Move the Dial for Sustainability

BEYOND MAKING "NOISE", NGOs are making real impact by influencing companies to act more responsibly.

Amid pressure to improve their environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance, some companies have made misleading or false claims about their actions or ambitions. In 2023, TotalEnergies made misleading claims related to its "climate-neutral" heating oil. As a result, it had to revise its advertising.

The turnaround by the oil company was triggered by Climate Action Germany. For decades, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have stepped up to "police" companies before other stakeholders did. These activists have been scrutinising companies for signs of greenwashing or any form of environmental and social-washing (E&S-washing). Their campaigns have targeted large, visible companies in industries from fashion to food, and oil and gas.

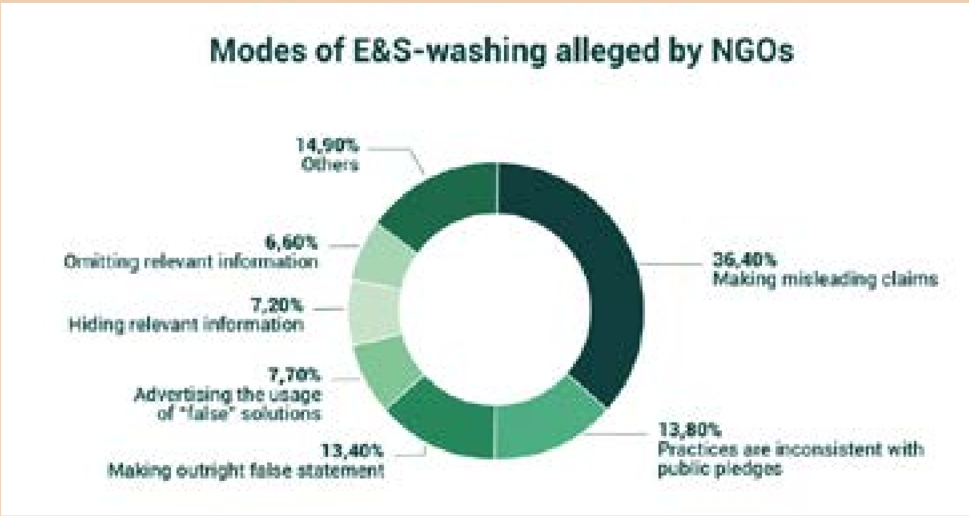
In fact, in a global survey among sustainability experts, NGOs emerge as the single greatest contributor to sustainable development over the past decades, ahead of financial institutions, institutional investors or governments. However, the impact of their work, campaigns and lobbying is not well understood.

**Unearthing untruths**

Thanks to the efforts of NGOs over the years, they have produced a wealth of insights, including into what ESG topics companies "wash", and how, when and where they do it. These insights were not previously documented, especially since holding errant companies accountable can be challenging and long drawn.

In a study, my co-authors* and I explored the implications of NGO actions on companies. We examined a global sample of over 1,200 allegations by 329 NGOs against 287 publicly listed firms. These allegations targeted misleading or false corporate claims relating to E&S issues. In the context of our research, "E&S-washing" refers to misrepresentation of corporate E&S-related risks, practices and impacts to make them appear more favourable than they are.

For example, an energy firm may claim to focus on renewable resources but invests heavily in oil and gas exploration. In other cases, firms' practices were inconsistent with public pledges or they made outright false statements, among other issues (See ways of E&S-washing in figure below).




In terms of the E&S issues they "wash", the most frequently identified claims related to firms' impacts on climate change (30 percent of all allegations), consumer health benefits (22 percent), and waste handling (11 percent). Other allegations related to biodiversity, animal welfare, as well as employee rights and safety.

Further, we found that E&S-washing occurred most on product labels or packaging (25.3 percent of allegations), advertising (23.1 percent) and public relations campaigns (13.3 percent). The fact that E&S-washing was less prevalent in sustainability reports, financial filings and presentations pointed to the need for scrutiny beyond investor-focused communication channels.

Importantly, about 42 percent of alleged E&S-washing were targeted at consumers, which is cause for concern. Consumers act as a critical market mechanism, incentivising firms to improve their ESG performance by switching from less to more sustainable products. But this mechanism fails if consumers act on misrepresented information.

**Real impact of NGO campaigns**

To understand the real impact of NGO campaigns, we examined stock market, media and corporate reactions to E&S-washing allegations. We observed an average 0.34 percent decline in stock returns within three days of an allegation. This market reaction was significantly more pronounced when allegations were associated with financially material aspects of the business that can affect future revenues, costs or risks.

Notably, companies with higher ownership by institutional investors – who are subject to stewardship codes – experienced a greater fall. This is not surprising, since these codes are meant to enhance corporate sustainability by making institutional investors more attentive to E&S issues in their portfolio firms.

The fall in value may reflect investors' concerns over future reputational and legal costs or actions by regulators. Experience shows that these are valid concerns; E&S-washing and violating sustainability laws have proven to be expensive. Some of the biggest fines have been imposed on Volkswagen (US$34 billion) and Toyota (US$150 million), while Lululemon is facing a class action lawsuit for allegedly misleading consumers with its "Be Planet" campaign.

The media, on the other hand, responded with an increase in news coverage around these allegations. The number of negative E&S news articles over the three-day window after an allegation increased by 14.6 percent (compared to the three days before). The effect was greater when the issue raised was linked to a financially material topic. However, companies tended not to respond to the media, reacting directly to the press only in 10 percent of the cases. Even when they did, they were less likely to respond in a conceding manner to accusations over material E&S dimensions.

The more important question is whether E&S allegations result in real change in the companies' operations. To shed light on this, we examined if climate-washing allegations led to companies reducing their Scope 1 carbon emissions. We found that emissions fell by 5 to 7 percentage points (compared to companies not facing allegations). More significant reductions were seen in companies with high ownership by investors subject to stewardship codes. Specifically, the carbon emissions of companies with high stewardship ownership (90 percent) fell by 5.8 to 7.6 percent after climate-washing allegations.

This suggests that NGOs are catalysts that influence investors to engage portfolio firms – or even divest – in response to their allegations.

**Size and influence matters**

It emerged in our study that size and influence are important on two dimensions. First, E&S allegations tended to fall on companies that are larger, more valuable, more visible, receive more press coverage and are consumer-facing. As expected, those with greater environmental impact, such as oil and gas companies, were common targets of NGO allegations.

At the same time, the outcomes of campaigns against errant companies were affected by the size and influence of the accusing NGOs, often linked to their geographic reach and international operations. Specifically, allegations by more influential NGOs led to a bigger fall in stock returns of the companies in question. These companies were also more likely to issue a corporate press response in a conceding way.

Moreover, the influence of NGOs could extend to the regulatory sphere when they call on government authorities, such as advertising regulators and competition authorities, to take punitive action.

**Catalyst for sustainable impact**

Naturally, companies are driven to make profits and increase shareholder value. But if companies do so at the expense of society and the environment, they may find themselves in the crosshairs of NGOs. Nevertheless, NGOs are a necessary ingredient to bring about positive change by catalysing engagement between the company, investors and other stakeholders.

Corporate boards are seeing the need to manage pressure exerted by NGOs and paying attention to their concerns and allegations against the companies they oversee. To avoid allegations, directors are incentivised to improve corporate practices and may even engage NGOs proactively. One example of active engagement is Nike working with Greenpeace to create a new policy to ensure that leather suppliers do not source leather from cattle raised in the Amazon biome.

In addition, NGOs can complement regulatory efforts by providing invaluable insights. Since NGOs scrutinise a broader range of disclosure outlets than regulators and standard setters do, financial market regulators in Europe are using NGO reports to detect corporate greenwashing. In addition, the European Security Market Authority is relying on NGO campaigns to inform government regulations.

Our results show that scrutiny by NGOs has real effects on stock prices, media reactions and corporate E&S practices. Importantly, NGOs are instrumental in channelling funds to companies that bring about the desired environmental and societal impact. In the belief that businesses will "follow the money", ESG investing has been the financial markets' answer to steer companies towards more responsible operations. But alone, it is not enough.

The investors, employees and customers of today are increasingly concerned about the ESG characteristics of the companies they invest in, work for and transact with. And so, it is important that NGOs, as part of the ecosystem, continue to play a role in steering companies towards not only greater accountability, but also transparency.

# Impact vs. Time: A Leader's Guide to Slow Productivity

***In this Nano Tool for Leaders, author and professor Cal Newport offers practical guidance on how to slow down in order to enhance your productivity.***

**Cal Newport**

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS® — a collaboration between Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management — are fast, effective tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes, with the potential to significantly impact your success and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

**Goal**

Cut the clutter to focus on core priorities using proven strategies.

**Nano Tool**

We all know them: bosses or co-workers who overload themselves, believing that good work requires faster responses to email and chats, more meetings, more tasks, and more hours. They cram professional effort into every corner of their lives and embrace busyness as a badge of pride, hoping it adds up to something meaningful. But research shows those efforts not only don't equate with enhanced job performance — they're also detrimental to our health and our relationships.*

What's needed is a transformation of our modern understanding of professional accomplishment. We need to reject the badge, seeing overload as an obstacle to producing great results rather than an effective approach. An alternative to the assumptions driving our current exhaustion is the philosophy of Slow Productivity, which can apply to anyone who has a reasonable degree of autonomy in their job. The following Action Steps can guide you in embracing the first principle of Slow Productivity: reducing your commitments to more fully embrace and advance a smaller number of important projects.

**Action Steps**

By paring down obligations, leaders can concentrate their energy and resources on key priorities and improve decision making, which leads to more impactful and higher-quality outcomes. Research shows you're more likely to succeed if you set intentional limits on three levels: missions, which are your big, ongoing goals; projects, which are the milestones on the way to those goals; and daily goals, which are what you put on your to-do list on any given day.

**1. Limit missions**

One or two main objectives that direct your professional life is ideal; five or more are hard to maintain. If you must have more than two, focus on the second and third action steps to keep control of your workload.

**2. Limit projects**

Maintain clarity and control over your schedule. If someone asks you to work on a project, determine how much time it would take and then schedule it on your calendar. If you can't find the time on your calendar, you don't have the time to do it. Decline, or cancel something else to make time for it. And limit the time you have available for scheduling — you don't want to end up with a packed calendar. Saying no is easier when you have hard evidence that it's the only reasonable answer.

**3. Limit daily goals**

Use these three techniques to gain control of your workdays:

Make other people work more by creating a Reverse Task List: on a shared document, list the major categories of tasks you tackle in your job. When someone asks you to take on some small obligation, direct them to add it to the task list themselves with all of the information you need to complete the task. By clearly communicating the specifics of your current workload, you demonstrate the need for exact task descriptions, and a clearly overstuffed list may deter people from adding to it.

Avoid "task engines": choose projects based on how many tasks they require to complete, not just how much overall time it takes.

Put repeat tasks on autopilot by creating rituals: for example, invoicing every Monday morning at the coffee shop, completing evaluations on Fridays from home, or discussing current projects with coworkers during scheduled office hours.

**How Leaders Use It**

Warren Buffett's famous quip, "The difference between successful people and really successful people is that really successful people say no to almost everything," takes on new meaning in light of Slow Productivity. His 5/25 Rule pares down missions in three steps: write a list of your top 25 career goals, circle the five most important goals, and avoid the remaining 20 at all costs (or at least until the top five are achieved). "You've gotta keep control of your time and you can't unless you say no. You can't let people set your agenda in life," explained Buffett.

Benjamin Franklin embraced the tenets of Slow Productivity later in his career. Seeking to train a manager to open a third printing-press franchise, he hired a printing assistant who then fell ill. During his recovery, the assistant's impressive work led Franklin to scrap the franchise plans and keep him as foreman. The printing business became more profitable, giving the notoriously hard-working Franklin the ability to turn his attention to more significant projects, including his work on electricity. He wrote at the time, "I am settling my old accounts and hope soon to be quite a master of my own time."

Psychologist Megan Rogers, an associate professor at Texas State University, uses the autopilot technique by working on goals and projects on specific days (or portions of days). "It's been extremely helpful to me. I try to schedule student mentorship meetings back-to-back on a couple of days, teaching tasks on a different day, and reserve one full day for deep research work (generally focused on one or two papers) without any interruptions. I'm a big advocate of minimizing task-switching as much as possible."

**Contributor to This Nano Tool**

Cal Newport, PhD, professor of computer science at Georgetown University. His academic research focuses on distributed algorithms and challenging network scenarios. Newport has authored several influential books including his latest, Slow Productivity: The Lost Art of Accomplishment without Burnout (Portfolio/Penguin, 2024), on which this Nano Tool is based.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

# Malcolm Gladwell on Diversity, Success, and Changing His Mind

*At a recent Authors@Wharton event, Wharton's Adam Grant spoke with Malcolm Gladwell about his latest bestseller, 'Revenge of the Tipping Point.'*

**ADAM GRANT**

*The Saul P. Steinberg Professor of Management, Professor of Psychology*

MALCOLM GLADWELL'S seventh bestseller, Revenge of the Tipping Point, wasn't supposed to be a full volume of new material.

His publisher wanted to reissue his breakthrough debut, The Tipping Point, on its 25th anniversary, so Gladwell was tasked with writing an updated prologue. But for a storyteller who's considered one of the world's most influential thinkers, a few pages of prose seemed inadequate to capture all the changes of the last quarter-century. The first book explored the science behind viral trends in business, marketing, and behavior; the second reframes those lessons through the lens of social engineering.

"There were things about COVID, and particularly the opioid crisis, that I really, really wanted to talk about, and I couldn't see a way to fit those two things in a simple revise of the original book," he said to Wharton management professor Adam Grant during an interview for the lecture series, Authors@Wharton.

Grant, who is good friends with Gladwell, ribbed him about revisiting the past. A self-described "fervent disbeliever" in nonfiction sequels, Grant said Gladwell's book is so provocative that it changed his mind.

"No one should write about the same topic twice. You're just going to end up being the musician that is perpetually stuck singing your first great hit over and over. You made me rethink that," Grant said.

Easy laughter punctuated much of their nearly 80 minutes on stage together, as Gladwell shared his thoughts on a wide range of topics he explores in the new book, including the art of admitting failure.

A chapter in the original book focuses on Bernie Goetz, a white man who shot four Black men as they approached him on a New York City subway in 1984. The case sparked intense debate about crime and race in America. Gladwell said he reevaluated his writing after a casual conversation earlier this year with Dr. Eugenia South, a Penn physician and professor of emergency medicine. She noted that he spent most of his words on Goetz and only two sentences about the young men who were shot, evidence that he "bought into the narrative" of white people as victims and Black people as criminals. Gladwell said her criticism was especially devastating because he is biracial, the son of a Black Jamaican mother and a white English father.

"I want to find every copy of The Tipping Point and just rip out that chapter. It's mortifying. But it doesn't diminish me as a person," he said. "She's offering me an opportunity to redeem myself by pointing out what I did wrong."

Gladwell's mea culpa intrigued Grant, an organizational psychologist whose research includes rethinking assumptions. "You go to unusual lengths to make your embarrassments public. You don't have to tell the whole world. Why this impulse?" he asked.

Gladwell said he learned intellectual humility from his father, a math professor who relished the opportunity to reconsider his position when given new information. Besides, Gladwell said, "The fastest way to make something go away is to say, "I was wrong.""

Below are some additional highlights from the conversation:

**On the Benefits of Diversity**

Gladwell cited a study about an American town with a higher-than-average rate of teen suicide. The town seemed idyllic — families were financially comfortable and the schools were high-performing. But Gladwell said the study identified the "monoculture" of the community as the root of the problem. Teens who didn't fit into the narrow definition of success didn't have alternative groups to seek out and find a sense of belonging.

"Parents moved to that community because they thought they were leaving these kinds of social problems behind, and instead they created an even bigger one," Gladwell said, adding that the finding poses an interesting question about how a lack of diversity may affect people in other settings.

Grant put the question in a business context, saying that studies on startups show that when founders emphasize a culture fit when hiring new employees, the business is less likely to fail at first. But as the company grows, that monoculture no longer works. "Once you become a bigger organization, you end up too homogenous, and you have a lot of groupthink, and it becomes harder to change and innovate," Grant said.

Gladwell said he's come to believe in quotas because diversity's strength is in numbers.

"It's not just about having people who are different," he said. "It's about having people who are different in sufficient numbers so that they can be themselves, and they can change the culture of the group that they belong to."

**On the Joys of Mediocrity**

Gladwell praised the utility of sports for teaching traits such as discipline and collaboration. But he doesn't think people need to be good at them to reap the rewards. He mentioned California Institute of Technology, where athletes need not be elite to join the school's track team.

"They are so slow, it's hilarious. But they're right," he said. "If you're a slow-miler, you get all the benefits of being a runner that you get if you're a good miler. This fixation with being good at it is just preposterous."

**On Accepting Less Success**

Reading questions from the audience, Grant asked Gladwell how a high-achiever can stop identifying with their own accomplishments. The idea prompted some reflection about age from Gladwell, who is 61.

"This is the question you confront when you are out of your prime. There's going to be a point where you're not going to have the same success you had when you were younger, and you have to figure out how you're going to deal with that," he said. "I think it's the central question of getting old."

**On Changing His Mind**

Gladwell produces and hosts Revisionist History, a podcast that takes a second look at something from the past to determine if it was misunderstood. Grant asked him if any topic is off-limits from reconsideration.

"Why would you take a stand like that? I don't think there's anything I wouldn't change my mind about," Gladwell said.

Grant replied: "I don't want to call you formulaic or predictable, but I did write down 'no' as your expected answer."

Then Gladwell, who recently became a father for the first time, quickly revised his answer.

"I will never change my mind about the belief that my daughters are cute. They're cute. They'll always be cute," he said.

Quoted Insurers

| Security | P/close | Open | High | Low | Close | %Change | Volume | Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AIICO | 1.13 | 1.13 | 1.15 | 1.1 | 1.12 | 0.88 | 8,279,352 | 9,303,879.55 |
| CORNERST | 2.11 | 2.11 | 2.32 | 2.11 | 2.32 | 9.95 | 2,423,416 | 5,510,742.85 |
| LINKASSURE | 0.95 | 0.95 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5.26 | 605,923 | 601,058.77 |
| MANSARD | 5.41 | 5.41 | 5.46 | 5.36 | 5.46 | 0.92 | 1,719,208 | 9,345,573.53 |
| NEM | 7.7 | 7.7 | - | - | 7.7 | 0 | 136,486 | 1,061,142.05 |
| SUNNUASSUR | 1.18 | 1.18 | - | - | 1.18 | 0 | 111,164 | 140,714.92 |

...INSURANCE ...PENSION ...BROKER ...RISK MGT ...SPECIALTY ...COMPANY ...PEOPLE ...REGULATION

**Stories by Joy Agwunobi**

# Insurance sector faces rising cyber threats, coronation advocates stronger defenses

From Left: Chairperson, Women Group, Lagos Chamber of Commercial and Industry, (LCCI), Mrs Olufunmilayo Oduwaye; Deputy Manager, Lekki Free Trade Development Company (LFTDC), Mrs Bolatito Ajibade and Chairperson, Small Medium Enterprise (SME) Group, Mrs Bankole Anjela during the presentation of a plaque to Mrs Bolatito Ajibade during the visit recently

THE DIGITAL AGE has brought numerous conveniences to the insurance sector, transforming customer interactions and operational efficiencies.

However, this transformation has also unveiled a darker side, exposing insurance firms to unprecedented cybersecurity risks. With a vast database of sensitive financial and personal data, the insurance industry has become a prime target for cybercriminals, whose attacks have grown more sophisticated and relentless.

The risks facing the insurance sector are underscored by a 2023 Nigerian Senate report, which estimated that the country loses $500 million annually to various forms of cybercrime. Additionally, high-profile attacks globally have disrupted operations and compromised data, shining a spotlight on the critical need for enhanced cybersecurity.

Amid this growing threat, Coronation Insurance Plc has highlighted the urgent need for the industry to adopt advanced cybersecurity measures. According to the company, the reliance on digital platforms and technologies, while offering unprecedented opportunities, has also introduced vulnerabilities that require proactive and robust responses.

"Cybersecurity must be at the forefront of every insurance company's strategic agenda," Coronation Insurance stated. The volume and sensitivity of data stored within the industry make it an attractive target for cybercriminals, and the stakes are too high to ignore.

As part of its comprehensive approach to combating cyber threats, Coronation Insurance has implemented several key initiatives to safeguard its operations and client data which includes the establishment of dedicated cybersecurity units responsible for monitoring and responding to potential risks. These teams leverage advanced tools such as Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) systems to detect and neutralise threats in real-time.

Additionally, the company highlighted its focus on regulatory compliance, ensuring adherence to both local and international standards.

The firm also revealed that it has partnered with global technology leaders, including Microsoft, and local cybersecurity experts to fortify its defences. These collaborations enable the company to stay ahead of emerging threats while continuously improving its cybersecurity infrastructure.

To further address the growing threat, Coronation Insurance has also introduced Cyber Liability Insurance policies designed to provide financial and operational protection in the event of an attack. These policies cover areas such as data breaches, business interruptions, and legal liabilities, offering comprehensive support to clients navigating the complexities of cybersecurity incidents.

As digital transformation reshapes the insurance landscape, the industry's resilience will depend on its ability to adapt to emerging threats. Coronation Insurance's call for enhanced standards and its investments in cybersecurity underscores the pivotal role insurers play in securing their operations and preserving client trust.

"The future of the insurance industry hinges on its ability to maintain robust cybersecurity defenses. By prioritising this critical area, we can protect not only our businesses but also the trust and confidence of the customers we serve," the company noted.

## Coronation Insurance empowers communities with education-focused CSR initiatives

CORONATION INSURANCE HAS reinforced its commitment to community development through two significant initiatives aimed at enhancing education and improving local infrastructure.


The company recently donated school supplies to St. George's Boys School in Ikoyi, Lagos, and renovated the Transforming Lives and Communities Initiative (TLCI) Library in Ajegunle. These efforts, part of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, reflect its ongoing dedication to community upliftment and education.

At St. George's Boys School, an all-boys primary institution in Ikoyi, Coronation Insurance contributed to creating a better learning environment for the students. The company's donation included new school uniforms and sportswear, which not only uplifted the students' spirits but also provided financial relief to their families.

In addition, teachers were acknowledged for their dedication to shaping the future of the children, with gifts presented to recognise their hard work and commitment.

During the handover ceremony, a Coronation Insurance representative emphasised the company's objective of fostering stronger communities through education, stating, "Our aim is to make a meaningful impact on the lives of students and teachers in our host communities. This is more than just a donation; it is an investment in the future and in community cohesion."

Beyond material aid, Coronation Insurance's initiative also served as a platform for deeper community engagement and collaboration. The company's actions underscore its belief in education as a key driver of national development and social change.

In Ajegunle, Coronation extended its CSR efforts by supporting the renovation of the TLCI Library, a crucial resource for promoting literacy and learning in the community. The renovation included the installation of new reading chairs, tables, and bookshelves, all designed to create an inviting space for children to read and learn. The library upgrade aims to foster a love for reading, offer a safe space away from the dangers of street life, and promote personal development.

A representative from Coronation explained, "We believe in the power of education to empower communities. The TLCI Library is a symbol of hope in Ajegunle, and we are proud to contribute to its transformation."

The community's response to the revamped library has been overwhelmingly positive, with students expressing excitement about the new space. One young library user shared, "This library feels like a new world for us. It motivates us to focus and dream bigger."

Both initiatives exemplify Coronation Insurance's strategic approach to CSR, demonstrating how the company is actively addressing societal needs through sustainable investments in education and community development. These projects not only aim to brighten the future of young people but also strengthen the company's relationship with the communities it serves.

The principal of St. George's Boys School expressed heartfelt thanks for the donations, saying, "We are incredibly grateful to Coronation Insurance for their generosity. These contributions will make a huge difference in the learning experience for our students." Likewise, representatives of the TLCI Library praised the renovation as a transformative step in promoting literacy in Ajegunle.

Coronation Insurance remains dedicated to driving positive change through its education-centered CSR initiatives, firmly believing that learning plays a vital role in building a stronger, more prosperous nation. These projects represent not just a milestone for the company, but a continued promise to empower future generations and strengthen communities.

## ATIDI, ASF team up to boost investment, mitigate risks in Africa

AFRICAN TRADE AND INVESTMENT Development Insurance (ATIDI), a prominent risk underwriting organisation created by African nations to protect trade and investment activities across the continent, has entered into a strategic agreement with the African Solidarity Fund (ASF), a pan-African financial body, to foster economic development and reduce the risks associated with trade and investment in Africa.

The agreement, signed during the Africa Investment Forum 2024 (AIF 2024) in Rabat, Morocco, lays the groundwork for joint efforts in supporting infrastructure and economic development projects in countries that are members of both institutions, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, and Togo. It also offers protection for investors, corporations, and lenders looking to invest in the continent.

Key objectives of this collaboration include promoting the risk mitigation solutions offered by both organisations for commercial and investment activities; advancing the development of renewable energy and infrastructure within the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA); and enhancing professional skills while improving the business climate in Africa.

This agreement marks a significant milestone for both organisations, underscoring their commitment to working together to boost intra-African trade, attract investment in high-impact projects, and foster economic growth across the continent.

Abdourahmane Diallo, ASF's Managing Director, highlighted that the partnership represents an important step toward sustainable development in Africa. "By joining forces, we aim to stimulate investment and foster economic growth across Africa, ensuring a secure environment for investors," Diallo stated.

Manuel Moses, CEO of ATIDI, emphasised that the agreement opens doors for the company to expand its range of financial solutions, which are tailored to address Africa's economic challenges, particularly in mitigating the risks that often deter trade and investment.

VETIVA CAPITAL MANAGEMENT LIMITED

## MARKET COMMENTARY FOR THE WEEK ENDED 20TH DECEMBER, 2024

# Focus for the week: FY'25 Agriculture Outlook - Walking a fine line

**SUPPLY DYNAMICS stoke CPO prices**

In 2024, global palm oil production faced considerable challenges, primarily due to adverse climatic conditions driven by the El Niño weather phenomenon. This event, which persisted through much of the year, brought unusually dry weather to key producing regions, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, leading to an estimated 10-15% yield decline. Furthermore, the prolonged drought through the third quarter of 2024 exacerbated the situation as rainfall levels remained below average, leading to lower harvests and tighter supplies, which supported higher prices. Malaysia's production was further constrained by persistent labour shortages, a lingering issue from prior years, compounding the supply challenges faced by the industry. On the demand side, demand for palm oil remained robust, as the growing utilization of palm oil in biofuel production played a pivotal role in shaping market trends. In Southeast Asia, biodiesel programs such as Indonesia's B35 mandate underpinned domestic demand, effectively stabilizing prices despite production constraints.

In international markets, palm oil consumption remained robust. India and China, the largest global importers, maintained steady import levels, and collectively purchased over 20 million metric tons in 2024, relying heavily on palm oil for both food and industrial uses. However, stricter deforestation policies in the European Union moderated demand, redirecting focus toward sustainably sourced palm oil.

India's policies also had a significant impact. In an effort to reduce reliance on imported edible oils and protect its domestic refining industry, the Indian government raised import duties on crude and refined palm oil to 27.5% and 35.75%, respectively, in September 2024. That said, palm oil prices surged in 2024, rising by 50% year-to-date, supported by resilient demand from major importers and constrained supply from top producers.

**A double-sided coin for domestic players**

In 2024, local crude palm oil (CPO) prices remained buoyant, rising by 13% to ₦1,359.97/kg in major markets, supported by elevated global CPO prices.

This trend is expected to persist in 2025, creating upside potential for domestic CPO producers. The sustained increase in global prices, driven by lower production from key producing countries like Indonesia and Malaysia due to adverse weather conditions and labour shortages, has strengthened the outlook for the domestic market.

Currency dynamics have further influenced the local CPO market. The significant devaluation of the naira in 2024 has made imported CPO and refined palm oil products less attractive due to higher landing costs. Consequently, this has incentivized greater reliance on local production, supporting price stability and revenue growth for domestic producers

| Indicators | WK CLS | WK OPEN | WTD (%) | YTD (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **EQUITIES** | | | | |
| NGX 30 | 3,726.88 | 3,706.60 | 0.54 | 33.57 |
| NGX All-Share Index | 101,129.09 | 99,377.62 | 1.76 | 35.25 |
| Market Cap (NGN bn) | 17,236.78 | [illegible] | 1.76 | 29.80 |
| **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SECURITIES (%)** | | | | |
| 91-Day T-Bill | 26.37 | 26.17 | 0.78 | 23.46 |
| 182-Day T-Bill | 25.67 | 25.19 | (0.48) | 19.04 |
| 364-Day T-Bill | 26.64 | 26.78 | (0.51) | 16.43 |
| 2-Year FGN Bonds | 20.49 | 20.33 | 0.08 | 6.32 |
| 3-Year FGN Bonds | 23.07 | 20.04 | 3.13 | 7.92 |
| 5-Year FGN Bonds | 21.16 | 18.71 | 7.33 | 7.86 |
| 7-Year FGN Bonds | 21.95 | 21.88 | 0.35 | 6.11 |
| 10-Year FGN Bonds | 18.09 | 18.08 | 0.04 | 2.58 |
| 20-Year FGN Bonds | 17.71 | 17.71 | 0.03 | 3.51 |
| **INTERBANK MARKET RATES (%)** | | | | |
| NIBOR OPR | 31.79 | 32.54 | (0.75) | 16.73 |
| **NGN EXCHANGE RATES (₦)** | | | | |
| USD/NGN | 1541.68 | 1533.00 | (0.57) | (76.19) |
| GBP/NGN | 1942.12 | 1931.58 | (0.57) | (76.04) |
| EUR/NGN | 1618.79 | 1609.66 | (0.57) | (63.20) |
| CNY/NGN | 215.64 | 214.42 | (0.57) | (76.41) |
| ZAR/NGN | 85.33 | 85.85 | (0.57) | (76.61) |
| **USD/NGN FORWARDS** | | | | |
| 1M | 1581.59 | 1580.29 | (0.07) | (62.14) |
| 3M | 1638.84 | 1639.10 | 0.02 | (64.83) |
| 6M | 1723.67 | 1726.75 | 0.15 | (68.30) |
| 1Y | 1855.16 | 1900.86 | 0.30 | (74.33) |

Source: NGX, FMDQ OTC, Bloomberg, Vetiva Research

| SECTOR | INDEX VALUE | WoW Δ | YTD Δ |
|---|---|---|---|
| BANKING | 1,071.20 | 3.33% | 26.55% |
| CONSUMER GOODS | 1,654.73 | 2.92% | 47.58% |
| INDUSTRIAL GOODS | 3,862.47 | -0.86% | 34.35% |
| OIL & GAS | 2,713.30 | 0.99% | 160.12% |
| VETIVA 30 ETF | 35.00 | 0.00% | 23.23% |
| INSURANCE | 829.18 | 8.83% | 22.48% |

Weekly Top 5 Gainers

| Stock | Closing Price (₦) | % Change |
|---|---|---|
| MRS | 180.00 | 36.36% |
| ETERNA | 25.45 | 32.36% |
| HONYFLOUR | 6.05 | 31.32% |
| LIVESTOCK | 4.10 | 30.16% |
| WAPIC | 1.70 | 26.87% |

Weekly Top 5 Decliners

| Stock | Closing Price (₦) | % Change |
|---|---|---|
| JOHNHOLT | 5.00 | -18.67% |
| MULTIVERSE | 4.60 | -18.58% |
| UPL | 2.30 | -16.27% |
| TANTALIZER | 1.60 | -13.04% |
| [illegible] | 25.00 | -8.06% |

Source: Vetiva Research

**What shaped the past week?**

**Equities:** This week, the Nigerian bourse traded on a bullish note, gaining 1.76% w/w to settle at 101,129.09pts. This came off the back of broad-based sectoral gains. At the top was the Insurance sector (+8.83% w/w), followed by the Banking index (+3.235 w/w), then the Consumer Goods space (+2.92% w/w), and lastly, the Oil & Gas index (+0.99% w/w). On the flip side, the Industrial index (-0.86% w/w) was again subdued. Leading the gainers chart for the week was MRS (+36.36% w/w), closely followed by ETERNA (+32.36% w/w) as investors reacted to positive news in the space. Other notable top performers were SUNUASSUR (+22.79% w/w), INTBREW (+20.77% w/w), and ARADEL (+20.73% w/w). On the decliners chart, small cap names such as JOHNHOLT (-18.67% w/w), MULTIVERSE (-18.58% w/w), UPL (-16.27% w/w), and TANTALIZER (-13.04% w/w) topped it.

**Fixed Income:** On Monday, the DMO, through CBN, conducted a Bonds auction. At the auction, the APR-2029 and FEB-2031 notes were reissued, with offers of ₦60 billion each. Total bids surpassed ₦278 billion, but allocation came in at ₦52 billion and ₦159 billion respectively, with stop rates printing at 21.14% (prev: 21.00%) and 22.00% (prev: 22.00%) respectively. This further constrained system liquidity. However, some FAAC inflows were recorded later thus moderating liquidity constraints (Friday: ₦378 billion negative). Following this, OPR moderated by 75bps w/w to 31.79% w/w. At the secondary market, trading sentiments were generally weak albeit with a bearish tilt. Changes were seen as follows – 91-day (+78bps w/w), 182-day (-0.68% w/w), 364-day (-51bps w/w), 2-year (+68bps w/w), 5-year (+733bps w/w), 10-year (+4bps w/w), and 20-year (+3bps w/w).

**Currency:** At the NAFEM, the Naira depreciated by ₦8.68 w/w to close the week at ₦1,541.68 per dollar.

**Domestic Economy:**

The Federal government plans to spend ₦49.7 trillion ($32 billion) and receive ₦34.8 trillion in revenue come 2025. That leaves a deficit of ₦13.1 trillion, or about 3.9% of gross domestic product, which the nation will fund by raising debt in local and international markets. The government's revenue targets are based on an oil price of $75 per barrel and an output of 2.06 million barrels per day. Nigeria's budget deficit may be larger than anticipated due to its lofty assumptions, which could necessitate a supplementary budget launch should revenue assumptions falter. In recent times, Nigeria's revenue outturns have been supported by one-off items such as grants and donations, which cover up the shortfall from main revenue line items. While consensus expectations of lower oil prices could dampen revenue generation efforts, weaker-than-anticipated exchange rate outturns could lift dollar-denominated expenses, such as debt servicing.

**Global:** The U.S. central bank cut interest rates on Wednesday, as expected, but Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said more reductions in borrowing costs now hinge on further progress in lowering stubbornly high inflation. Powell's explicit - and repeated - references to the need for caution from here on jolted Wall Street, sending stocks sharply lower, bond yields higher and leading investors to dial back estimates of how far borrowing costs are likely to fall over the coming year.

Following this, major US indices showed skittish sentiments, The DJIA rose by a meagre 0.04%, to 42,342.24pts, the S&P 500 lost 0.09%, to 5,867.08pts, and the Nasdaq lost 0.10%, to 19,372.77pts. Meanwhile, the dollar index briefly reached a two-year peak of 108.54 on Friday. Over in Europe, stocks suffer worst session for five weeks after Fed outlook, Bank of England holds rates. The pan-European Stoxx 600 index closed 1.51% lower on Thursday, to close at 506.66 points. In the UK, the pound was flat against the dollar at $1.2500 on Friday, after it slipped to a one-month low of $1.2475 earlier in the day. The BoE held its main interest rate unchanged at 4.75% on Thursday but policymakers had become more divided about whether rate cuts were needed to tackle a slowing economy. Also, British retailers reported a weak run-up to the Christmas holidays with sales falling again and businesses worrying about higher costs in 2025. At Friday's close we saw the FTSE 100 lose 0.15% on the day to 8092.85pts. Finally in the APAC region, markets mostly fell on Friday as investors digest inflation data out of Japan, as well as an interest rate decision out of China, amid the backdrop of the Fed's earlier statement. The People's Bank of China held its loan prime rates steady on Friday, leaving the one-year rate unchanged at 3.1% and the five-year rate at 3.6%. In the markets, China's CSI 300 dropped 0.45% to close at 3,927.74pts, Hong Kong's Hang Seng index lost 0.16% to close at 19,720.70pts. Japan's headline inflation came in at 2.9%, higher than the 2.3% seen in October. The, Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 0.29% on Friday and closed at 38,701.90pts, while the broad-based Topix slipped 0.44% and finished at 2,701.99pts. Finally, Australia's S&P/ASX 200 fell 1.24% to close at 8,067pts on Friday, its lowest closing level since September.

**What will shape markets in the coming week?**

**Equities market:** Following another week of bullish momentum, we see the rally filtering into the Christmas week. However, profit taking activities in select gainers is also expected. Overall, we see transaction volumes falling w/w as traders close their books due to the holidays scheduled for next week.

**Fixed Income:** Due to the holidays scheduled for next week as well as the NTBs auction, we expect to see subdued trading activities across the market during the week.

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## MONEY Nuggets

TUNDE OYEDOYIN

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# Assumptions can cost you, dearly!

FOLKS, ASSUMPTION can dent your cash reserves and take money away from your pocket. Little wonder when doing chemistry in secondary school about forty years ago, assumptions were made with defined parameters.

You heard stuff like "temperature and pressure remaining constant," when carrying out experiments or explaining one of those laws. It turned out that those scientists knew what they were talking about.

If you step outside of the laboratory and make assumptions in this digital and capitalist age without equally putting parameters in place as safeguards, your bank balance could be "gone with the wind." The worst part of it is it doesn't matter whether the undefined assumption is made during winter or summer, or whether it's at a restaurant on Old Kent Road or a fanciful cafe in Knightsbridge. The harsh reality is that making assumptions can dip its long hand into your pocket and take more out of the cash you have there.

Even if you're coming from a good cause on a very chilly and windy day, assumption can still cost you as I discovered after taking a hit in the pocket, recently. That was despite heading to another function from a book launch.

Prior to the evening of the first Saturday of this month, yours truly had not given much thought to the subject matter of assumption as it relates to personal finance. Thus, when the Bolt driver that was to ferry me to Hornchurch drove past the Palms Hotel, I wouldn't have assumed he knew what he was doing.

But guess what? After about five minutes of driving past the hotel, he then pulled over inside a fuel station, saying: "We're here". Thinking it was a kind of stunt, yours truly said he had better be real. As it turned out, the driver said he was just following the direction of the sat nav and that was where the thing said I was going. On my side of the equation, I'd assumed he was going to take a back entrance to the hotel. Hence, I kept quiet when he drove past.

Of course, he offered to take me to the hotel, but that meant he had to go quite a distance before finding somewhere to make a U-turn and then begin the journey back. To be honest about it, yours truly thought he just did that out of the goodness of his heart.

I didn't know my pocket was going to take a hit. It wasn't till my eyes caught a glimpse of the update on my credit card statement later that same evening at the Christmas Party that the penny dropped. In fact, the additional charge that Bolt debited to my card was even more than the nearly nine quid that was initially taken for the journey from Romford.

Next time I'm inside a Bolt cab or elsewhere, I won't be making any assumptions. And neither should you!

## Share Price List as @ Friday 20 December, 2024: The Nigerian Stock Exchange

| Company | Previous Close | Open | High | Low | Close | Change | % Change | Volume | Value (N) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABBEYBDS | 2.80 | 2.80 | - | - | 2.80 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 45,814 | 131,759.02 |
| ABCTRANS | 1.15 | 1.15 | 1.24 | 1.24 | 1.24 | 0.09 | 7.83% | 353,281 | 432,655.35 |
| ACADEMY | 3.00 | 3.00 | - | - | 3.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 371,612 | 1,078,819.50 |
| ACCESSCORP | 24.00 | 24.00 | 24.80 | 24.00 | 24.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 23,059,888 | 555,582,432.35 |
| AFRIPRUD | 15.80 | 15.80 | 17.35 | 16.70 | 17.35 | 1.55 | 9.81% | 3,652,298 | 62,594,229.10 |
| AIICO | 1.49 | 1.50 | 1.63 | 1.40 | 1.50 | 0.01 | 0.67% | 21,819,677 | 32,940,209.44 |
| AIRTELAFRI | 2,156.90 | 2,156.90 | - | - | 2,156.90 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 9,095 | 20,920,341.70 |
| ARADEL | 730.40 | 730.40 | 664.00 | 664.00 | 664.00 | -66.40 | -9.09% | 2,996,272 | 1,985,107,526.60 |
| AUSTINLAZ | 1.83 | 1.83 | - | - | 1.83 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 8,125 | 14,060.00 |
| BERGER | 18.00 | 18.00 | - | - | 18.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 94,079 | 1,848,975.60 |
| BETAGLAS | 57.75 | 57.75 | - | - | 57.75 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 45,187 | 2,487,970.50 |
| BUACEMENT | 93.00 | 93.00 | - | - | 93.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 183,902 | 17,100,411.80 |
| BUAFOODS | 394.90 | 394.90 | - | - | 394.90 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 2,131,611 | 649,249,065.90 |
| CADBURY | 21.30 | 21.30 | - | - | 21.30 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 829,863 | 16,401,741.75 |
| CAP | 38.00 | 38.00 | - | - | 38.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 157,937 | 6,139,800.50 |
| CAVERTON | 2.26 | 2.26 | 2.40 | 2.27 | 2.40 | 0.14 | 6.19% | 2,353,901 | 5,487,360.65 |
| CHAMPION | 3.80 | 3.80 | - | - | 3.80 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 81,598 | 312,926.40 |
| CHAMS | 1.99 | 1.99 | 2.02 | 1.92 | 1.93 | -0.06 | -3.02% | 8,167,583 | 16,089,929.04 |
| CILEASING | 3.90 | 3.90 | 3.93 | 3.60 | 3.88 | -0.02 | -0.51% | 5,796,845 | 21,378,074.67 |
| CONOIL | 387.20 | 387.20 | - | - | 387.20 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 46,158 | 16,191,603.40 |
| CORNERST | 3.15 | 3.15 | 3.15 | 3.15 | 3.15 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 380,038 | 1,179,424.05 |
| CUSTODIAN | 14.60 | 14.60 | 15.45 | 15.20 | 15.45 | 0.85 | 5.82% | 1,234,267 | 18,920,338.55 |
| CUTIX | 2.32 | 2.32 | - | - | 2.32 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 2,003,259 | 4,759,229.12 |
| CWG | 6.55 | 6.55 | 6.85 | 6.45 | 6.85 | 0.30 | 4.58% | 6,378,324 | 41,793,698.85 |
| DAARCOMM | 0.59 | 0.59 | 0.62 | 0.55 | 0.62 | 0.03 | 5.08% | 3,142,653 | 1,828,441.94 |
| DANGCEM | 478.80 | 478.80 | - | - | 478.80 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 116,493 | 50,208,483.00 |
| DANGSUGAR | 32.50 | 32.50 | - | - | 32.50 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 650,781 | 21,646,174.30 |
| DEAPCAP | 1.16 | 1.16 | 1.17 | 1.15 | 1.16 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 1,577,856 | 1,831,280.21 |
| ELLAHLAKES | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.12 | 3.01 | 3.01 | 0.01 | 0.33% | 4,478,293 | 13,737,847.64 |
| ENAMELWA | 19.30 | 19.30 | - | - | 19.30 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 28 | 532.00 |
| ETERNA | 27.25 | 27.25 | 29.90 | 29.45 | 29.45 | 2.20 | 8.07% | 1,802,594 | 51,902,723.95 |
| ETI | 28.00 | 28.00 | - | - | 28.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 335,717 | 9,493,666.00 |
| ETRANZACT | 6.75 | 6.75 | - | - | 6.75 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 112,233 | 743,752.15 |
| EUNISELL | 19.27 | 19.27 | - | - | 19.27 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 10,278 | 178,323.30 |
| FBNH | 26.80 | 26.80 | 26.80 | 26.05 | 26.80 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 5,368,365 | 141,603,930.85 |
| FCMB | 9.05 | 9.05 | 9.10 | 9.00 | 9.00 | -0.05 | -0.55% | 15,830,677 | 142,808,138.35 |
| FIDELITYBK | 15.85 | 15.85 | 16.35 | 15.80 | 16.00 | 0.15 | 0.95% | 16,000,155 | 256,760,994.50 |
| FIDSON | 14.50 | 14.50 | - | - | 14.50 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 627,227 | 8,436,383.60 |
| FTNCOCOA | 1.82 | 1.82 | 1.85 | 1.80 | 1.85 | 0.03 | 1.65% | 1,206,837 | 2,188,702.05 |
| GEREGU | 1,150.00 | 1,150.00 | - | - | 1,150.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 624 | 645,840.00 |
| GOLDBREW | 8.64 | 8.64 | - | - | 8.64 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 886 | 6,893.08 |
| GTCO | 54.00 | 54.00 | 57.50 | 54.00 | 57.00 | 3.00 | 5.56% | 23,512,588 | 1,303,817,098.80 |
| GUINEAINS | 0.67 | 0.67 | 0.72 | 0.64 | 0.69 | 0.02 | 2.99% | 4,779,108 | 3,208,018.08 |
| GUINNESS | 67.00 | 67.00 | - | - | 67.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 349,718 | 23,569,501.85 |
| HMCALL | 5.00 | 5.00 | - | - | 5.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 171,864 | 881,357.19 |
| HONYFLOUR | 5.50 | 5.50 | 6.05 | 6.00 | 6.05 | 0.55 | 10.00% | 4,401,376 | 26,561,656.30 |
| IKEJAHOTEL | 9.15 | 9.15 | - | - | 9.15 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 174,195 | 1,654,575.00 |
| IMG | 37.95 | 37.95 | - | - | 37.95 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 1,208 | 41,313.60 |
| INFINITY | 7.00 | 7.00 | - | - | 7.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 2 | 13.70 |
| INTBREW | 4.70 | 4.70 | 5.00 | 4.70 | 5.00 | 0.30 | 6.38% | 5,641,798 | 27,662,783.08 |
| INTENEGINS | 1.60 | 1.60 | 1.67 | 1.47 | 1.47 | -0.13 | -8.13% | 717,259 | 1,101,408.98 |
| JAIZBANK | 2.76 | 2.76 | 2.84 | 2.77 | 2.83 | 0.07 | 2.54% | 15,648,899 | 44,095,315.87 |
| JAPAULGOLD | 2.18 | 2.18 | 2.20 | 2.16 | 2.18 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 9,431,244 | 20,594,722.73 |
| JBERGER | 155.25 | 155.25 | - | - | 155.25 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 208,793 | 31,282,047.75 |
| JOHNHOLT | 5.88 | 5.88 | - | - | 5.88 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 166,488 | 947,783.75 |
| LASACO | 2.80 | 2.80 | 2.80 | 2.70 | 2.80 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 892,551 | 2,463,134.24 |
| LEARNAFRCA | 3.53 | 3.53 | 3.88 | 3.88 | 3.88 | 0.35 | 9.92% | 1,152,998 | 4,470,686.80 |
| LINKASSURE | 1.08 | 1.08 | 1.15 | 1.05 | 1.10 | 0.02 | 1.85% | 4,701,681 | 5,100,093.13 |
| LIVESTOCK | 3.95 | 3.95 | 4.10 | 3.85 | 4.10 | 0.15 | 3.80% | 2,199,291 | 8,641,948.53 |
| MANSARD | 7.50 | 7.50 | 7.55 | 7.19 | 7.50 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 1,789,034 | 13,331,169.44 |
| MAYBAKER | 8.10 | 8.10 | 8.35 | 8.35 | 8.35 | 0.25 | 3.09% | 440,578 | 3,580,419.15 |
| MECURE | 11.45 | 11.45 | - | - | 11.45 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 19,294 | 199,692.90 |
| MEYER | 7.67 | 7.67 | - | - | 7.67 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 31,067 | 238,245.89 |
| MORISON | 4.01 | 4.01 | - | - | 4.01 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 5,000 | 18,050.00 |
| MRS | 175.60 | 175.60 | 180.00 | 180.00 | 180.00 | 4.40 | 2.51% | 588,858 | 108,672,850.50 |
| MTNN | 175.50 | 175.50 | 175.50 | 175.50 | 175.50 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 2,544,536 | 452,370,394.80 |
| MULTIVERSE | 5.10 | 5.10 | 4.60 | 4.60 | 4.60 | -0.50 | -9.80% | 1,268,288 | 6,048,944.55 |
| NAHCO | 41.95 | 41.95 | 46.10 | 46.10 | 46.10 | 4.15 | 9.89% | 2,149,439 | 98,593,525.50 |
| NASCON | 32.40 | 32.40 | - | - | 32.40 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 2,752,146 | 80,718,939.10 |
| NB | 30.00 | 30.00 | 29.00 | 29.00 | 29.00 | -1.00 | -3.33% | 2,140,273 | 62,913,301.55 |
| NCR | 4.73 | 4.73 | - | - | 4.73 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 3,615 | 18,798.00 |
| NEIMETH | 2.05 | 2.05 | 2.07 | 2.00 | 2.00 | -0.05 | -2.44% | 430,502 | 878,048.04 |
| NEM | 10.80 | 10.80 | - | - | 10.80 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 683,828 | 7,252,498.80 |
| NESTLE | 875.00 | 875.00 | - | - | 875.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 65,563 | 57,756,576.20 |
| NGXGROUP | 28.45 | 28.45 | 30.00 | 28.00 | 30.00 | 1.55 | 5.45% | 3,206,721 | 90,842,958.40 |
| NNFM | 40.05 | 40.05 | - | - | 40.05 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 319,791 | 13,351,773.75 |
| NPFMCRFBK | 1.55 | 1.55 | 1.65 | 1.50 | 1.65 | 0.10 | 6.45% | 2,089,686 | 3,308,601.70 |
| NSLTECH | 0.58 | 0.58 | 0.62 | 0.59 | 0.62 | 0.04 | 6.90% | 3,358,932 | 2,052,426.15 |
| OANDO | 68.50 | 68.50 | 70.00 | 68.50 | 69.50 | 1.00 | 1.46% | 6,407,985 | 444,399,537.75 |
| OKOMUOIL | 367.00 | 367.00 | - | - | 367.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 32,490 | 12,958,115.30 |
| OMATEK | 0.63 | 0.63 | 0.69 | 0.63 | 0.68 | 0.05 | 7.94% | 1,751,204 | 1,174,135.36 |
| PRESCO | 465.00 | 465.00 | - | - | 465.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 78,969 | 36,852,921.20 |
| PRESTIGE | 0.80 | 0.80 | 0.83 | 0.80 | 0.81 | 0.01 | 1.25% | 6,074,210 | 4,900,647.94 |
| PZ | 23.00 | 23.00 | - | - | 23.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 219,641 | 5,102,739.50 |
| REDSTAREX | 4.41 | 4.41 | - | - | 4.41 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 511,687 | 2,443,334.66 |
| REGALINS | 0.57 | 0.57 | 0.62 | 0.57 | 0.61 | 0.04 | 7.02% | 10,276,469 | 6,035,317.10 |
| ROYALEX | 0.75 | 0.75 | 0.82 | 0.72 | 0.73 | -0.02 | -2.67% | 4,504,636 | 3,498,100.00 |
| RTBRISCOE | 2.47 | 2.47 | - | - | 2.47 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 48,560 | 114,492.72 |
| SEPLAT | 5,700.00 | 5,700.00 | - | - | 5,700.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 419,471 | 2,151,886,230.00 |
| SKYAVN | 27.95 | 27.95 | - | - | 27.95 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 116,730 | 3,514,334.50 |
| SOVRENINS | 0.90 | 0.90 | - | - | 0.90 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 157,618 | 142,601.53 |
| STANBIC | 58.55 | 58.55 | - | - | 58.55 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 322,625 | 18,914,921.20 |
| STERLINGNG | 5.00 | 5.00 | 5.05 | 4.99 | 5.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 43,319,185 | 216,300,685.18 |
| SUNUASSUR | 6.95 | 6.95 | 7.59 | 6.72 | 7.49 | 0.54 | 7.77% | 3,168,771 | 22,604,419.18 |
| TANTALIZER | 1.57 | 1.57 | 1.60 | 1.60 | 1.60 | 0.03 | 1.91% | 1,098,083 | 1,766,019.96 |
| THOMASWY | 1.90 | 1.90 | - | - | 1.90 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 113,550 | 197,127.00 |
| TOTAL | 673.90 | 673.90 | - | - | 673.90 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 592,331 | 380,849,760.70 |
| TOURIST | 2.50 | 2.50 | - | - | 2.50 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 5,000 | 12,500.00 |
| TRANSCOHOT | 116.00 | 116.00 | - | - | 116.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 55,502 | 6,229,978.90 |
| TRANSCORP | 43.20 | 43.20 | 42.95 | 42.80 | 42.95 | -0.25 | -0.58% | 2,108,978 | 90,314,076.85 |
| TRANSEXPR | 1.38 | 1.38 | - | - | 1.38 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 4,028 | 5,558.64 |
| TRIPPLEG | 1.87 | 1.87 | - | - | 1.87 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 15,123 | 26,677.89 |
| UACN | 27.50 | 27.50 | 30.25 | 29.95 | 30.25 | 2.75 | 10.00% | 9,411,161 | 283,599,625.85 |
| UBA | 33.50 | 33.50 | 34.45 | 33.50 | 33.75 | 0.25 | 0.75% | 43,454,560 | 1,470,970,007.15 |
| UCAP | 18.50 | 18.50 | 19.00 | 18.65 | 19.00 | 0.50 | 2.70% | 7,918,966 | 149,656,641.70 |
| UNILEVER | 27.55 | 27.55 | 30.00 | 30.00 | 30.00 | 2.45 | 8.89% | 389,889 | 11,636,476.05 |
| UNIVINSURE | 0.40 | 0.40 | 0.44 | 0.40 | 0.44 | 0.04 | 10.00% | 28,313,872 | 12,415,110.18 |
| UPDC | 1.49 | 1.49 | 1.49 | 1.48 | 1.49 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 5,454,828 | 8,124,708.60 |
| UPDCREIT | 5.00 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 4.85 | 4.90 | -0.10 | -2.00% | 6,663,497 | 32,583,689.40 |
| UPL | 3.50 | 3.50 | - | - | 3.50 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 5,914 | 21,994.41 |
| VERITASKAP | 1.39 | 1.39 | 1.38 | 1.32 | 1.35 | -0.04 | -2.88% | 10,081,186 | 13,631,023.10 |
| VFDGROUP | 44.40 | 44.40 | - | - | 44.40 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 2,859 | 121,450.20 |
| VITAFOAM | 22.00 | 22.00 | 23.45 | 22.00 | 22.00 | 0.00 | 0.00% | 5,045,136 | 112,059,993.45 |
| WAPCO | 70.50 | 70.50 | 70.70 | 68.20 | 68.50 | -2.00 | -2.84% | 6,198,557 | 423,017,520.85 |
| WAPIC | 1.78 | 1.78 | 1.85 | 1.69 | 1.70 | -0.08 | -4.49% | 5,276,255 | 9,318,743.44 |
| WEMABANK | 8.70 | 8.70 | 8.60 | 8.35 | 8.50 | -0.20 | -2.30% | 4,915,778 | 41,423,292.45 |
| ZENITHBANK | 44.80 | 44.80 | 45.85 | 44.85 | 45.85 | 1.05 | 2.34% | 60,410,012 | 2,728,940,774.35 |

# Lawmakers investigate failed FG's N141bn tractor deal with American firm

Stories by Onome Amuge

IN NOVEMBER 2023, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security struck a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with American farm equipment powerhouse John Deere, to supply 2,000 tractors each year for five years.

The deal was heralded as a milestone in the modernisation of Nigerian farming practices, with the nation poised to reap the rewards of cutting-edge agricultural technology and increased farming efficiency, leading to higher food production.

Despite the promise of modernized farming practices, over a year after the deal was signed, it has come to light that no equipment has been delivered to Nigeria, leaving farmers without the promised advancements in their farming practices.

This news raises serious concerns about the progress of the agreement, as the Nigerian farming community remains without the benefits of John Deere's technological expertise and equipment.

Following the non-delivery of the 2,000 tractors and 100 combined harvesters, which formed part of the Presidential Food Security Initiative and Hope Agricultural Mechanisation Drive, despite a widely publicised agreement, the House of Representatives has taken a proactive stance, launching an investigation into this failure to honour the agreement.

The decision was reached during plenary, after the adoption of a motion presented by Saba Adam, the member representing Edu/Moro/Patigi Federal Constituency in Kwara State.

Adding to their ongoing investigation into the non-delivery of farm equipment, the House of Representatives has widened the scope of their inquiry to include a second agreement- the N138.61 billion deal struck between the Federal Government and AFTRADE DMCC for the establishment of a tractor assembly plant in Nigeria.

Adam brought to the forefront an agreement between the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and John Deere Tractors for the supply of 2000 tractors, implements, and 100 combined harvesters on an annual basis.

According to Adam, the contract for a tractor assembly plant in Nigeria was estimated to cost N3 billion ($70.042m) and include sales, after-sales services, spare parts, and training for mechanised service providers.

"A year after the agreements were signed by the National Agricultural Development Fund and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, no single tractor or implement has been received in Nigeria, despite the huge public funds involved in these transactions.

"The non-delivery of these tractors and implements is a setback to the Renewed Hope Agenda in agricultural mechanisation and poses a challenge to Nigeria's food sufficiency ambitions, as two farming seasons have been lost since the signing of the agreements.

"There is a need to investigate the non-delivery of the tractors, implements, and combined harvesters over a year after the agreements were signed, as well as the status of the tractor assembly plants envisioned by the agreements," the lawmaker said.

In a move reflecting the gravity of the situation, the motion was adopted without debate, reflecting the consensus among members of the House. The unanimous voice vote, led by Speaker

Abbas Tajudeen sets the stage for an investigation into the procurement and distribution process.

### Food crisis and the need for intensified mechanisation

The months preceding 2023 had seen a steady but worrisome rise in the price of food in Nigeria, but with President Tinubu's unexpected fiscal policies in 2023, including the removal of petrol subsidies and adoption of a free-floating naira, this issue was catapulted into a full-blown crisis.

The resulting price hike for staple foods, such as rice, wheat, and maize amongst others, dealt a devastating blow to millions of Nigerians already struggling with economic hardship, driving many further into poverty and intensifying food insecurity in the country.

With food security concerns looming large over Nigeria, President Tinubu wasted no time in declaring a state of emergency on food security.

The president underlined the crucial importance of agricultural mechanisation in increasing food production, a strategy his administration pledged to be a top priority in efforts to tackle Nigeria's persistent food insecurity.

While agriculture remains the lifeblood of the Nigerian economy, employing more than 70 per cent of the population and contributing significantly to the country's GDP, it has been plagued by a chronic lack of mechanisation, according to experts from both the government and private sectors.

The World Bank's Agribusiness Indicators for Nigeria disclosed that with only 5.7 tractors per 100 square kilometres, Nigeria is severely undersupplied when compared to the 81,000 tractors required to meet demand. This dearth of mechanisation in the agricultural sector has resulted in a domino effect, leading to low productivity, poor infrastructure, and limited access to finance and technology.

According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Nigeria's tractor density hovers around 0.2 horsepower per hectare, estimated at 5.7 tractors per 100 square kilometres, a low number when compared to the FAO's recommendation of 1.5 horsepower per hectare (1.1 kW/hectare).

With approximately 80 million hectares of arable land available for farming, Nigeria has the potential to be a powerhouse of food production. However, the current state of mechanisation in the country's agricultural sector is a far cry from what is needed to tap into this potential.

The low level of mechanisation in the agricultural sector has led to several challenges, including low productivity, poor infrastructure, and limited access to credit and technology. These challenges have made it difficult for Nigeria's agricultural sector to reach its full potential, hampering the country's overall economic development.

### FG, John Deere sign agreement for tractor delivery to address mechanisation troubles

To tackle the persistent issue of under-mechanisation in Nigeria's agricultural sector, the federal government, led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, took decisive action in November 2023 by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with John Deere.

The partnership aimed to establish a tractor plant in Nigeria, providing the country with a much-needed boost in the availability of modern agricultural equipment and machinery.

Reiterating the government's dedication to improving access to modern agricultural equipment for farmers, Abubakar Kyari, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, clarified that the collaboration with John Deere was driven by a vision of creating a more favourable environment for farming activities.

The terms of the MoU, as explained by Kyari, stipulated that John Deere would be expected to produce a minimum of 2,000 tractors annually for five years.

Minister Kyari acknowledged that Nigeria's level of agricultural mechanisation is very low, with only about 50,000 serviceable tractors for a country with over 70 million hectares of farmland. He emphasised the need to increase the number of tractors and other agricultural machinery, as well as the need to improve the availability of spare parts and maintenance services.

"Nigeria is grossly under-mechanised; we have less than 50,000 serviceable, workable tractors today, and in a country with at least 70 million hectares of land, it is grossly inadequate, and I think this is a way to go and to modernise our agriculture," he said.

"The original arrangement is for 2000 tractors per year, but what we are saying is that it depends on how much the farmers are willing to take.

"This is purely a partnership for the off-take for the farmers, not the government taking, but what the government is supposed to do is to have an environment that is very conducive for John Deere to sell the tractors to the farmers," he remarked.

Jason Brantley, the vice president of John Deere, expressed excitement about the MoU signed with the Nigerian government and Tata Nigeria. He stated that the partnership is critical for increasing agricultural productivity and ensuring food security, as well as for improving the livelihoods of farmers.

In addition to providing tractors, Brantley explained that the company is also exploring the feasibility of supporting the Nigerian market with after-sales services. This includes the provision of genuine spare parts, as well as the training of operators and mechanics. He noted that these services are essential for ensuring the continued efficiency and productivity of the tractors.

The one-year mark since the signing of the MoU between John Deere, and the Nigerian government, has come and gone without any substantial updates on the progress of this deal, causing confusion among the nation's farming community.

With the House of Representatives now conducting an official investigation into the John Deere MoU, the attention of the nation turns to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, which must now provide concrete information on the status of this critical agreement.

As it stands, Nigerians, particularly those in the agriculture sector, hold onto a thread of hope that this MoU is not merely another hollow promise, as the country eagerly awaits the realisation of this potentially transformative partnership.

# Cocoa hits record high of nearly $13,00 per tonne on tight supply, weather pressures

COCOA PRICES SURGED to a record level of nearly $13,000 per tonne on the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) amid a prolonged period of supply chain disruption, with cocoa producers struggling to cope with persistent production deficits.

The tonne price of cocoa has skyrocketed by more than 200 percent since the start of 2024, reaching a pinnacle of $12,931 per tonne amidst mounting concerns about supply.

The supply fears were exacerbated by the severe weather conditions in West Africa, which threatened cocoa crops in the region. This has led to dwindling global cocoa stockpiles, adding further upward pressure on prices. The underperforming cocoa production in the Ivory Coast and Ghana proved to be a significant catalyst for the all-time high cocoa prices. Analysts predict that the 2024-25 season will witness a deficit in global cocoa stocks, as the adverse weather patterns in West Africa are expected to continue taking a toll on cocoa production.

In a significant development, the European Union (EU) approved a one-year postponement for new rules and legislation that were aimed at prohibiting the import of products sourced through deforestation, including soy, beef, palm oil, wood, cocoa, and coffee. This move could potentially ease the pressure on cocoa markets by allowing for the continued import of products that may have been linked to deforestation in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, the world's two largest cocoa producers.

In response to the subpar cocoa crop yield, Ghana is reportedly considering deferring cocoa bean deliveries of up to 350,000 tonnes until the next harvest season.

Zafer Ergezen, a commodities market specialist, pointed out that the current upward trajectory of cocoa prices is part of a sustained trend that began in the previous year.

Ergezen emphasised the importance of West Africa, which accounts for approximately 70 percent of the world's cocoa production, to global cocoa supply.

According to him, any disruptions in this region, such as adverse weather or production challenges, can have a profound impact on the availability of cocoa beans and, subsequently, cocoa prices.

**Stories by Onome Amuge**

# Steady oil prices reflect market caution over potential Fed rate cuts

THE OIL MARKET ENDED the week with minimal changes in pricing, as global markets contemplated the effects of China's oil demand and potential interest rate reductions following recent U.S. inflation data.

Brent crude futures rose six cents or 0.08 percent to end the day at $72.94 per barrel, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate futures inched up 8 cents or 0.12 percent to close at $69.46. However, both benchmarks posted weekly losses of approximately 2.5 percent.

The U.S. dollar's recent weakening, despite its ongoing gains in the previous weeks, proved supportive to oil prices as the week came to a close. The dollar retreated slightly from a two-year high, largely due to data showing a decrease in U.S. inflation levels following a recent interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve. With a less robust dollar and the potential for increased liquidity in the market due to rate cuts, oil prices became relatively cheaper for holders of other currencies, boosting the appeal of crude futures for investors globally.

The decrease in U.S. inflation data, coupled with the Federal Reserve's recent interest rate cut, appeased investor concerns, bringing a sense of relief to the oil market.

According to John Kilduff, partner at Again Capital in New York, "The fears over the Fed abandoning support for the market with its interest rate schemes have gone out the window." He further stated, "There were concerns around the market about the demand outlook, especially as it relates to China, and then if we were going to lose the monetary support from the Fed, it was sort of a one-two punch."

OPEC+'s challenge, according to Emril Jamil of LSEG, is to maintain strict control over their supply levels, which in turn could raise prices and ease investor concerns about their increasingly pessimistic demand forecasts. The continuous downward revisions of OPEC+'s 2024 global oil demand outlook—now the fifth consecutive month in which they've reduced their projections—have only served to deepen market anxiety.

The ongoing flux of the global oil market was further demonstrated by JPMorgan's recent forecast, which suggested a shift from equilibrium in 2024 to a surplus of 1.2 million barrels per day in 2025. The expected increase in non-OPEC+ supply by 1.8 million barrels per day in 2025, coupled with OPEC's anticipated maintenance of current production levels, is expected to result in a surplus, further affecting price stability.Recent developments suggest that G7 countries may seek to intensify their clampdown on Russian oil by considering more stringent measures, such as an outright ban or a reduction in the current $60 per barrel price cap. The tightening of sanctions could potentially limit Russian oil supply on the global market, which has already been hampered by the use of Russia's "shadow fleet" of ships to circumvent existing price restrictions.

Quasar Elizundia, an expert research strategist at Pepperstone, observed a peculiar stability in oil prices even as the US dollar, boosted by the recent Federal Reserve meeting, surged toward its highest point in two years. This apparent equilibrium in the oil market stands in stark contrast to the mixed signals emanating from monetary policy and supply and demand data, which typically influence oil prices.

Elizundia noted that the Federal Reserve's stance, as signaled by its chairman Jerome Powell, has introduced an element of caution in the market. Powell's hawkish approach toward interest rate cuts for 2025 has raised eyebrows among analysts, prompting questions about the implications for economic growth.

"As we know, slower global economic growth implies lower energy demand. This signal from the Fed has overshadowed the recent decline in crude inventories in the United States, a data point that would normally push prices upward. The paradox also lies in the fact that, despite OPEC+ efforts to curb production and support prices, the shadow of subdued future economic growth looms over the market.

"The oil market finds itself at a crossroads. The current "stability" in prices is explained by a complex balance of forces. The strengthening dollar, uncertainties surrounding global demand, and the ongoing supply constraints imposed by OPEC+ continue to influence investors," he noted.

## Soybeans continue rally in technical rebound as wheat hits fresh lows

CHICAGO SOYBEAN FUTURES experienced an upward trend on Friday as short-covering ahead of the weekend and technical buying lifted prices. The rebound followed a drop in futures the day before, prompted by forecasts for a bumper South American crop.

The buoyancy of soybean prices, however, was in contrast to the plight of wheat futures, which set contract lows for the second day running, bogged down by abundant global supply. Corn, on the other hand, reaped the rewards of an increase in export business, with futures seeing some gains.

The agricultural commodities market is feeling the weight of a US dollar that continues to hover near a two-year high. This strength of the dollar has the unintended consequence of making US crops less competitive internationally, as it effectively increases the cost of those crops for foreign buyers.

The Chicago Board of Trade soybean market experienced a rebound of 11-1/2 cents per bushel on Friday, closing at $9.74-1/2. The rally was fueled by short-covering ahead of the weekend and the upcoming holiday season, which typically sees lower trading activity and increased volatility.

The CBOT wheat market saw little movement on Friday, closing at $5.33 a bushel. This followed a descent to historic lows earlier in the session, as the market continued to struggle with an overabundance of global supply.

Meanwhile, the CBOT corn market experienced a gain of 5-1/2 cents per bushel, closing at $4.46-1/4, representing a weekly increase of 0.96 percent.

The international wheat market has continued to face a surplus of supply, with Black Sea regions and South American nations, particularly Argentina and Australia, providing stiff competition for wheat exports. This overabundance of wheat has caused import tenders to be heavily skewed towards Black Sea nations, perpetuating the downward pressure on wheat prices.

In contrast, the corn market has shown signs of resilience as the USDA lowered its end-of-season inventory projections last week, leading to increased global demand. South Korean buyers, in particular, have been quick to take advantage of the reduced corn prices, helping to support the market.

## Copper records weekly drop on strong dollar, uncertain demand prospects

COPPER PRICES CONTINUED to struggle near a five-week low, with the metal marking its second straight weekly decline. The red metal's value has been weighed down by a strong US dollar and growing concerns about demand, as investors deal with the dual challenges of a powerful currency and uncertain demand prospects.

Despite a relatively stable performance on Friday, with three-month copper trading flat at $8,884.50 per metric tonne on the London Metal Exchange (LME), the metal remains under pressure from its recent high of $11,104.5 in May. The 20 percent decline in copper prices since then can be attributed to a combination of factors, including a strong US dollar and waning confidence in global demand, as speculative bets made by investors early in the year failed to materialise.

In the closing months of 2024, the market's attention shifted to a potent US dollar, higher-for-longer interest rates, and a sense of underwhelmed anticipation surrounding China's economic stimulus efforts.

Meanwhile, the potential for President-elect Donald Trump to implement import tariffs further complicated the global market outlook, creating uncertainty for traders and investors.

Natalie Scott-Gray, senior metals analyst at StoneX, foresees the complex interplay of strong dollar, higher interest rates, lukewarm economic stimulus in China, and potential import tariffs imposed by President-elect Donald Trump, continuing to weigh on the prices of industrial metals as we enter 2025. Scott-Gray predicts that these factors will restrain demand growth, holding back the fortunes of copper and other metals that are closely tied to economic activity.

Peru, one of the world's leading copper producers, has reported that it expects copper production to remain flat for the third consecutive year in 2025, signaling an ongoing lack of supply-side impetus in the market. On the demand side, copper and zinc inventories in Shanghai Futures Exchange-monitored warehouses have been on a steady decline, reaching their lowest levels since February this year, indicating tightness in supply and potential upward pressure on prices.

While copper prices continued to face downward pressure, other metals traded in a more mixed pattern. The London Metal Exchange saw aluminum prices gain 0.6 percent, closing at $2,522 a tonne.

## Gold edges higher on dovish inflation signals

GOLD PRICES CONTINUED their upward march on Friday, buoyed by a weakening dollar and falling Treasury yields, as recent U.S. economic data pointed to a slowdown in inflation. The dovish signals from the U.S. dollar and Treasury yields made gold an attractive alternative, driving up demand.

Despite the positive movement on Friday, the Federal Reserve's hawkish stance on interest rates kept gold prices firmly on track for a weekly loss

The dollar's two-year high gave way to a 0.6% decline on Friday, which in turn made gold more affordable for international investors. Simultaneously, Treasury yields dipped down from their six-month peak.

These factors were driven in part by a recent U.S. economic report, which revealed that monthly inflation had slowed in November after showing minimal improvement in previous months. The key indicator, the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, registered an increase of 0.1 percent in November, slightly lower than the 0.2 percent growth recorded in October.

Phillip Streible, chief market strategist at Blue Line Futures, attributed the positive price movement in gold on Friday to the weaker-than-expected personal consumption expenditures (PCE), personal income, and personal spending data released earlier in the day.

Streible explained that the gold market is regaining momentum due to these factors, as investors are revising their expectations for the Federal Reserve's monetary policy. Specifically, he noted that a shift from expectations of two rate cuts to the possibility of three cuts, coupled with a more accommodating Fed policy, is driving renewed interest in gold.

Despite the positive price movement, gold suffered about 0.9 percent weekly decline after the Federal Reserve's "dot plot" indicated that policymakers expect only two 25-basis-point rate cuts by 2025.

In their latest analysis, J.P. Morgan highlighted the potential for gold prices to rise in 2025 if the current low expectations for Federal Reserve rate cuts are not borne out. The investment bank suggests that a scenario in which inflationary concerns prove to be exaggerated, allowing the Fed to maintain its monetary policy flexibility, could pave the way for gold gains in the coming year.

In other precious metal markets, silver gained 1.8 percent on Friday, with spot prices reaching $29.54 per ounce. This marked a sharp rebound after silver prices had been pushed lower by the strengthening US dollar earlier in the week.

Meanwhile, platinum prices posted a 0.5 percent gain, settling at $928.34 per ounce. The precious metal's upward trajectory was driven by reduced supply concerns, as the ongoing labor dispute in South Africa's mining sector showed signs of easing.

Palladium also joined the positive trend, climbing 1.5 percent to $919.56 per ounce.

# UBA donates N500m to Lagos State Security Trust Fund

**● Pledges support for State's effort at improving security**

**Onome Amuge**

UNITED BANK FOR AFRICA (UBA) through UBA Foundation, its corporate social responsibility arm, has donated the sum of N500 million to the Lagos State Security Trust Fund (LSSTF), as part of its continued commitment to secure the environment for individuals and businesses.

The N500m cheque was presented to Babajide Sanwo-Olu, the Lagos State governor, by Tony Elumelu, the UBA Group chairman, who was accompanied by Muyiwa Akinyemi, the bank's deputy managing director, at the State House, Marina, Lagos on Sunday.

Speaking during the presentation, Elumelu reiterated the bank's dedication to supporting initiatives that ensure the safety and prosperity of communities across Nigeria adding that "At UBA, we understand that security is critical for economic growth and societal well-being. Our donation to the Lagos State Security Trust Fund is a reflection of the bank's belief in building safer communities to enhance the quality of life for all. We are proud to partner with the Lagos State Government to achieve this shared vision of a secure environment conducive to investment and development."


Olasupo Olusi (l), MD/CEO, Bank of Industry (BOI); and Dele Kelvin Oye, president of the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture, at the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the disbursement of a N75 billion intervention fund for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, at BOI's Office, in Lagos recently.

While receiving the N500m cheque, the Lagos State governor expressed appreciation to the UBA Group and UBA Foundation for the significant contribution and commended Tony Elumelu for its unwavering commitment to impactful projects, state's progress and well-being.

He said, "we are grateful to the UBA Group for their significant contribution to the Lagos State Security Trust Fund. This donation will strengthen our efforts to enhance security and protect our citizens. Together we are building a safer Lagos for all"

This latest gesture aligns with UBA Foundation's Special Projects initiative, which focuses on addressing pressing societal issues through strategic partnerships and impactful interventions. Over the years, UBA Foundation has actively contributed to enhancing education, the environment, and economic empowerment and special projects such as these critical donations across Africa. The Foundation's commitment to security as a driver of sustainable development is evident in its support for programs like the LSSTF. Group Chairman, United Bank for Africa (UBA), emphasised the bank's role as a leader in giving back to society. He explained that in pledging its support to the state's efforts at improving security, UBA recognises the vital link between safety and economic stability.

He said, "This partnership with the Lagos State Government reinforces the Bank's belief in collaborative efforts as the key to addressing security challenges and creating environments where individuals and businesses can thrive. We believe that a secure Lagos State is integral to a secure Nigeria. UBA Foundation will continue to support transformative initiatives that uplift lives and drive development."

UBA Foundation, the CSR arm of the UBA Group, is committed to the socio-economic betterment of the communities in which the bank operates, focusing on development in the areas of Education, the Environment, Economic Empowerment and other Special Projects.

## PalmPay, Jumia launch holiday campaign to reward users

**Onome Amuge**

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON is set to get a whole lot more exciting as PalmPay, one of Africa's leading fintech platforms, teams up with Jumia, the continent's e-commerce giant, to launch a festive campaign that's all about convenience, rewards, and enhancing your shopping experience.

Running from December 11th to 28th, 2024, the holiday campaign is set to reward shoppers who use the new "Pay with PalmPay" feature on Jumia with cash prizes.

Every purchase made using the direct payment method automatically enters participants into a draw, giving them a chance to win exciting cash rewards while enjoying the seamless shopping and payment process.

A strategic partnership to enhance digital payments

The integration of the "Pay with PalmPay Wallet" feature on Jumia is considered  a major milestone in the partnership between the two industry leaders, poised to bring enhanced services to Nigerians.

Speaking at the media announcement, Chika Nwosu, managing director of PalmPay, highlighted the broader mission driving this collaboration: "We are thrilled to join forces with Jumia to redefine convenience for shoppers. At PalmPay, our mission has always been to drive economic empowerment through accessible and user-friendly financial services. This partnership is a natural step forward in achieving that goal.

"Beyond the holidays, this partnership with Jumia is a signal of bigger things to come," he stated.

According to Nwosu, the initiative  is more than just about payments, but about creating value for millions of customers across Nigeria. He also expressed excitement about the opportunities the partnership will unlock in 2025, including campaigns and innovative initiatives that will further transform the online shopping landscape.

Sunil Natraj, CEO of Jumia Nigeria, highlighted the shared vision between both companies, stating: "At Jumia, we are dedicated to creating value for our customers by ensuring a convenient, reliable, and secure shopping experience. This partnership with PalmPay strengthens our commitment to enhancing the digital payments within our platform. By integrating PalmPay, we are providing more options for customers to access affordable and quality goods with the convenience of cashless transactions."


**How to join the holiday fun**

Participating in the campaign has been made easy for users. When shopping on Jumia, users are to select the "Pay with PalmPay" option at checkout, and their entry into the draw becomes automatic.

Bonus Entry: Share a screenshot of your purchase on X (formerly Twitter) using the hashtag #PalmPayXJumia to increase your chances of winning. Additional winners will be selected from participants engaging with the campaign on Twitter.

Whether you are shopping for gifts, or gadgets this festive season, PalmPay and Jumia are making sure customers' experience is not only seamless but also rewarding.

## Nestlé honoured for championing farmer support , local sourcing at SERAS

**Onome Amuge**

NESTLE NIGERIA HAS been awarded the "Best Company in Food Security" for the third consecutive year at the 18th Africa Sustainability Enterprise and Responsibility Awards (SERAS).

The recognition acknowledges Nestle's significant role in driving responsible local sourcing, farmer capacity building, grain quality improvement, dairy value chain development, and the provision of sustainable, affordable nutrition through its ground-breaking research and innovation.

In addition, Nestlé Nigeria received the award for Best in Circular Economy at the SERAS Africa Sustainability Awards 2024, marking a milestone as the first company in Nigeria to achieve circularity in its production value chain. This includes the incorporation of 50 percent recycled PET (rPET) in the packaging of its premium water brand, Nestlé Pure Life. The award also recognises Nestlé Nigeria's achievement of 100 percent plastics neutrality by recovering every tonne of plastic it introduces into the market for recycling.

The Africa Sustainability Awards is the second longest-running global sustainability awards platform and the oldest in Africa. The awards panel, composed of nine expert judges with a rich background in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria, follows a rigorous, independent process to identify genuine sustainability impacts.

Receiving the awards on behalf of Nestle Nigeria, Victoria Uwadoka, corporate communications, public affairs and sustainability Llad at Nestle Nigeria thanked the conveners and the distinguished judges of the SERAS awards for acknowledging the organisation's leadership in Food Security and Circular Economy.

"Winning the Best in Food Security award for the third consecutive year means a lot to us as the Good Food, Good Life Company. We remain committed to collaborating with stakeholders to ensure that everyone has access to sustainable nutritious food," she stated.

Uwadoka further emphasised the importance of the Best in Circular Economy award, stating, "As articulated by our Managing Director, Wassim Elhusseini, we could not be prouder! Nestlé is the first company in Nigeria to incorporate 50% recycled PET in beverage packaging. This journey, which began in 2018, is a success story of collaboration across multiple stakeholders and teams.

"We celebrate every team member and partner, including ALEF Recycling and all institutions that contributed to this achievement. Let us continue to work together to inspire, innovate, and lead the way in protecting our planet for future generations."

Nestle Nigeria was also nominated as a finalist in four SERAS categories including "Best in Gender & Equality/Women Empowerment," recognizing its impact on women's inclusion in the agricultural value chain and distribution network through the Nestlé Rural Women Empowerment Project; "Best in Climate Action," for its efforts in reducing carbon footprint through energy savings, water reduction, and packaging innovation; along with "Best in Food Security" and "Best in Circular Economy."

Ken Egbas, founder of SERAS Africa Sustainability Awards remarked, "Nestle's impactful initiatives and unwavering dedication to sustainability have positioned the organisation among the finalists for these prestigious accolades. This recognition is a testament to the exceptional work and contributions the team has made towards social and environmental sustainability in the African community."

# BUA commences 2,400-tonne gypsum plaster manufacturing operations

Onome Amuge

BUA Gypsum Plaster Limited, a subsidiary of BUA Group, has commenced operations at its cutting-edge Plaster of Paris (P.O.P.) and plasterboard manufacturing plant in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

The newly opened plant, boasting a production capacity of 2,400 tonnes per day, is set to increase local production and meet the rising demand for plaster products. This landmark development, which makes the facility the largest gypsum plaster production plant in Nigeria, is expected to strengthen the country's self-sufficiency and reduce its dependence on foreign imports.

BUA Group, established in 1988, has become a formidable force in the Nigerian business landscape, with a diversified portfolio spanning manufacturing, mining, foods, and infrastructure sectors. Over the years, the company has made a series of strategic investments in various sectors, including cement manufacturing, construction, real estate, plaster production, and quarrying, solidifying its reputation as one of Nigeria's most prominent business groups

Commenting on the group's latest development, Abdul Samad Rabiu, founder/chairman of BUA Group, stated, "The commencement of production at BUA Gypsum Plaster Ltd. is a major milestone in our efforts to support Nigeria and West Africa's infrastructure development. With a daily production capacity of 2,400 tonnes, this facility will serve the housing and construction sectors, significantly reducing dependence on imported gypsum plaster products."

In a bid to uphold quality and ensure customer satisfaction, BUA Gypsum Plaster Limited is extending an invitation to businesses and distributors to register for product access and distribution rights. This limited-time offer, which aims to foster a more exclusive distribution network, will be open for registration until December 31st, after which point product access will only be granted to registered companies.

In celebration of the newly opened plaster plant, BUA Gypsum Plaster Limited is offering a special introductory price of N8,000 per bag (ex-factory) for distributors who complete their registration by the end of December.

Rabiu, speaking on behalf of BUA Gypsum Plaster Limited, described the limited-time offer as a unique opportunity for partners to join the company in supporting local manufacturing, while simultaneously reaping the benefits of exceptional value.

The BUA Group chairman urged interested companies to reach out to BUA's plaster sales department for further information, including details on the registration process and other relevant inquiries.

## BOI, NACCIMA roll out N75bn fund to empower Nigerian MSMEs

Onome Amuge

THE NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION OF Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NACCIMA) and the Bank of Industry (BOI) have forged a new alliance with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to disburse a substantial N75bn intervention fund to benefit micro, small, and medium-scale enterprises across Nigeria.

The agreement was officially sealed recently between Dele Oye, the president of NACCIMA, and Olasupo Olusi, the managing director and chief executive officer of BOI,at BOI's office, in Lagos.

According to Oye, the collaboration with BoI is geared towards fostering economic growth and boosting the competitiveness of Nigerian businesses in the global marketplace.

Oye lauded BOI's commitment to supporting enterprises across all sectors, providing not only financial backing but also valuable guidance and expertise.

The NACCIMA president stressed that a flourishing business community is vital for the prosperity of any nation, and reiterated NACCIMA's dedication to working in tandem with BOI to achieve this goal for Nigeria.

He said, "It is indeed a great honour to stand before you today as the President of the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NACCIMA) at this significant occasion of our Memorandum of Understanding signing with the Bank of Industry (BOI). Today, we do not simply convene; we gather to forge bonds, to kindle a partnership, and to reaffirm our collective commitment to the growth and sustenance of our nation's economy.

"As the apex chamber of commerce in Nigeria and the largest business organisation in West Africa, NACCIMA has always stood on the frontline of advocating for policies and practices that elevate the business environment and invigorate the entrepreneurial spirit across our land. Our broadest objective is clear to champion the cause of commerce and industry so that Nigerian businesses can thrive in a competitive global landscape. We are driven by the belief that a prosperous business community is the bedrock of a prosperous nation.

Olusi, the BoI MD, expressed optimism about the partnership, noting that the MoU was a reinforcement of the commitment to create a more vibrant and accessible financing environment for Nigerian businesses.

"With the support of NACCIMA, we believe we can expand our reach and magnify our impact," he added.

## LG Electronics revolutionises HVAC solutions in Africa with energy-efficient innovations

Joy Agwunobi

LG ELECTRONICS, a global leader in household and commercial electronics, has unveiled its latest HVAC technologies at the Annual LG HVAC Consultant Leaders' Summit held in Lagos.

The event showcased the company's new Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) System and Multi V 5 air quality solution, both designed to optimise heating and cooling in high-rise buildings, hospitals, and airports.

LG's product managers provided detailed presentations, highlighting the energy efficiency, flexible installation options, and seamless integration of their systems, making them ideal for a variety of commercial environments, such as hotels, hospitals, and industrial facilities.

Africa's growing commercial construction sector presents significant potential for LG's HVAC business. As demand for smart solutions rises, there is a greater need for systems that offer integrated IoT control, building automation, and real-time performance monitoring. LG is well-positioned to meet this demand with its advanced technologies.

The summit proved to be a vibrant platform for networking and collaboration, as industry leaders, consultants, and business partners engaged in discussions about market trends and the future of HVAC technology.

The event buzzed with excitement as participants explored new opportunities for partnerships and innovation.

## Honeywell Relaunch: Flour Mills pledges continued focus on consumer needs

Onome Amuge

FLOUR MILLS OF NIGERIA (FMN), has reaffirmed its dedication to providing exceptional products and services that meet the diverse needs of its customers. This pledge was recently reiterated at the "Honeywell Reloaded" event, held in Lagos, where the company showcased its revitalised and reenergised iconic brand.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Devlin Hainsworth, the managing director of Food at Flour Mills of Nigeria (FMN), disclosed the company's acknowledgment of the various challenges faced by consumers in today's market. Hainsworth emphasised FMN's commitment to serving its customers, noting that the company is aware of the pressures consumers face, which is why it strives to make its brand readily available and continue to add value wherever possible.

"Fundamentally, in all our brands, we target families and their happiness, and we believe our brands will stand the test of time. At a time when others are retrenching, we decided to invest in our brand, improve the quality of Honeywell products, and continue to improve and provide quality in hard times. We try to put a little more into them. We want to come through the hard times with consumers knowing and loving our brands," he stated.


In addressing concerns regarding the availability of local raw materials, particularly wheat, for its product lines, Hainsworth shared insights into the company's wheat development programme. According to the FMN MD, the company is heavily involved in sourcing wheat seeds and working collaboratively with farmers in order to secure the necessary raw materials for its various product offerings.

"We are stepping it up, though the local sourcing is still relatively low. The local sourcing percentage is still in the single digits; it's not a lot, but we look, where we can, to consider other local materials without adversely impacting the quality. We are working to develop local wheat capability," he explained.

Hainsworth added that the company would continue to improve on its brands, where it could, to offer additional value to its consumers.

In recognition of the milestone occasion that marked the relaunch of the Honeywell brand, a statement from Flour Mills of Nigeria Plc highlighted the company's established position as a trailblazer in the Nigerian food industry.

The relaunch of the iconic brand, the statement disclosed, has generated considerable enthusiasm among key stakeholders, notably consumers, who are eager to experience the refreshed offerings and the new value proposition FMN is bringing to the table.

"This milestone event, held in Lagos, unveils Honeywell's dynamic new identity, featuring vibrant packaging, enhanced product quality, and a renewed commitment to meeting consumer needs.

"The relaunch of Honeywell products signifies a bold step forward, combining tradition with innovation to cater to modern Nigerian families. The Honeywell brand offers improved quality with strands of happiness, allowing you to appreciate, in every mouthful, the improved quality and grammage of pack sizes.

"This relaunch represents a strategic transformation for the Honeywell brand," the company stated.

The company further noted that the new packaging is a visual celebration of Nigeria's vibrant culture and the brand's enduring legacy, enhancing nutritional value and taste, and updating products to enrich the lives of families across the country.

# Nigerian DisCos record N159.3bn revenue shortfall in Q3'24

**Stories by Onome Amuge**

THE 11 ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION companies (DisCos) operating in Nigeria seem to be struggling to generate substantial revenue, as they managed to only collect N466.69 billion out of the N626.02 billion billed to customers in the third quarter of 2024, leading to a N159.3 billion shortfall, according to the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC).

The NERC Q3 2024 report showed that the aggregated technical, commercial, and collection (ATC&C) loss across all DisCos reached 39.10 percent, with technical and commercial losses accounting for 18.32 percent and collection losses for 25.45 percent. This represents an increase of 4.40 percentage points when compared to the Q2 2024 report, indicating that the DisCos have been unable to effectively collect payments for electricity services.

The Q3 2024 report revealed that none of the 11 DisCos achieved their targeted ATC&C performance as stipulated in the Multi-Year Tariff Order (MYTO). Kaduna DisCo emerged the worst underperformer as it registered the highest shortfall relative to its target, with a 70.84 percent ATC&C loss against the target of 25.00 percent.

L-R: Seyi Makinde, governor, Oyo State; Mutiat Ladoja, wife of former governor of Oyo State; and Onikepo Akande, former minister of trade, during the Oyo State 2024 AfCFTA Consultative Forum held in Ibadan recently.

Concerning the energy situation across all DisCos for the period under review, the report indicated that the total energy received amounted to 7,606.84GWh, while the energy billed to end-use customers stood at 6,249.21GWh. With an overall billing efficiency of 82.15 percent, the system experienced a slight decrease of 0.19 percentage points compared to the 82.34 percent recorded in Q2 2024.

The report further disclosed that the 11 DisCos collected N466.69 billion out of the N626.02 billion billed to customers in Q3 2024, translating to a collection efficiency of 74.55 percent. This marked a 4.76 percentage points decrease when compared to the 79.31 percent recorded in Q2 2024.

In Q3 2024, six international customers purchasing power from the grid-connected Generation Companies (GenCos) made cumulative payments of $6.49 million, constituting only 53 percent of the $12.19 million invoiced by the market operator for the services rendered in the quarter. This limited payment reveals that despite international bilateral agreements for energy purchase, the actual payments received fell short, adding to the challenges faced by the power sector in Nigeria.

Continuing the trend of partial payments, the domestic bilateral customers only paid N1.566 billion out of the N2.100 billion invoiced by the market operators for services rendered in Q3 2024, representing a payment rate of 74.76 percent.

The NERC report noted that the Nigerian power system comprised 28 grid-connected power plants, including 19 gas-powered plants, five hydro plants, two steam plants, and 2 gas/steam combined plants. The average available generation capacity of these plants stood at 5,100.90MW for the quarter.

"The average available generation capacity across the grid-connected plants increased by 16.04 percent (705.13MW) from the 4,395.77MW recorded in 2024/Q2 to 5,100.90MW in 2024/Q3," the report showed.

The report highlighted a positive development as 19 power plants registered increased available generation capacities in Q3 2024 compared to Q2 2024.

# NNPC confirms Port Harcourt Refinery back to full operational status

**Insists product loading ongoing amid shut-down reports**

THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL PETROLEUM COMPANY (NNPC) Limited has refuted recent claims alleging that the Old Port Harcourt Refinery, which resumed operations recently, has been shut down, emphasising that preparations for loading operations on Saturday are currently in progress.

NNPC Limited, in an official release signed by Olufemi O. Soneye, the chief corporate communications officer, maintained that reports of the refinery being shut down are totally false "as the refinery is fully operational as verified a few days ago by Mele Kyari, former Group Managing Director of NNPC.

It was earlier reported that the Port Harcourt Refining Company had stopped operating weeks after it appeared to restart production.

However, the NNPC has said that the report is false and preparation for the day's (Saturday) loading operation is currently ongoing.

Soneye, reacting to a report that the refinery had stopped loading petroleum products barely one month after it was declared open, stated: "The attention of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited has been drawn to reports in a section of the media alleging that the Old Port Harcourt Refinery which was re-streamed two months ago has been shut down.

"Members of the public are advised to discountenance such reports as they are the figments of the imagination of those who want to create artificial scarcity and rip-off Nigerians," he stressed.

For decades, efforts to revive the Port Harcourt Refining Company (PHRC) seemed insurmountable. However, under Mele Kyari's leadership, the once-elusive goal has been realised, signalling a critical step toward achieving energy self-sufficiency. This success is not only a milestone for the NNPCL but a testament to Kyari's resolve to transform Nigeria's energy landscape.

The Port Harcourt Refinery Company in Eleme is a sprawling facility divided into a 60,000-barrel-per-day-old refinery, and a new one capable of refining 150,000 barrels per day. The old refinery, operational since 1965, is Nigeria's first refinery and had remained idle since 1990 when the newer unit became the primary production hub.

After over 30 years of dormancy, the old Port Harcourt refinery, which has a unique configuration where one barrel of crude oil yields a maximum of 23–24 per cent gasoline, was recently reopened by the NNPC Limited amid shock by forces against the revival of the country's four refineries.

After the $1.5 billion approved by the Federal Government in 2021 for the comprehensive rehabilitation of the refinery had been judiciously spent, the NNPCL under Kyari's sound leadership, reopened the Old Port Harcourt Refinery on Tuesday, November 26, 2024.

Today, the old Port Harcourt refinery is currently producing straight-run gasoline (Naphtha) blended into 1.4 million litres of PMS daily; 900,000 liters of kerosene; 1.5 million liters of Automotive Gas Oil (Diesel); 2.1 million liters of Low Pour Fuel Oil (LPFO), and additional volumes of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), also known as cooking gas.

Attempts by sceptics to rubbish the achievement recorded with the 60,000-barrel-per-day Port Harcourt refinery had been roundly repudiated by the NNPCL, workers at the refinery, experts, and delegates from the Presidency, Nigeria Labour Congress, Trade Union Congress, Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, and Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers.

# Ignite Power secures $15m from AFRIGREEN to drive solar energy transformation in West Africa

IGNITE POWER, A LEADING renewable energy company in Africa, has secured a $15 million senior debt financing from Afrigreen Debt Impact Fund (AFRIGREEN), a top investor in the continent's renewable energy sector, for its subsidiary Westa Solar.

This financing will support Westa Solar's ongoing commercial and industrial (C&I) solar energy projects in Africa, advancing the company's efforts to expand renewable energy access across the continent. The financing obtained from AFRIGREEN will also fuel Ignite Power's expansion plans, enabling the company to tap into lucrative yet untapped markets in West Africa.

Notably, the $15 million senior debt financing has been structured in two phases, with an initial tranche of $4 million to be disbursed immediately, followed by a further $11 million contingent upon successful deployment of the first phase and confirmation of mutual intent by the parties involved. This investment strategy ensures that the funds are utilised effectively and efficiently, with a focus on driving Ignite Power's mission of promoting solar energy adoption in the region.

Ignite Power's innovative financing model, which incorporates Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) and leasing options, enables businesses in the region to adopt solar energy solutions without the need for substantial upfront capital investments.

According to reports, West Africa's businesses are increasingly seeking alternative energy sources to address the challenges of unreliable grid electricity and soaring diesel costs.

In Nigeria's market, where access to affordable financing can be challenging, Ignite Power's innovative hedging structure, developed in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), represents a significant advancement. The agreement incorporates a unique hedging instrument that allows Ignite Power to receive funds in USD while repaying the loan based on the Naira-equivalent value at the time of repayment.

In a country like Nigeria, where exchange rate volatility is a significant concern, the inclusion of a hedging instrument within Ignite Power's financing agreement with IFC is particularly noteworthy. This mechanism is designed to mitigate the risks associated with currency fluctuations, enabling Ignite Power to hedge against potential losses and maintain a stable financial environment for project deployment and long-term operations.

Ignite Power's tailored financing options present a compelling alternative, enabling businesses to adopt solar energy solutions without incurring significant upfront capital investments. By removing the traditional financial barriers to solar adoption, Ignite Power is unlocking growth opportunities in the commercial and industrial sector, driving the transition to a more sustainable energy ecosystem.

The successful conclusion of this financing agreement puts Ignite Power in a position of strength for future growth. With this investment, the company's C&I subsidiary, Westa, is well-positioned to expand its operations in West Africa, building on the 3 MW of solar energy already deployed in the region.

Yariv Cohen, Ignite Power CEO, commented on the importance of the investment, stating that the partnership with Afrigreen represents a landmark opportunity not only for our company but also for the entire solar sector across West Africa.

"The demand for clean, reliable, and affordable energy solutions has never been greater, particularly in Nigeria. With this financing, we can offer businesses innovative financing solutions, eliminating upfront capital requirements and making solar energy accessible to a wider market. This is an unprecedented opportunity to establish the next generation of the energy sector in West Africa—distributed, 100% sustainable, and clean," Cohen remarked.

Sade Williams/Business a.m.

# UBA to develop aviation infrastructure, partners FAAN on terminal upgrades

OLIVER ALAWUBA, GROUP managing director of United Bank for Africa (UBA) plc, has reaffirmed the bank's commitment to fostering and supporting the growth and development of the aviation sector.

Speaking during the commissioning of the newly refurbished E-Wing departure terminal at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos on Friday, he said the organisation's partnership with the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) in its quest to develop airports infrastructure across the nation, dates back to 22 years ago, adding that in line with it the UBA group is always ready to contribute its quota to the nation's development through the public private partnership arrangement.

"I think it's a great day for us, we have been in this partnership for 22 years working with FAAN and improving the infrastructure. This is just an example of what public private partnership can do. You have seen that the minister is committed to improving the infrastructure and [the] government cannot do it alone, so the private sector has to come in and UBA clearly is providing that support as needed at this time. This is just the first phase, we are also going to remodel the D-Wing departure," he said.

Festus Keyamo, minister of aviation and aerospace development, while commissioning the facility, commended FAAN for its unwavering commitment to delivering exceptional service to Nigerian travellers.

L-R: Olubunmi Kuku, managing director, FAAN; Festus Keyamo, minister of aviation and aerospace development; and Oliver Alawuba, group managing director, United Bank for Africa (UBA) Plc, during the unveiling of the newly refurbished E-Wing departure terminal at Lagos airport on Friday

The minister praised the collaborative effort between FAAN and the United Bank for Africa, highlighting this project as part of a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing passenger comfort and entertainment within airport terminals.

"This is part of a general plan by FAAN endorsed by the Ministry, to continue to remodel all of them in partnership with private entities within our limited resources to make them more user-friendly. What we are doing here today is the commissioning of the remodelled E-Wing departure hall of Murtala Muhammed International Airport. You can see what they have done here; our concessionaires have done tremendously well, in partnership with UBA. We want to thank them so much, this is the outcome of the partnership, the new floor, a well lit departure hall, the adverts everywhere. We are going to other wings of the airport, we are going to work on Wing-D," he said.

Olubunmi Kuku, the managing director and chief executive of FAAN, assured aviation stakeholders of the organisation's continued focus on improving facilities and services at airports.

She announced plans for additional investments in cooling systems, equipment upgrades, and modernising infrastructure by 2025, underscoring FAAN's dedication to ensuring that Nigerians take pride in their airport facilities.

Through these ongoing efforts, FAAN aims to create a positive and enjoyable airport experience for all passengers and stakeholders. "I do want to say that our passenger traffic remains strong. But there may be some economic realities that are affecting global nations but within Nigeria, we are expanding our facilities and planning for the future hence the use of terminal two. We are using terminal D right now, we are moving passengers in here to decongest and look at the arrival time and slot to make effective use of the capacity of the terminal as well as the timing of flights arriving and landing," she said.

Four environmentally friendly CNG-powered air-conditioned buses were also introduced to improve passenger mobility within the airport premises.

## NSIB tasks NCAA on regulatory compliance as crashed Sikorsky helicopter had no FDR

THE NIGERIAN SAFETY INVESTIGATION BUREAU (NSIB) has asked the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), as part of its immediate safety recommendations, to ensure strict compliance with the Nigeria Civil Aviation Regulations (Nig. CARs) 2023 part 7.8.2.2(q) which requires that all helicopters with a maximum takeoff mass of over 3175 kg and up to 7000 kg be fitted with a Flight Data Recorder (FDR).

Announcing the release of six final accidents reports and one preliminary report in Abuja, recently, Alex Badeh Jr, director general of the Bureau, said in the preliminary report that the Sikorsky SK76c helicopter with registration 5N-BQG, operated by Eastwind Aviation, which crashed into the Atlantic ocean on October 24, 2024, was not fitted with a Flight Data Recorder (FDR), as required by regulations.

He however said the flight crew were certified to conduct the flight, adding that so far, five bodies had been recovered while three others are yet to be found.

"The flight crew were certified to conduct the flight. At the initial stage of the flight, the captain was the Pilot Flying while the First Officer was the Pilot Monitoring. The helicopter had a valid Certificate of Airworthiness.

"A Visual Flight Rules (VFR) flight plan was filed. Five bodies identified as the passengers were recovered, while the remaining three occupants of the helicopter, including the flight crew, are yet to be found. The helicopter was fitted with a solid-state cockpit voice recorder.

"The helicopter was not fitted with a Flight Data Recorder (FDR), although Part 7.8.2.2(q) of Nigeria Civil Aviation Regulations (Nig. CARs) 2023 requires that FDR shall be fitted on the helicopter.

"The flight crew used non-standard phraseology throughout the flight. There were no standard callouts for the various phases of the flight. The helicopter Radio Altimeter (Rad alt) was snagged and deferred on October 18, 2024, six days before the accident. No dew point data was reported in the weather information passed to 5N-BQG on the day of the occurrence," he said.

The helicopter, on October 24, 2024, with eight individuals – six passengers and two crew members, went down into the Atlantic Ocean near Bonny Finima, off the coast of Calabar, during a routine flight at approximately 11:22 AM local time.

The aircraft was en route from the Port Harcourt Military Base (DNPM) to the Anton Offshore Facility when it lost contact with air traffic controllers.

Speaking further, Badeh said the occurrence was not survivable as the helicopter disintegrated upon impact with the water surface and its various parts scattered.

"The helicopter sank to a depth of about 42 meters. In total, five bodies of the passengers were recovered, while three bodies, including the flight crew and one passenger, are yet to be found," he added.

## Turkish Airlines sets Guinness World Records for 'Most Countries Flown to by an Airline'


Turkish Airlines has a 30-country lead over its closest competitor in this hard-to-break record

TURKISH AIRLINES, WHICH has held the title of flying to the most countries in the world since 2012, has been officially recognised by Guinness World Records as the record holder.

The national flag carrier has successfully achieved the Guinness World Records™ title for the "Most Countries Flown to by an Airline".

The record certificate was presented at Santiago Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport following Turkish Airlines' inaugural flight to Chile.

The ceremony was attended by Turkish Airlines executives and Guinness World Records officials.

Based on Guinness World Records™ evaluation criteria, Turkish Airlines set the record with flights to 120 countries, reflecting only the active routes of the past 12 months.

Nevertheless, including temporarily suspended routes and the inaugural flight to Chile, Turkish Airlines' flight network now spans 131 countries.

Bilal Ekśi, Turkish Airlines chief executive officer, commenting, said, "We are delighted to be in Santiago, Chile, our newest route launched today, and to receive the Guinness World Records™ title for the Most Countries Flown to by an Airline.

As the only airline to hold this distinction for over a decade, we proudly showcase the strength of our flight network and reinforce our mission to connect people, cultures, and destinations around the globe."

Talal Omar, vice president, MENA & Türkiye, Guinness World Records™, speaking on the development, said: "Today, we mark a distinguished milestone for Turkish Airlines, whose steadfast commitment to connecting the world exemplifies vision and excellence in aviation.

This remarkable achievement affirms its vital role in the global aviation landscape, reaching more international destinations than any other airline. We offer our congratulations to Turkish Airlines on this extraordinary accomplishment and declare them, with great distinction, Officially Amazing."

# Kuku's one year on FAAN's saddle: The man for the job!

YAKUBU DATI

WITHIN THE 12 MONTHS that the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) experienced a change in leadership, the initial anxiety that usually comes with the appointment of new CEOs has given way to assurances that the agency is headed in the right direction.

This is because the new pilot has been found to possess the skill and knowledge not only in flying the plane to its desired destination but to land it safely.

Welcome Olubunmi Kuku, who assumed office as the managing director of FAAN in December last year and who has left no one in doubt that she has the capacity to deliver on the mandate given to her.

As people observed to see how the first female managing director of FAAN would fit into the shoes of her predecessors like George Ureise, Sale Dunoma, Rabiu Yadudu, Kabir Yusuf and others, Mrs Kuku has proven that the shoes fit her perfectly.

In 12 months, the amiable and hard working finance and administration guru has accomplished several noteworthy achievements that have positively impacted the aviation sector and is strategically reengineering it into a commercially viable entity.

Armed with a B.Sc. in Finance from the University of Illinois and an MBA in International Finance and Strategic Management from DePaul University, Mrs Kuku came prepared to add value to the business of aviation.

Leveraging on her background in finance and business administration, the lady now acknowledged as one with the Midas touch in one year, doubled the income of FAAN by 100 percent through innovation and sheer doggedness.

She has, to buttress the point, led her agency into delivering over N112 billion internally generated revenue (IGR) to the consolidated revenue fund of the federal government in line with the drive of the Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration for the viability of government agencies.

This is a significant improvement on the 2023 and 2022 remittance of 54 billion naira (N54,297,487,089.01) and thirty billion naira (N30,530,347,715.73) respectively.

Drawing from her vast professional experiences at highly rated financial institutions like the Bank of Montreal, Ernst & Young and Deloitte, Visa Consulting Analytics, Kuku was able to diversify FAAN's revenue streams by increasing non-aeronautical incomes while building strategic partnerships and incentives to boost airport revenue generation.

Her professional exposure is a healthy mix of both foreign and local, which saw her voyaging through Bank PHB Plc, the Ministry of Aviation where she served as the special assistant on strategy and infrastructure development to the minister between July 2011 and 2014 , among others.

Consequently on assumption of duty, she hit the ground running by focusing on safety and security resulting in integrating the reviewed FAAN Corporate Safety Policy that defined her commitment to accountability and responsibility to safety.

As FAAN helmsman, Kuku laid a strong foundation for enhancing productivity. She embarked on massive manpower training to build safety standards where more than 4,000 staff and critical personnel across 6 safety-critical courses were trained in the FAAN Training School which she upgraded in line with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards.

Due to her positive intervention, the school is already attracting students from neighbouring African countries who are trooping in to make use of the facility.

Her infrastructural works like the reconstruction and rehabilitation of internal roads, terminals, conveyor belts, and eradication of touts and undesirable elements have also enhanced security and wellbeing of passengers at the airport.

As a team player, Kuku's collaboration with other key agencies and stakeholders as well as adherence to NCAA regulations is gradually creating the necessary corporation and synergies needed to fast track development in the sector same way that her mainstreaming with the Lagos State government, FCT and other state governments is deepening collaboration and cooperation.

Without any iota of doubt, Mrs. Olubunmi Kuku's first year as managing director of FAAN has been marked by a strong commitment to enhancing the operational efficiency, customer experience and improved revenue of the agency and deepening the road map provided by Festus Keyamo, the minister of aviation and aerospace development in creating the needed synergy in line with the Renewed Agenda of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration for the industry to thrive.

As FAAN continues to evolve under her leadership, these achievements attest to the fact that she's the man for the job and that she is set to join the ranks of Apple's Steve Job, Jeff Bezos of Amazon and Anne Mulcahy of Xerox who transformed the fortunes of their organisations

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## The Airport Customer Experience

# Digital accessibility for enhanced passenger experience

AIR TRANSPORTATION is a global industry that carries millions of passengers every day. With the increasing reliance on digital tools for booking, check-in, flight information and in-flight services, it is important to ensure that these services are accessible to all. Digital accessibility in aviation is crucial to ensure that all passengers, including those with disabilities, can safely and easily access air travel services.

'Digital Accessibility' was understood to refer in a somewhat narrow sense to the accessibility of a company's website, mobile applications or digital documents. This led to a focus on ensuring websites and their content could be accessed by everyone, including people with disabilities. Standards to aid this, known as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) were developed by the World Wide Web Consortium.

With evolution in technology, new devices have been introduced in aviation to improve passenger experience and operations. Most airport passengers interact with a wide range of public-facing digital assets such as self-service terminals, automatic gates, and information displays all of which should be accessible.

For instance, airline websites and mobile apps should comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to ensure accessibility for passengers with visual, auditory, motor, or cognitive disabilities. Features like screen reader compatibility, high contrast modes, and keyboard navigation can enhance accessibility.

Airport and airline apps should provide accessible features, like: Audio induction loops for passengers with hearing aids. Clear and simple navigation. Compatibility with assistive technologies like screen readers. Apps can also offer personalised assistance, like guiding passengers with disabilities through the airport.

Airports can implement digital wayfinding systems, such as interactive kiosks or mobile apps, to help passengers navigate the airport. These systems should include accessible features, like audio output, high contrast modes, and simple navigation.

Self-service kiosks should be designed with accessibility in mind, including features like: Audio output and tactile buttons. High contrast modes and adjustable font sizes. Compatibility with assistive technologies like screen readers.

Training to understand the need for empathy and specialised training should be given to not only airport and airline staff, but all airport employees. This includes training staff in every area where families with disabled individuals will come into contact, from curb to gate. Airline staff should receive training on disability awareness and digital accessibility to ensure they can assist passengers with disabilities effectively. Airport employees should be familiar with assistive technologies and accessible features of digital systems. Training promotes an environment that is inclusive and supports staff in the care they should give.

These examples of digital initiatives that many airports have introduced for passengers with disabilities encompass such things as: Real-time sign language translation or recorded information; Advance virtual information to reassure travellers; Navigational aids for individuals with vision impairments; Assistance apps that allow users to request help from service providers, among others.

Across the globe states have introduced or amended legislation to ensure that all passengers have an equitable experience. The United States amended their Part 382, Passengers with Disabilities legislation to include the requirement for accessibility of automated kiosks (CFR 14 § 382.57). Canada introduced the Accessible Transportation for Passengers with Disabilities Regulations. This stipulates that websites must be accessible and that automated self-service kiosks meet the Canadian standards of Accessible design for self-service interactive devices. In Europe, the European Accessibility Act (EAA) was introduced. In response to the impending legislation, airports across Europe are required to ensure that all facilities and digital services introduced after 28 June 2025, are universally accessible.

For the United Kingdom (UK) many airports and airlines are reported to convene regular accessibility consultation forums comprising "representatives of disability groups and disabled individuals" as recommended by the UK Civil Aviation Authority in the Section 32 of CAP 1228 Guidance on quality standards under Regulation EC 1107/2006.

For Africa the starting point will be to hear the voice of travellers with disabilities and understand by both listening and observing what services they will require and how best they can be served. The continent needs to get employees at their airport to become much aware of the need for accessibility for all and to make them accessibility ambassadors.

Perhaps the culture of keeping physically and medically challenged persons along the road to beg will require a culture reorientation. Making those persons accessibility ambassadors will help reorientate everyone and open their eyes to see the many possibilities of persons with disabilities. Promoting the businesses of such individuals and giving them space at the airports for their handwork is also good for accessibility reorientation.

Another consideration should be that though digital assets are highly accessible, not everyone will feel comfortable interacting with them. For many passengers with a disability, especially older adults, they can be hesitant using new technology. Consider what accommodations an airport can put in place to ensure they also have a seamless and equitable experience.

It is advisable to think of best practices in accessibility as going above and beyond standard compliance. This should not always be with an eye on investing in new assets. Airports should consider using existing processes more effectively. Some airports are reported to monitor all their accessibility related assets and provide real-time information on their public website or app to alert travellers of any issues and offer alternative facilities.

**EKELEM AIRHIHEN**

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# FAAN chief gets stakeholders' accolades on first year in office

Sade Williams/Business a.m.

STAKEHOLDERS IN THE nation's aviation industry have commended Olubunmi Kuku, the managing director and chief executive of the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), for her giant strides in just one year in office.

Speaking at an event to mark Kuku's one year in office and the December edition of the MD's quarterly award for excellence at the FAAN headquarters in Lagos, Henry Agbebire, director, special duties, FAAN, said the occasion was to honour a significant milestone, that is, the attainment of one year of dedicated service by the Kuku whose visionary leadership has been instrumental in transforming the FAAN into a model of operational excellence.

Agbebire confirmed that under Kuku's leadership, FAAN has witnessed achievements in safety, security and passenger facilitation.

John Okezie Ekpe, general manager, safety, said Kuku's commitment has helped to ensure that safety is prioritised at all levels of the organisation's operations.

Ekpe listed the establishment of safety culture, clear formal safety policy, regulatory compliance, adequate safety training, accountability and engagement in continuous improvement as some of Kuku's achievements in the areas of safety.

L-R: John Okezie Ekpe, general manager, safety; Olubunmi Kuku, managing director/CEO, FAAN; Mba Ifeoma Loretta, deputy general manager, safety promotion, FAAN; and Oguche Samuel Enejo, assistant general manager, safety, FAAN, at the marking of Kuku's one year in office and launch of the Occupational Safety and Health Manual and Aerodrome General Safety Handbook at FAAN Headquarters in Lagos, recently.

Others who spoke on the achievements of the FAAN managing director included Obiageli Orah, director, public affairs and consumer protection; Albert Afegbai, director, AVSEC; Oguche Samuel Enejo, assistant general manager, safety OSH, who all commended the MD for the giant efforts made in such a short period.

Speaking on the sideline of the ceremony, Kuku commended all workers of FAAN, stating that she also owes the indelible experience to God, staff of FAAN, directors and the management.

"It is not just the work we have done but the spirit we have done it well together. I am grateful for the sacrifices. Thank you for being the force behind the success," she said.

While thanking President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for giving her the opportunity to serve, Kuku also said that the minister of aviation and aerospace development, Festus Keyamo, has equally been supportive, adding that his words and actions have made her work easier.

She said: "I want to thank Mr President and minister of aviation and aerospace development for their unwavering support that they have been given to FAAN. I want to thank our passengers for bearing with us this year. The NDLEA, Customs, NIS, DSS and others have been very engaging.

"Over the next few months, we should stand to see two things. One is the landside improvements and the other is airside improvements. For the airside, all the safety initiatives are ongoing, making sure we are returning our major airports to category two. In terms of actual landside and terminal equipment, we are working around automation, and a lot of things that we have, making sure we are improving passengers' experiences, upgrading our terminal in our secondary as well as our main airports".

On the expectations for next year, the MD added: "As you pass through the airport this festive season, you will see there are lots of improvements. The aviobridges, conveyor belts will be coming in next year. We are fully committed to providing the same level of service you get internationally".

# Upgraded MMIA E-Wing departure terminal opens to travellers, CNG buses too

AS PART OF ITS EFFORTS at enhancing the overall passenger experience at airports, the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), on Friday, commissioned a newly refurbished E-Wing departure terminal at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos.

Four environmentally friendly CNG-powered air-conditioned buses were also introduced to improve passenger mobility within the airport premises.

Festus Keyamo, minister of aviation and aerospace development, while commissioning the facility, commended FAAN for its unwavering commitment to delivering exceptional service to Nigerian travellers.

The minister praised the collaborative effort between FAAN and the United Bank for Africa, highlighting this project as part of a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing passenger comfort and entertainment within airport terminals.

"This is part of a general plan by FAAN endorsed by the Ministry, to continue to remodel all of them in partnership with private entities within our limited resources to make them more user-friendly. What we are doing here today is the commissioning of the remodelled E-Wing departure hall of Murtala Muhammed International Airport. You can see what they have done here; our concessionaires have done tremendously well, in partnership with UBA. We want to thank them so much, this is the outcome of the partnership, the new floor, a well lit departure hall, the adverts everywhere. We are going to other wings of the airport, we are going to work on Wing-D," he said.

Keyamo, who said the Ministry had formally informed the National Security Adviser about steps taken to curb corruption at the airport, commended other agencies for collaborating with FAAN to restore sanity to the system.

"All thanks to the very hard work put in by FAAN. The dismantling of check-in tables is for the benefit of all Nigerians and the image of the agencies, that people normally lampoon over their conducts. But we are very deliberate about what we are doing. I must give credit to other agencies, they have stepped up their games, there is less harassment and more professionalism on their parts. We have updated the National Security Adviser over the steps we have taken, those steps were not taken outside of his endorsement in the first place, the MD and myself had engaged him over the last few months before we took those steps. We have written to the NSA about the concrete steps we have taken now and for him to inform the agencies to cooperate with us so that we all, as a nation, will work hand in hand and hand a good gateway into the country," he added.

Keyamo also lauded FAAN's decision to procure energy-efficient buses, aligning with President Bola Tinubu's goal of promoting sustainable practices and reducing reliance on traditional fossil fuels.

Also speaking, Oliver Alawuba, group managing director, UBA, reaffirmed the bank's commitment to partnering with FAAN in its quest to upgrade airports infrastructure.

"I think it's a great day for us. We have been in this partnership for 22 years working with FAAN and improving the infrastructure. This is just an example of what public private partnership can do. You have seen that the minister is committed to improving the infrastructure and the government cannot do it alone, so the private sector has to come in and UBA, clearly, is providing that support as needed at this time. This is just the first phase, we are also going to remodel the D. Departure."

Olubunmi Kuku, managing director of FAAN, assured aviation stakeholders of the organisation's continued focus on improving facilities and services at airports.

# Air Peace says viral video of overcrowding, improper boarding, misleading

AIR PEACE HAS DESCRIBED as 'mischievous and misleading' a viral video showing overcrowding and depicting improper boarding of passengers purportedly travelling with the airline.

Ejike Ndiulo, head, corporate communications for the airline, said in a statement that "the false video post was designed by some faceless individuals with the intent of misleading the flying public to cause confusion and distraction for management of Air Peace and its stakeholders, including the regulators."

"Our attention has been drawn to a video circulating online and on social media on the boarding of Air Peace passengers on flight P47123 from Abuja to Lagos on December 20, 2024. This report is false, mischievous and misleading," Ndiulo said in the statement.

He explained that "on that day, there were flight delays because of poor weather conditions, specifically harmattan-induced haze and fog, which is common at this time of the year, and which significantly limits visibility and impacts flight operations nationwide."

To ensure that passengers continued their journeys with minimum disruptions, Ndiulo said Air Peace deployed three aircraft to Abuja to evacuate all the passengers.

"While processing them for their flights at the boarding gate, passengers overwhelmed both the FAAN and boarding officers and rushed to the airside. Duty managers and ramp officials then had to mount barricades in front of the motorized step to differentiate passengers on flights. "While we empathize with you, our loyal customer, we condemn in very strong terms the misinformation, insults and deliberate falsehood disseminated in the video post. Such representations are not reflective of our values or operations. There is no truth in the allegation, and we urge the public to disregard the report in all its entirety. We appreciate your understanding and patience during this period and sincerely regret any inconvenience these delays may have caused you.

"The safety of our passengers and crew is our utmost priority. At Air Peace, safety is not just a priority but a fundamental precondition for all our activities. We remain committed to maintaining safe and timely operations. For further assistance or inquiries, please contact us via callcenter@flyairpeace.com," he said.

# UN calls for urgent global action to regulate AI's rapid growth

**Joy Agwunobi**

AS THE WORLD MOVES toward an era defined by artificial intelligence (AI), the technology's rapid evolution has triggered a pressing need for global regulations to safeguard humanity's future. From reshaping industries to transforming warfare, its unprecedented capabilities are outpacing efforts to establish guardrails, raising critical concerns about safety, ethics, and accountability.

At the centre of the debate lies the dual-edged nature of AI. On one hand, its potential to address pressing global challenges such as climate change prediction and its ability to predict humanitarian crises is undeniable. On the other hand, its misuse in military systems and the digital domain poses existential threats, with scenarios involving autonomous weapons, deepfakes, and disinformation looming large. The convergence of AI with advanced technologies like quantum computing adds another layer of complexity, intensifying the risks of destabilised global security.

This evolving landscape has prompted António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General, to deliver a warning to ministers and ambassadors at a recent high-level address, emphasising the urgency of global cooperation to ensure AI serves as a tool for progress rather than destruction.


L-R: Dennis Ajalie, managing director, TeamApt Limited; Oluwole Oyeniran, partner, digital engineering, Deloitte; Gbenga Adebayo, chairman, Association of Licensed Telecoms Operators of Nigeria (ALTON); Carmelle Cadet, chief executive officer, Emtech; Mohammed Jiya, chief operating officer, Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU); and Wunmi Ogunbiyi, founder, aCubed Limited, at the Committee of e-Banking Industry Heads (CeBIH) conference 2024 held in Lagos, recently

Guterres warned that humanity is falling behind in its ability to regulate AI effectively, a delay that could prove catastrophic. "Every moment of delay in establishing international guardrails increases the risk for us all," he stated.

He issued a strong appeal against the use of AI in military applications that operate autonomously, stating, "No country should design, develop, deploy or use military applications of AI in armed conflict that violate international humanitarian and human rights laws. That includes relying on AI to select or engage targets autonomously."

Guterres also pointed to the alarming integration of AI into modern conflicts, where the technology is being tested in areas such as autonomous surveillance, predictive policing, and life-or-death decision-making. This trend, he warned, risks destabilising global peace, especially as advancements in quantum-AI systems potentially intersect with nuclear weapon capabilities.

"The fate of humanity must never be left to the 'black box' of an algorithm," he stressed, calling for strict human oversight in decisions involving the use of force.

Beyond military concerns, Guterres also highlighted AI's role in manipulating the information domain. He cited the proliferation of deepfakes and AI-generated disinformation, which can erode societal trust, manipulate public opinion, and even provoke crises.

Environmental concerns also featured prominently in his address, as Guterres noted the resource-intensive nature of data centers powering AI systems and the geopolitical competition over minerals essential for AI technologies.

"Unprecedented global challenges call for unprecedented global cooperation," Guterres said, advocating for inclusive efforts to ensure AI benefits all of humanity rather than exacerbating inequalities.

He further outlined recent international steps to regulate AI, including the adoption of the UN Global Digital Compact and key resolutions at the General Assembly aimed at enhancing global cooperation. A forthcoming resolution addressing the use of AI in the military domain, he noted, will be crucial in shaping the future of AI governance.

Concluding his address, Guterres reiterated his call for a ban on lethal autonomous weapons and urged the Security Council to take the lead in preventing the militarisation of AI in ways that could threaten international stability.

"I urge you all to join forces to build a safe, secure, and inclusive AI future," he appealed, emphasising the collective responsibility to harness AI for the greater good.

## FG launches free AI academy to empower Nigerians

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has unveiled a groundbreaking Artificial Intelligence (AI) Academy aimed at equipping Nigerians with essential digital skills to thrive in an increasingly digitised world.

This transformative initiative, driven by the Federal Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Technology in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Intel Corporation, aspires to position Nigeria as a leader in AI innovation across Africa.

During the launch event held in Abuja, Uche Nnaji, the minister of innovation, science, and technology, described the academy as a platform designed to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of AI and its real-world applications.

The programme offers Nigerians the chance to acquire cutting-edge knowledge in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

"The AI Academy is not just a training initiative; it is a transformative opportunity to empower Nigerians with critical skills in artificial intelligence. In today's world, where AI is reshaping industries, solving complex problems, and creating new economic opportunities, Nigeria must not only adapt but take the lead," Nnaji stated.

The AI Academy is a fully online, self-paced learning programme, offering courses that cover AI fundamentals, ethical considerations, tools, and practical applications. Participants will also have access to advanced opportunities, including internships with Intel Corporation and the chance to serve as AI ambassadors, gaining hands-on experience in the field.

Registration for the academy is already open and will remain so until January 30, 2025. Interested individuals are encouraged to sign up via the ministry's official website, with no fees required to participate.

Nnaji called on students, young professionals, and civil servants across the nation to take advantage of the programme. "This is an opportunity to be part of a movement that will redefine our nation's future. By acquiring AI skills, we are not only preparing individuals for employment but creating a generation of innovators and problem-solvers who will contribute to Nigeria's growth," he said.

Highlighting the far-reaching potential of artificial intelligence, Nnaji underscored its role in addressing challenges in agriculture, healthcare, education, and security. He stressed that AI is no longer a distant concept but a vital tool for driving progress across all sectors.

The minister noted: "AI has the power to transform our society, offering solutions to some of the most pressing issues we face. By empowering Nigerians with these skills, we are not just preparing them for jobs but equipping them to shape the future of our country's technological and economic landscape."

## Crypto hacking hits $2.2 billion in 2024, North Korea responsible for over half

CRYPTO HACKING REMAINS a growing threat, with each of the past four years seeing over a billion dollars in stolen crypto. As 2024 marks the fifth consecutive year of rising crypto theft, the surge in both the adoption of cryptocurrencies and their increasing value continues to present more lucrative opportunities for hackers.

A recent report by Chainalysis, a blockchain analysis firm, reveals that stolen funds have increased by 21.07 per cent year-over-year, reaching $2.2 billion in 2024. Additionally, the number of individual hacking incidents has also risen, from 282 in 2023 to 303 in 2024.

According to the findings, the cumulative value stolen between January and July 2024 hit $1.58 billion, reflecting an 84.4 per cent increase over the same period in the previous year.

The report also highlighted a shift in the types of platforms targeted by hackers. In previous years, decentralised finance (DeFi) platforms were the primary victims, largely due to their rapid growth and weak security protocols.. "Developers in the DeFi space prioritised bringing products to market over implementing robust security, making these platforms prime targets," Chainalysis explained.

Although DeFi platforms accounted for the largest share of stolen assets in early 2024, centralised platforms became the main target in the second and third quarters with notable breaches including the theft of $305 million from DMM Bitcoin in May and $234.9 million from WazirX in July.

The shift underscores the critical need to secure private keys, which emerged as the most exploited vulnerability in 2024, accounting for 43.8 per cent of stolen funds, according to the report, hackers often employed sophisticated laundering techniques, funneling stolen crypto through decentralised exchanges (DEXs), bridges, and mixing services to obscure transaction trails.

One of the most concerning revelations from the report was the role of North Korea-linked hacking groups. These groups were responsible for $1.34 billion in crypto theft across 47 incidents in 2024, a 102.88 per cent increase from $660.5 million in 2023 which accounted for 61 per cent of the total stolen funds for the year and 20 per cent of total incidents.

The report notes that 'North Korea's state-sponsored hacking activities are often used to fund weapons development programmes and evade international sanctions. These cybercriminals have become notorious for their advanced tradecraft, using sophisticated malware and social engineering tactics to steal cryptocurrency that funds ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction programmes, hence endangering global security."

In response to these challenges, the report outlined proactive measures that leverage predictive technologies and foster collaboration between public and private sectors. Chainalysis highlighted its recent acquisition of Hexagate, a leading Web3 security solutions provider, to enhance real-time threat detection and mitigation.

The report stresses the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors to effectively combat crypto theft. It noted that initiatives like data sharing, real-time security solutions, advanced tracing tools, and targeted training can empower stakeholders to quickly identify and neutralise malicious actors.

"As regulatory frameworks for crypto evolve, increased scrutiny on platform security and customer asset protection will become a priority. To ensure effective prevention and accountability, the crypto industry must keep pace with best practices while fostering stronger partnerships with law enforcement and equipping security teams with the necessary resources," Chainalysis stated.

# TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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## NCC hosts virtual forum to develop A2P messaging licensing framework

**Joy Agwunobi**

THE NIGERIAN COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (NCC) has taken a step towards addressing regulatory gaps in the telecommunications sector with the introduction of a licensing framework for Application-to-Person (A2P) Messaging services.

In a virtual stakeholders' forum held today, the commission engaged industry stakeholders to deliberate on the draft framework, which aims to foster innovation, protect consumers, and ensure fair competition within the telecom ecosystem.

Delivering his address, Aminu Maida, the executive vice chairman (EVC) of the NCC, represented by Chizua Whyte, acting head of legal & regulatory services, highlighted the vital role A2P messaging plays in today's digital landscape. He emphasised how businesses, government agencies, and other entities rely on A2P messaging to communicate essential information, such as bank alerts, healthcare reminders, and public service updates.

According to Maida, A2P messaging has become an indispensable tool for both businesses and consumers, driving efficiency and supporting socio-economic development.

"A2P messaging ensures timely, secure, and efficient communication, which is crucial in supporting businesses and enhancing public service delivery," Maida said.

Despite its potential, the A2P messaging ecosystem in Nigeria faces several challenges, including fraud, data privacy concerns, spam, and an unequal distribution of value among stakeholders. According to Maida, these issues have prevented A2P messaging from reaching its full potential in driving growth and innovation. He emphasized that the proposed licensing framework is designed to address these challenges while fostering a fair and transparent environment for all participants.

The forum provided a platform for key industry stakeholders operators, aggregators, and service providers to engage in meaningful discussions about the draft framework. Maida stressed the importance of collaboration and inclusivity in crafting a regulatory approach that benefits all parties involved.

"The NCC is committed to participatory regulation, where feedback and collaboration from all stakeholders are essential in shaping a framework that serves everyone's interests," Maida stated.

During the event, the NCC presented stakeholder feedback on the draft framework and addressed their observations and recommendations. The commission reiterated its dedication to continuous collaboration and encouraged stakeholders to actively contribute to refining the framework.

"The Nigerian Communications Commission remains committed to providing a regulatory environment that supports innovation, protects stakeholders, and ensures that our telecommunications sector continues to thrive," Maida emphasised.

Additionally, the commission said that its engagement with both internal and external stakeholders would continue as it works toward finalising the A2P Messaging Services Licensing Framework, in line with its participatory rule making process.

## MTN, Airtel dominate as Nigeria's mobile subscriptions hit 157.3m

**Joy Agwunobi**

NIGERIA'S MOBILE subscription base climbed to 157.3 million in October 2024, up from 154.6 million in September. This growth signals a gradual rebound for the telecom sector, following months of decline triggered by regulatory audits and subscriber revalidation processes.

The resurgence was largely driven by gains recorded by MTN and Airtel, the two leading network operators. These increases came on the heels of a sweeping audit by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the enforcement of the National Identification Number (NIN)-SIM linkage policy; the exercise had previously slashed active mobile subscriptions by 64.3 million lines between March and September.

With this renewed growth, according to the data from the commission, Nigeria's teledensity indicating the number of active mobile connections per 100 inhabitants rose to 72.7 per cent in October, compared to 71.46 per cent in the previous month. The NCC bases this calculation on an estimated population of 216 million people. MTN, Nigeria's largest telecom operator by subscriber base, contributed significantly to the industry's recovery. The operator gained an additional 2.2 million active lines in October, bringing its total subscriber count to 80.3 million from 78 million recorded in September. This increase cements MTN's market dominance, as it now controls 51.09 per cent of the mobile market.

Airtel also recorded growth, adding 697,430 new subscriptions to its database in October. This pushed the company's active subscriber count to 54.4 million, compared to 53.7 million in the previous month. Airtel's market share now stands at 31.61 per cent, keeping it in second place behind MTN.

Globacom, which faced significant subscriber losses during the regulatory audits, reported a further decline of 44,635 active lines in October. The operator's total active subscriptions now stand at 19.1 million, representing 12.15 per cent of the market share. Similarly, 9mobile continued to experience a downturn, losing 245,263 subscribers in October. This reduction brought its active subscriber base to 3.3 million, leaving it with a marginal 2.15 per cent share of the market.

## Data & Information Governance Insight

### Capturing and mitigating data privacy risk early

**MICHAEL IRENE, PhD**

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PRIVACY IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT that everyone values, but safeguarding it in our increasingly interconnected world is no simple task. From mobile apps to surveillance cameras, the sheer volume of personal data collected and processed every day is staggering. This is where Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) come in — a vital tool to ensure privacy is built into systems and processes right from the start, rather than being treated as an afterthought.

A DPIA is far from just a bureaucratic exercise for businesses. It's a proactive process designed to identify risks to individuals' privacy and to address them before they become a problem. Imagine a company developing a new mobile banking app, a scenario particularly relevant as Nigeria's fintech sector continues to thrive. Without conducting a DPIA, developers might focus solely on adding features such as rapid payments or an attractive user interface, neglecting to consider potential risks such as weak password requirements or vulnerabilities in how customer data is stored. A DPIA forces the team to stop and think: How could this feature impact users' privacy? Could it expose sensitive information to hackers or other threats?

By undergoing a DPIA early in the development process, the team might decide to introduce robust safeguards like multi-factor authentication, end-to-end encryption, and strict data minimisation. These measures not only make the app safer but also ensure compliance with regulations like the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) and help to build user trust.

Another example is the growing adoption of biometric systems. Take a school that decides to use fingerprint scanning for student attendance. On the surface, it appears to be a practical solution — no more lost registers or inaccurate records. However, without a DPIA, the school might fail to consider key questions. How will this biometric data be stored? Could it be accessed or misused by unauthorised parties? What happens if the system is hacked? A DPIA would identify these risks and recommend solutions, such as encrypting the biometric data, limiting how long it is kept, or exploring less invasive options like smart cards. By addressing privacy concerns upfront, the school can protect pupils' data while still achieving its efficiency goals.

DPIAs are especially crucial when dealing with sensitive data, such as health records. Picture a hospital in Lagos implementing a new digital system to improve patient care. While the system might allow doctors to access records more quickly, it could also inadvertently allow unauthorised staff to view private medical histories. A DPIA would flag this issue, leading the hospital to implement safeguards like role-based access controls and detailed audit logs to track who accesses which records. These measures would preserve patients' confidentiality while enhancing the hospital's efficiency.

Even public sector projects benefit from DPIAs. Imagine a city council in Abuja installing CCTV cameras in busy markets to tackle crime. Without a DPIA, they might overlook the potential for these cameras to intrude on the privacy of ordinary citizens. A DPIA would encourage solutions such as blurring faces in footage unless a criminal incident occurs, striking a balance between security and privacy.

For Nigerian businesses and public institutions, DPIAs are not just about ticking regulatory boxes; they are an opportunity to build trust with the people they serve. When individuals feel confident that their personal data is handled responsibly, they are far more likely to use digital services, whether that's online shopping, ride-hailing apps, or government platforms. This trust is critical in Nigeria, where data breaches and privacy concerns have sometimes shaken public confidence in technology.

What makes DPIAs particularly powerful is their ability to integrate privacy into the core of a project. Instead of fixing problems once they arise, DPIAs encourage organisations to anticipate and mitigate risks from the outset. For example, a Nigerian start-up developing an artificial intelligence recruitment platform could use a DPIA to address potential biases in its algorithms. If the system disproportionately disadvantages candidates from specific regions or educational backgrounds, the DPIA could lead to interventions such as diversifying the training data or enabling human oversight to ensure fairness. These steps don't just protect privacy; they promote ethical practices and inclusivity.

Ultimately, DPIAs serve as a compass in the complex world of data protection, helping organisations design systems that respect privacy by default. From tech start-ups in Abuja to multinationals operating in Lagos, DPIAs provide a framework for safeguarding personal data while fostering innovation. By prioritising privacy, organisations protect individuals, build trust, and create a safer digital environment for everyone — whether they are an eight-year-old exploring educational apps or an eighty-year-old relying on telemedicine.

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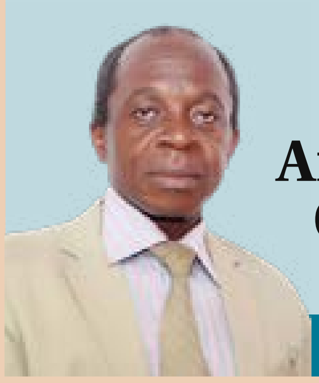

## Africa & Global Observatory

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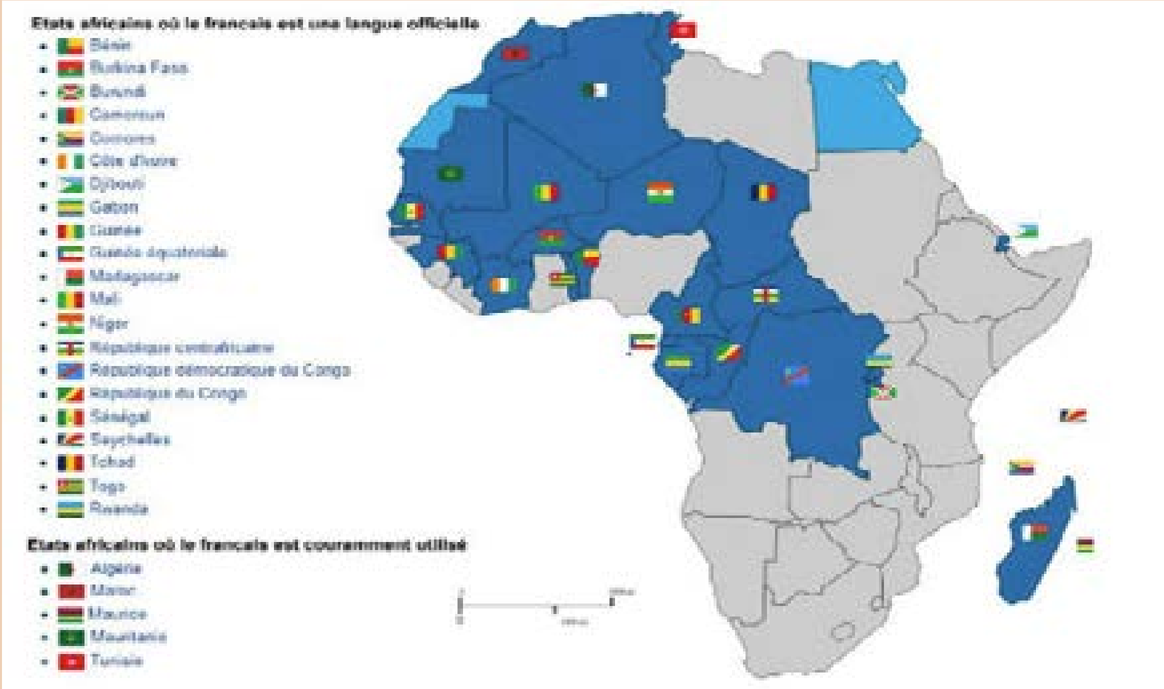
# Is France proud of its footprints in colonial Africa? (2)




SENEGAL'S RECENT COMMENTS on France was another bad news that France may find difficult to shrug off. Whether France saw it coming or not is an issue on its own. But the timing seems troubling, to say the least, even if France chooses to pretend to the contrary. Earlier in December, Senegal's President Bassirou Diomaye Faye demanded the exit of French troops and demanded the immediate closure of French military bases in Senegal. With this, Françafrique has received another fatal blow and more francophone African countries are reclaiming their sovereignty. Faye's declaration undeniably signposts the twilight of French colonialism and the lingering presence of foreign powers who still see Africa as their cash cow. With unequivocal clarity, Faye made statements that have obviously sent shockwaves through the corridors of global power and could change the story of Africa's relationship with the West.

According to Faye, "Senegal is an independent, sovereign nation, and sovereignty is incompatible with the presence of foreign military bases. The days of domination are over." With this, France and other Western countries having overweening presence and influence in Africa should have food for thought on this as the hypocrisy of the Western nations that pretend to believe in independence and democracy — but still maintain military strongholds across Africa — is being exposed. Nonetheless, France could still be nurturing the illusion of present relevance as it still has some countries in its kitty. After the coup d'etat that toppled Mohamed Bazoum in July 2023, many sympathisers referred to Bazoum as a Western ally, which can easily be construed to mean Western asset. Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, remains a strong outpost of France with Alassane Ouattara at the helm. It was with the backing of France that Ouattara got to legitimise an otherwise illegitimate third term in office, effectively playing to France's whims and buttressing the hypocrisy and double standard of France on claims of democracy and sovereignty.

President Emmanuel Macron's comments on the controversial election that retained Ouattara in office beyond the second term betrayed his country's complicity in the tenure elongation scheme. The scheme may have predated the commencement of Macron's and Ouattara's presidency and just as it has also exposed France's double speak on constitutional democracy as France was directly involved in the forceful ejection of Laurent Gbagbo, the immediate predecessor of Ouattara. Although, at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague in 2016, Gbagbo was found culpable in the aftermath of the violence that followed disputed elections in 2010, his lawyers accused current President Alassane Ouattara of seizing power by force with the help of France, Côte d'Ivoire's former colonial ruler. In that April 2011 intervention, French special forces alongside UN helicopters assisted forces loyal to Ouattara, who then was the internationally recognised president, in their advance upon Gbagbo's compound. He was captured in the bunker below the compound and placed under arrest by the Ouattara forces. Is it any surprise that those supporting or conniving at the tenure extension of Ouattara will not find fault with France? The proofs of France working hand in glove with Ouattara could be deciphered as Ouattara, who categorically said in March 2020 that he was not going to seek re-election in October, later changed his assertion, with top court in September clearing the path for him to seek what turned out a contentious third term, thus eliciting protests that turned violent in several places.

As if having a premonition on the outcome of the yet-to-be-announced outcome, Macron reportedly called Ouattara a day before the official results of the presidential election were announced, urging him to make a "significant" gesture towards the opposition. It turned out that Ouattara swept up 94.27 per cent of the votes. Moreover, nearly a month later, President Macron defended Ouattara's decision to run in the election. Nearly three months ago, in October, Ouattara's ruling party had expressed its support for the President seeking a fourth term in 2025. If the reasons France looked away from Ouattara's tenure elongation were shrouded earlier, they began to unravel a year later. A surreptitious attempt was made to hijack the West African regional single currency, the 'Eco' — earlier mooted by the ECOWAS, originally meant to establish a regional currency to promote trade and development. But Macron and Ouattara planned to adopt the 'Eco' as Francophone countries' currency as a replacement for the CFA ab initio, then to later prod the wider ECOWAS members — essentially the Anglophones — to join. Ouattara and Macron had announced in December 2019 that the FCFA would be replaced with the 'Eco.' Ouattara Macron declared that, in 2020, the eight French-speaking West African countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo would retire their shared currency, the West African CFA franc, and replace it with a new currency – also called the eco. The other seven primarily Anglophone ECOWAS countries were surprised at the statement.

Unsurprisingly, controversy trailed the introduction of the 'Eco' as a legal tender for those francophone countries, thereby setting off a full-fledged leadership war. In addition to changing the name of the West African currency known for decades as CFA, the statement by Macron and Ouattara stipulated that countries using the new Eco would no longer be required to keep half their reserves in France, and France would not be involved in managing the new currency. But, that was a superficial explanation. In reality, the new France-backed Eco, like the CFA franc, would be pegged to the euro, and France would remain the guarantor of its convertibility, unlike the plan for the ECOWAS Eco to ensure a flexible exchange rate. Moreover, the creation of the separate West African Eco will more effectively tie the affected Francophone countries more closely to France than to their African neighbours. The suggestion that it would be much easier for the Anglophone countries to join the Eco later sounds incredible, especially as it runs counter to the roadmap for the ECOWAS version of the Eco.

On the question of why France faces so much anger in West Africa, the answer can be attempted by making reference to certain glaring issues. For instance, poverty is a common denominator across all Francophone countries. Many of these countries remain among the poorest. Why are the countries colonised by France among the poorest in Africa? The economic conditions of former French colonies in Africa are influenced by a complex interplay of historical, political, and social factors. Niger Republic, for instance, is a poster child. Despite uranium from Niger being used to power Europe for decades, the country remains one of the poorest in the world. It has not benefited appreciably from its main natural resources, particularly mining mainly exported to France. In particular, the poor pricing of uranium remains a problem, as it is the main source of electricity in France. The French-speaking countries are not a monolith, they are diverse, sovereign States with accordingly dissimilar outcomes. In Mali, the problem has to do with gold exploration and export. The recurrent crisis in the eastern DR Congo is in relation to mineral resources exploration and exploitation. The experiences are similar in many ways. Despite being one of the world's largest uranium producers for well over 40 years, Niger still remains one of the poorest countries on the planet. Although, for decades, uranium from Niger has been used to power Europe, Niger has not benefited appreciably in the form of electricity generated. In fact, Niger has been significantly dependent on Nigeria — the southern neighbour — for nearly half of its electricity supply. Areva, a world leader in nuclear energy, has been involved in the efforts of bringing France and Niger together on a common platform to placate Niger over the uranium mining fallouts. Over a decade ago, Niger reportedly wanted Areva to pay for the reconstruction of the road to Arlit.

Multinational mining operations have led to the contamination of water, air and soil by radioactive substances in places where ordinary Nigeriens reap little benefit from France's control of Niger's uranium resources while 60 per cent of the population live below the poverty line and roads used by trucks carrying uranium are in poor condition. Meanwhile, over 50 per cent of the electricity supply in France is generated from the uranium exported from Niger. The 'uranium highway,' a network of major roads connecting Niger's primary urban mining centres such as Arlit, Agadez and Niamey, are major links used for the carriage of liquidated uranium resources. The network itself forms part of the Trans-Sahara route, stitching together concessional nation-states for the purpose of facilitating the exploitation in a country bordered by seven countries. About a decade ago, Niger ordered an audit of French nuclear group Areva's uranium mines as part of preparations for better deal in talks over a new long-term contract, according to the Mining Minister at the time, Omar Hamidou Tchiana. Somair and Cominak, Areva's two mines in Niger, produce the fuel for roughly one-third of France's nuclear power, the source of some of the cheapest electricity in the West.

It has become clear and undeniable that France covets African natural resources and will do anything possible to continue to have unrestricted access to them. But that is unlikely to continue, from the turn of recent events. Now that Niger has decided to stand up to France in the matter of uranium and national leadership, it is likely to be followed by many more other countries determined to free themselves from the vice grip of the ex-colonial that still wants to tie its former colonies to its apron strings thereby perpetuating the tradition of exploitation. For France it means the sleeping former colonies are waking up.

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