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TRULY INDEPENDENT

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Continental News

'No survivors' in Ethiopia plane crash

An Ethiopian Airlines jet has crashed shortly after take-off from Addis Ababa, killing all on board.

The airline said 149 passengers and eight crew members were on flight ET302 from the Ethiopian capital to Nairobi in Kenya.

It said 32 Kenyans, 18 Canadians, eight Americans and seven British nationals were among the passengers.

The crash happened at 08:44 local time, six minutes after the months-old Boeing 737 Max-8 took off. The cause of the disaster is not yet clear. However, the pilot had reported difficulties and had asked to return to Addis Ababa, the airline said.

"At this stage, we cannot rule out anything," Ethiopian Airlines CEO Tewolde Gebremariam told reporters at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa. "We cannot also attribute the cause to anything because we will have to comply with the international

regulation to wait for the investigation." Visibility was said to be good but air traffic monitor Flightradar24 reported that the plane's "vertical speed was unstable after take-off". An eyewitness at the scene told the BBC there was an intense fire as the aircraft hit the ground.

"The blast and the fire were so strong that we couldn't get near it," he said. "Everything is burnt down."

First word of the crash came when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed expressed his "deepest condolences" on Twitter.

In an earlier statement, the airline said that search and

rescue operations were under way near the crash site around the town of Bishoftu, which is 60km (37 miles) south-east of the capital.

Who are the victims?

Mr Gebremariam told the news conference that passengers from more than 30 countries were on board the flight.

He said they included 32 Kenyans, 18 Canadians, nine Ethiopians, eight Italians, eight Chinese, eight Americans, seven Britons, seven French citizens, six Egyptians, five Dutch citizens, four Indians and four people from Slovakia.

Slovak MP Anton Hrnko later

confirmed via Facebook that his wife and two children were on the plane.

Three Austrians, three Swedes, three Russians, two Moroccans, two Spaniards, two Poles and two Israelis were also on the flight. There was also one passenger each from Belgium, Indonesia, Somalia, Norway, Serbia, Togo,

Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and Yemen.

Four people held United Nations passports, the airline said, and it believed some passengers could have been heading to a session of the UN Environment Assembly which begins in Nairobi on Monday.



Ethiopian Airlines shared this image of CEO Tewolde Gebremariam at the crash site

Polls close after Nigerians vote in governor elections

Nigerians have headed to the polls to elect state and local representatives, two weeks after the presidential poll.

Ballots were cast in 29 of the country's 36 states.

In oil-rich Nigeria, some state governors control budgets larger than those of neighbouring countries and so these are often keenly contested.

President Muhammadu Buhari beat his main rival Atiku Abubakar in the 23 February presidential election, securing a second term.

Results for the state elections are expected to start coming in on Sunday.

Fears of possible election-related violence led to the massive deployment of security personnel across the country and on Friday the army

said it would ensure that people could vote in a non-violent environment.

However, police told Agence France-Presse that a local election observer was killed in the south-eastern state of Enugu, after being "hit by a stray bullet fired by a policeman to disperse a group of protesters". In last month's poll, Mr Buhari's All Progressives Congress (APC) got 15.2 million votes across the country, while Mr Abubakar's People's Democratic Party (PDP) received 11.3 million. There are 73 million registered voters.

The APC won 19 states, while the PDP secured 16, plus the capital, Abuja.

Mr Abubakar said the election was a "sham" and was not free and fair. He has since filed a petition challenging President Buhari's win.

Although turnout for the presidential election was low across the country, it was higher in the northern states - one factor behind Mr Buhari's victory.

Death toll from Malawi flooding rises to 28

The number of people killed in heavy rains and flooding in southern Malawi has risen to 28, an official said on Sunday, while the estimated number of people affected has roughly doubled.

Chipiliro Khamula, a spokesman for Malawi's Department of Disaster Management in the Ministry of Homeland Security, said that 28 deaths had been recorded as of Saturday, as well as 124 injuries.

"A total of 45,312 households (approximately 226,560 people) have been affected and assessments to establish the extent of the damage in all the 14 affected districts are underway" he said via WhatsApp.

Malawi's President Arthur Peter Mutharika declared a state of disaster in the region late on Friday, after the storm caused rivers to break their

banks, leaving villages underwater, and in some areas knocked out power and water supplies.

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The same storm has also caused flooding in regions of Mozambique.

Mutharika directed emergency relief services to be coordinated immediately and also ordered Malawi's army to assist those trapped and displaced.

After several houses in his village collapsed, Tobias Timothy, who was camping in a school in Neno, a district around 45 kilometers north of Malawi's second-largest city Blantyre, said he and others in the school were waiting for help. "We need shelters," he told Reuters. "School is in session so we don't know what happens when learners return on Monday." Reuters



Seven states - Kogi, Bayelsa, Ekiti, Osun, Ondo, Edo and Anambra - did not hold elections because their governors have not finished their four-year terms. Most Nigerians take state elections seriously because their lives are directly impacted by the governor and representatives in the state legislature.

For instance, in 2000 - Governor Ahmed Sani Yerima introduced sharia law in Zamfara state and some other state governors in the north followed suit, even though the federal government wasn't

fully in support.

The governors also enjoy political influence and control huge budgets.

Lagos has an estimated population of 17.5 million people - this is more than the combined population of Gabon, The Gambia, Liberia, Cape Verde and Sierra Leone.

The state's GDP is more than that of Kenya. In fact, Lagos would be the fifth largest economy in Africa if it were a country. Other key battlegrounds are Kaduna, Akwa Ibom, Imo, Kano and Kwara. BBC

EDITORIAL

Audit for US\$25 Million is noteworthy

PRESIDENT GEORGE MANNEH WEAH last Thursday ordered the General Auditing Commission (GAC) to conduct an investigative audit into how US\$25 Million earmarked by the government to mop-up excess Liberian dollars in the economy was expended.

THE MONEY WAS withdrawn in 2018 from the country's reserve with the United States Fed for this particular purpose. But the procedure employed by a Technical Economic Management Team or TEMT, chaired by the Minister of Finance and Development Planning Samuel Tweah and co-chaired by Executive Governor of the Central Bank of Liberia Nathanie R. Patray, has received public criticism and mounting suspicions whether the pronounced objective was achieved.

LAST WEEK FOUR collaborating opposition political parties here called for the arrest of the two TEMT leaders to account for the money similarly as several officials of the Central Bank of Liberia, including former Executive Governor Milton Weeks and Acting Governor Charles Sirleaf, son of ex-President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and others are in court to account for printing excess Liberian banknotes, totaling over LRD2 million.

BUT BOTH MINISTER Tweah and Executive Governor Patray argue that they did not wrong, detailing in a press statement last week that US\$17.0 million used in the exercise is fully accounted for, while the remaining US\$8.0 million is with the CBL.

AMID THE PUBLIC suspicion, President Weah believes the right thing to do is to conduct an investigative audit to establish the veracity of the transaction involving the US\$25 million.

WE BELIEVE THE President took a wise decision in this matter, aimed at establishing the truth. In the coming two weeks, the General Auditing Commission will go through the files to authenticate whether the US\$17.0 million was actually used to mop-up excess banknotes in the economy and the balance US\$8.0 is with the CBL as claimed.

IT IS THEREFORE important that both Minister Tweah and Executive Governor Patray avail themselves and cooperate with auditors from the GAC in a spirit of transparency and accountability.

IF BOTH OFFICIALS would put away pride and demonstrate a cooperative poster in getting to the bottom of this matter, they will not only redeem their own integrity, but the entire government, particularly the President, who reposed the confidence in them to serve the Liberian people.

A MARK OF a good leadership is willingness to listen to the people. President Weah has demonstrated that he listens to the concerns of Liberians by this singular act of calling the two officials to transparency and accountability.

THE CDC-LED GOVERNMENT, including the country generally is facing an integrity test. How we proceed in these challenging times will go a long way in building a positive image not only for this current generation, but generations to come.

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COMMENTARY

By Jacqueline Musiitwa

Banking on Refugees

Refugees have long been excluded from financial services, leaving them struggling to integrate into host economies. But new technologies have made the lack of an identity card, loan collateral, or a fixed address irrelevant, and the world's displaced people may be only the first to benefit.

KAMPALA - Every minute, on average, 31 people are displaced - forced to leave their jobs, homes, and even their families. These refugees often arrive, after arduous journeys, in new countries with no money or identification, and few possessions. Yet, far from securing a safer, more prosperous future, they often find themselves marginalized, excluded, and even demonized, denied opportunities to integrate into their host societies or contribute to the local economy. One straightforward way to empower refugees is to give them access to financial services.

Financial service providers (FSPs) have long neglected this population, owing to accessibility and identification challenges, together with perceptions of refugees as a high-risk group. But technological advances in the last decade have made providing financial services to refugees easier, safer, and more cost-effective than ever.

Thanks to digital and mobile technologies, banking no longer happens primarily in brick-and-mortar branches, but rather on people's phones, wherever they are. This has facilitated the rise of digital wallets that enable users to receive, store, and spend money using only their phones. In recent years, mobile money has become wildly popular in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, and it can be a game changer for the world's massive unbanked population - 1.7 billion people - two-thirds of whom already own a mobile phone that could act as a gateway to financial services.

There is little reason to distinguish refugees from the rest of the world's unbanked. Contrary to popular belief, refugees are not a higher-risk demographic: the Kiva Refugee Impact Report found that, when it comes to loan repayment, refugees are on par with non-refugees. Moreover, thanks to facial-recognition and artificial-intelligence technologies, banks can now instantly verify users' identities, using, for example, a quick iris scan run through an open-source identity-verification application programming interface (API).

As a result, refugees' lack of an identity card, loan collateral, and/or a fixed address is becoming irrelevant. This will be all the more true with the introduction of ID2020, a collaboration among Microsoft, Accenture, and the United Nations that will use biometric data and the blockchain (distributed ledgers) to create an encrypted, permanent, and shareable means of identification for all refugees.

It is in the interest of FSPs themselves to make use of the blockchain. True, the technology - which facilitates direct transactions among parties, creating a permanent and immutable record - has the potential to displace FSPs in the long term, by ending their monopoly on intermediating trust. But, in the short term, its adoption by banks could slash costs and reduce the risk of fraud, thereby enabling the rapid expansion of services to refugees, among others. In this sense, the blockchain could revolutionize credit access for refugees.

Already, the blockchain is being used to help refugees. For example, in Jordan, the Zaatari refugee camp distributes humanitarian aid using the blockchain and cryptocurrency. Each refugee

is issued a digital wallet, into which money for food and supplies is deposited, with facial recognition being used to verify transactions. The results have been compelling: fair and accurate aid distribution, a 98% reduction in transaction fees, and fewer cases of misappropriation of funds.

In Finland, MONI, a blockchain startup, and the Finnish Immigration Service have issued refugees a digital ID stored on the blockchain. With a MONI account, refugees can access government benefits, even if they have lost their passports. Such uses of the blockchain reduce reliance on government-issued identification, as they encourage the acceptance of other forms, such as a UN-issued refugee ID.

There is another, long-term rationale for FSPs to expand services to refugees. Doing so would allow them to collect data and learn valuable lessons that can help shape their approach to increasingly mobile global customers, who are shifting from full-time jobs to remote and freelance work in the "gig economy."

The creditworthiness of freelancers - expected to represent 43% of the workforce by 2020 - can be difficult to determine, owing to their irregular and unpredictable incomes. And so-called digital nomads often lack a permanent address, making it difficult to conduct credit checks. These workers of the future thus raise many of the same challenges for traditional financial services that refugees do. Alternative credit-scoring methods that are created for refugees today could be applied much more widely in the future.

Given all of this, banks should act now to expand their services to refugees. They could follow the example of the financial-technology (fintech) company MyBucks, which has already opened a banking branch in Malawi's Dzaleka refugee camp to provide loans, mobile banking, and training services.

Of course, resolving the refugee crisis and tapping the economic potential of the more than 25 million refugees worldwide will also require changes in other areas, beginning with destination-country political narratives. In many countries, politicians and the media have been portraying refugees as a threat to security, cultural cohesion, and public resources.

Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton blamed her loss to Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, and the Brexit vote that preceded it, on the public backlash against immigration, and recently suggested that Europe should admit fewer refugees, in order to stem the rise of populism. Gunter Nooke, Germany's Africa Commissioner, had an even more unpalatable proposal: African countries should cede land to be administered by the European Union as special economic zones, in what would amount to "voluntary colonialism."

Such solutions are not only unethical; they would not end the crisis. Humanitarian aid alone will not work, either, except as a stopgap measure. To preserve long-term stability and dynamism, host countries must unlock economic opportunities for refugees. FSPs and fintech companies, known for their capacity for disruption, can play a key role in that process.

O-PED

By Jayati Ghosh

The Revolt Against Big Food

NEW DELHI - Confounding the grim prediction made by the British economist Thomas Malthus in 1798, the world currently produces more than enough food for a population that has increased almost tenfold since then. Today's food problem is not absolute scarcity. It is that food is so unequally distributed and irrationally consumed that there is widespread malnutrition at both ends of the spectrum: the world's most deprived people die or suffer from cognitive impairment because of undernutrition, while others face death or disease because of obesity.

Modern patterns of food production and distribution are largely to blame. Production - even by smallholders - increasingly relies on cultivation techniques developed by large corporations. And food consumption around the world is becoming less healthy and sustainable, owing to aggressive marketing and the year-round supply of previously seasonal or faraway crops.

The problem is clear, yet little is being done to address it. A deep-seated complacency at the heart of the world's business-driven food system is fast turning into hubris. The dominance of multinational agribusiness companies - "Big Food" - rivals that of big tech firms in the digital economy, and policymakers seem happy to encourage the widespread belief that only industrial agriculture can feed the world and meet increasing demand.

This dogma has led to pervasive monocropping and excessive use of chemicals in food production. These practices damage the environment, reduce soil quality, make crops more vulnerable to natural hazards and pests, pose greater risks to farmers' livelihoods, and produce increasingly unsafe food. Industrial farming also fuels unhealthy and dangerous consumption patterns, sometimes even leading to obesity and undernutrition within the same family.

The challenge is to make food production more sustainable, and to adopt safer and healthier diets. It may seem futile even to attempt this, because consumers around the world are so accustomed to the cheaper foods produced by global agribusinesses. But there are good arguments for a revolt against Big Food.

As Timothy Wise of the Small Planet Institute and Tufts University argues in his new book, "the myth that 'we' feed 'the world' is the ultimate first-world conceit." The industrial farms and multinational agribusinesses based in the Global North do not account for most of the world's food production, 70% of which comes from millions of small farmers, especially in the developing world.

What's more, many of these farmers already have the tools to achieve "green" agricultural goals, according to Wise, if only they were allowed to use them. The world does not need a new technological revolution in agriculture to produce food in a sustainable and profitable way.

Perhaps the most important myth Wise busts is that small farmers are less knowledgeable and efficient than large-scale producers or cultivators operating under contracts with agribusiness companies. The political and market power of large corporations has made this axiomatic among policymakers, but there are plenty of examples of small farmers succeeding with their own methods.

In Malawi, for example, smaller producers have taken the initiative after other well-intentioned agricultural policies resulted in unanticipated negative outcomes. Over a decade ago, the country sought to increase maize production by giving smallholders coupons to buy seeds and chemical fertilizers. Yields rose dramatically at first, prompting reports of a "Malawi Miracle" (multinational seed and fertilizer companies benefited, too). But this success encouraged maize monocropping, which made the soil more acidic and less fertile over time. Farmers had to buy more seeds and fertilizer just to maintain yields, and there is now little evidence that rural hunger in Malawi has decreased.

Now, however, groups of small farmers have started growing a locally improved variety of more nutritious corn. They no longer require seed purchased from multinational companies or heavy use of chemical fertilizer, and they are mixing the new corn with other crops.

Small farmers are proving their worth elsewhere, too. In the Indian state of Kerala, local communities are leading a resurgence in rice farming, and women's collectives have become successful organic farmers under the state's Kudumbashree federation of women's self-help groups. Small farmers in Mexico are playing a crucial role in preserving much-needed biodiversity - a fact that the country's new government recognizes. And China has given small farmers training and facilities, and has grouped them into cooperatives as part of a large-scale project to promote sustainable agriculture.

The answer to the modern global food problem seems simple: loosen the grip of big corporations over production, distribution, and consumption, and give small farmers the room to produce sustainably. But this is easier said than done. Giant agribusiness interests may be powerful enough to prevent such a revolution from even taking root.

OPINION

By Nina L. Khrushcheva

The Trumping of Ukraine

NEW YORK - If life imitates art, Nikolai Gogol, who had a keen grasp of the delusional and demented, could have scripted many of the key political events of recent years. Consider a story that begins with a woman announcing her presidential candidacy and quickly becoming - despite her flaws - the favorite to win. But out of nowhere appears another candidate: a television star with no qualifications for public office.

In short order, this buffoonish interloper goes for the jugular, heaping one big lie after another on his opponent, while spouting absurd promises about social policy and security matters. His proposals fall apart under the slightest scrutiny, but it doesn't seem to matter. More citizens drift into his camp, attracted by his vow to "drain the swamp" and lock up his "crooked" opponent. The world is taken aback as he bamboozles his way to victory.

This black comedy describes the 2016 US presidential election, when Donald Trump came to power in one of the world's most powerful countries and its oldest democracy. But while America might well recover from electing a louche carnival barker, Gogol's birthplace, Ukraine, is another matter.

A country whose independence always seems to be hanging by a thread, Ukraine is reprising the same bizarre story that brought Trump to power in 2016. Recent opinion polls show a surge of public support for Volodymyr Zelensky, a comedian who once played a naive president on TV and is now running for that office in real life, despite not knowing anything about politics or public policy.

Unlike the United States, Ukraine has no margin for error in politics. It is mired in an undeclared war with Russia that has taken some 15,000 lives and turned over one million people into refugees in their own land. Having been invaded by its mighty neighbor and witnessed the illegal annexation of Crimea, Ukraine is in no position to have its all-powerful presidency placed in the hands of a political ingénue.

By pretending that he is capable of managing Ukraine's many complexities, Zelensky, like Trump, betrays a contempt for the country he says he loves. He is certainly unfit to confront Ukraine's warring oligarchs, who are eager to loot the state's coffers under the absent supervision of a useful idiot.

One can only wonder why Zelensky has thrown his jester's cap into the ring. Most likely, he recognizes that the other two leading candidates, current President Petro Poroshenko and two-time former Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko, each have a lot of political baggage. And so, like Trump, he has presented himself as a new broom that will sweep out all of the "corrupt politicians."

Poroshenko, for his part, has presided over the past five years of unacknowledged warfare with Russia, while carrying out some important reforms (particularly to the gas-transmission system). But he has done little to improve the Ukrainian army's readiness or prevent cronies and ministers from plundering its budget. Poroshenko himself has become much wealthier while serving as president, raising serious concerns about his fitness for another term.

As for Tymoshenko, her story, too complicated for satire, is more akin to something from Tolstoy than from Gogol. Though she was a divisive figure in the 1990s and during her premierships, she proved effective in negotiating with Russian President Vladimir Putin to end a gas dispute in 2009, sparing Kyiv - and much of Europe - from the shivering cold. For that, Victor Yanukovich, the Kremlin puppet who was then Ukraine's president, put her on trial for "abuse of power" after his own election in 2010.

Tymoshenko challenged Yanukovich and his cronies to dig into her past. Her opponents spent millions of dollars searching for evidence of corruption, with help from the best American private investigators money could buy. Yet in the end, they found none from either of her two terms as prime minister.

One of Tymoshenko's nemeses from this period was Paul Manafort, former chairman of Trump's 2016 campaign, who is now facing a long prison term for crimes related to his work in Ukraine on behalf of Yanukovich. Manafort's involvement in this story - it was he who funneled millions of dollars to smear Tymoshenko - should tell Ukrainian voters all they need to know. In a political system systematically distorted by oligarchic interests, Tymoshenko is probably the only candidate who would even try to deliver on the promise of stemming corruption.

Against this backdrop, Zelensky is posing as an outsider who is untainted by the country's culture of swindling. In fact, he is a plant for Ihor Kolomoisky, one of Ukraine's most unprincipled oligarchs (which really is saying something.). Kolomoisky just so happens to own the television station that made Zelensky a star, and he has used his private army to try to intimidate Poroshenko. Among other things, he seems to want to regain control of PrivatBank, now that Ukrainian taxpayers have had to foot the bill to clean up its debts. When asked about his ties to Kolomoisky, Zelensky simply feigns ignorance.

Navigating Ukrainian politics is nothing like walking over the country's glorious black-earth steppe. Put your foot down in the wrong place and you will plummet into the abyss. That is why Ukraine cannot afford to take a Trump-size risk with someone like Zelensky.

But nor should Ukrainians have to put up with another five years of Poroshenko, whose primary focus is on feathering his own nest. That leaves Tymoshenko. Despite her faults, she is the only realistic choice for Ukrainians. And, having survived an unjust prison sentence, she has already proved her willingness to make hard choices on behalf of her country, despite the personal consequences.

Whereas a win for Tymoshenko would offer Ukraine its best chance in these tumultuous times, a victory for Zelensky would turn Marx's famous dictum on its head: America's farce would reappear as Ukraine's tragedy.

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Trading Across Borders

Starts from back page

effective service delivery, revenue generation and payments, relevance of import and export permits, border patrol, check points and anti-smuggling as well as the role of digital economy in enhancing cross borders trade were discussed.

During the presentations and discussions sections, participants were asked to focus mainly on finding solutions as oppose to constantly over stating the problems. Participants called on the responsible authorities to among other things increase the port operating hours so as to allow more containers to leave the port. Aside for the APM Terminals, the banking and the NPA close between 2pm and 5 pm respectively. Once the operation time is extended, more containers will leave the port and the extra charges by port authorities and trucking agencies will be avoided.

The Ministry of Commerce and the LRA have agreed to do away with the Pre-shipment Inspection (PSI) and deal only with Direct Inspection. According to Customs brokers, PSI was posing too much challenges and expenses for importers including delays on the part of BIVAC to provide inspectors on time.

The decision to remove the Import Permit Declaration (IPD), could not be resolved. Hon. Wilson Tarpeh noted that the IPD was essential in regulating goods that are imported and exported out of the country and that it was based on international best practices. Other participants noted that IPD should only be restricted to security related goods coming into the country.

Participants also called on the government to ensure that the APM Terminals abolish the 10% increase in port or



containers handling charges. With the rising cost of living including increase in prices of goods and services, an addition increase in the service charge will affect the end users or consumers participants noted. However, as it stands, the APM Terminals noted that the 10% increase is a part of the concessional agreement with the government of Liberia.

There was also a recommendation to increase the number of days a container can stay in the port time from five to seven days. Few years ago, the number of days was 21 and was reduced to 14 and then to 5 days by the APM Terminals. There are indications that it will be reduced to only three days. Importers believe that the time is insufficient to clear a container out of the port and that seven days will give them additional time to go through most of the processes involved. According to statistics, the average time for container to stay in a port is 20 days.

On the issues of the

Container Tracking Number (CTN), participants mainly importers noted that it lack clarity and was an imposition of more charges to them. Cargo handling agency according to them are already providing tracking numbers for us they noted. But the NPA noted that this was not the same as revenue generated from tracking numbers from shipping lines were not coming into government revenue hence the need for government to take charge. In spite of the information provided, participants want the NPA to provide more information before fully launching the CTN program.

Mr. Antoine a business man (Soguipah Rubber Company) based in Guinea noted that Liberia stands a better chance of generating more revenue from transshipment, especially through Guinea and Mali. He noted that on average, his company ships 14 containers monthly out of the Freeport of Monrovia, but

that could be increase to 56 or more containers on a monthly basis. Mr. Antoine noted that there were lots of other companies near the border with Liberia that want to ship through the Freeport but the high taxes is the major problem. The LRA noted that it charges 2.5% as transshipment fees and will look into the economic implications of a reduction in the rate.



The proliferation of check points in and around the country was also stressed. Participants noted that the increase in the number of checkpoints were posing serious constraints for people trading across borders. According to the World Bank, it takes more than 32 hours to take a cargo truck from the Freeport of Monrovia to the Liberia-Guinea Border. But Immigration boss, Hon. Nebleh noted that the increase in the number of checkpoints,

especially during the night hours was illegitimate and needed to stop. He noted that there are 171 border points in Liberia and that only 45 was manned by immigration officers and that the LRA was only present at 18 port of entries. With this information, participants noted that there was a need for the LRA and Customs Officials to coordinate in generating government revenue while at the same time protecting the countries borderlines.

The two day meeting was climaxed with a visit to the Liberia-Guinea border. There, the team headed by the Minister of Commerce, Hon. Wilson Tarpeh had a frank exchange with immigration and military personnel of that sisterly country. Assurances of mutual respect and cooperation in peace and security and trading across borders were assured by delegates of both countries.

Participants attending the forum were drawn from both the private and public sectors of the country to include the Liberia Chambers of Commerce, Liberia Business Association, PATEL, Cross Borders Women Association, APM Terminals, BIVAC, the ministries of Commerce and Finance and Development Planning, the Liberia Revenue Authority, the Liberia Land Authority as well as a consultant from the International Finance Corporation who made a presentation on ports systems and operations in Liberia. The Country Resident representative of the MRU, hon. Christian Jallah was also in attendance.



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Liberia hosts West Africa's first Blue Oceans Confab

The Government of Liberia in partnership with the Embassy of Sweden in Monrovia and Conservation International holds a Blue Oceans Conference here beginning March 18 - 21, 2019.

According to a press release, this is the first ever environmental and marine conference in West Africa, representing a historic moment for the country.

"This conference provides a platform to identify ground-breaking solutions to ensure the sustainable management of our ecosystem. Protecting our beaches, coastal and marine resources are key to our survival as a nation and it's in direct alignment with Liberia National Development Agenda; the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development there is no time for excuses," says Nathaniel Blama, Executive Director of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The release says Director Blama spoke on behalf of the government's Steering Committee which he chairs along with Liberia Maritime Authority (LiMA) and the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA).

By focusing on the themes of marine pollution, climate change, sustainable fishing, and the blue economy, the



conference will seek to identify innovative solutions to ensure the long-term sustainability of Africa's marine environment and to reverse the decline in the health of the ocean for people, the planet and prosperity.

The ocean has a large depository of plastic debris and other pollutants including riverine discharges, agricultural, sediment, solid waste and agricultural run-offs. In addition, coastal and marine habitats and resources are under threat from pollution, over-harvesting of resources,

inappropriate development in the coastal zone, and poor inland and land-based management.

The release reveals that most of Liberian population lives within 30 miles of the coast where they are increasingly vulnerable to climate change. Challenges associated with climate change and ocean acidification require enhanced vulnerability and impact assessments, mitigation and adaptation plans, resilience building and disaster risk reduction strategies.

The conference will build on the impact being made thus far and increase the likelihood of furthering the policies needed to address climate change.

West Africa is rich in marine resources but often much of the potential benefits from fisheries do not flow back into the region. The fishing sector must be built

on thriving, diverse ecosystems and governance structures and fisheries management must support the interests of Liberians.

The call for a "Blue Economy" will focus on the decoupling of socio-economic development from environmental degradation. Two particularly significant pieces of current and future blue economic growth across in Liberia are tourism and shipping. We will continue to work on using the ocean as a key resource for Liberia's economy.

This conference comes at a great time as Liberia is looking towards diversifying the economy for broader growth.

"Building off the momentum of the conferences in both New York and Nairobi, we are excited to take the conversation forward and look at practical next steps for West Africa's Ocean Conservation. This is a major opportunity for Liberia to join global efforts to conserve our oceans," says Conservation International Liberia Country Director, Jessica Donovan. - **Press Release**

Women receive medical tests at Slipway

By Winston W. Parley

Scores of women in the Slipway Community underwent free medical tests Friday, 8 March in an exercise organized by the Liberia National Red Cross Society (LNRCS) in collaboration with the Indian Community in Liberia.

The event held at the Slipway Field in Monrovia was in observance of the International Women's Day.

Scores of young and elderly

women residing in Slipway were tested by Red Cross staff and female Indian health practitioners to know their blood pressure and sugar levels to be advised for medical attention where necessary.

Each of the women that were tested were subsequently given sanitary pads by the group.

During the exercise, Red Cross Secretary General Madam Saybah Tamba told the

participants that all Red Cross and the Indians are doing is to let the women know how much they care about their health.

She encourages the women to continuously check their pressure and sugar levels because these are dangerous conditions.

Madam Tamba admonishes the women to also take their health seriously, pleading with them to kindly cooperate with the health practitioners.

For her part, Montserrado County Health Team Focal Person Madam Precious T. George expresses appreciation to the Indian Community and the Red Cross for the collaboration, saying it is not the first time for the Red Cross to buttress the county health team's effort.

She also encourages women here to always go to health facilities to do their checks so that they do not sit home and die of curable illnesses.

Madam George further calls on the Red Cross and the Indian Community to extend the exercise to other districts in Montserrado County.

Also speaking, the president for the Association of Indian Community in Liberia Mr. Rohiet Suji expresses

Police probe Central

Starts from back page

placed the victim into his own vehicle and took him to the nearest clinic called Peace Home Clinic in the 72nd Community.

Based on the clinic's advice, he says the two officers and Mr. Davis and Mr. vah took the late Mr. Innis to the ELWA Hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival by doctors on call.

While at ELWA Hospital, Col. Mulbah says family members of the deceased and friends of the family including Oldada Deshield. Esther Innis, Victoria Deshield, Abel T. Washington

and Joseph Simoke arrived at ELWA and took the late Innis' body to the Stryker Funeral home accompanied by officers of the LNP.

The LNP says it has in its possession a copy of the death certificate of Mr. Innis in its possession, but it cannot release it to the public due to ongoing investigation.

The police warn the public to desist from making pre-emptive conclusions in ongoing cases which could undermine the outcome of police investigation.



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appreciation for women's contributions in making the society work, adding that they are unstoppable whether it is in engineering, medicine, media, defense, sports, finance, technology and arts.

Mr. Suji argues that it is difficult to find a field where women have not set their foothold.

He expresses appreciation for the Liberian Red Cross

management and volunteers for their hard work for the society and mankind, and also appreciates the Indian Community's women wing that collaborated with the Red Cross for the program.

On behalf of the participants, community leaders thanked the Red Cross and the Indian Community for their service to the women.

MORE HEADLINE NEWS MORE HEADLINE NEWS

Gov't envisions gender sensitive budget

By Lewis S. Teh

Finance Minister Samuel Tweah has voiced his determination to have the most gender-sensitive budget in Liberia's history beginning 2019/2020 budget year.

Speaking Thursday, 7 March at the Ministry of Finance, Mr. Tweah revealed that a lot of work has gone into mainstreaming gender in Liberia's development program.

"We are going to do our best on this. Anything we do will reflect gender balance. Whether it is budget planning, execution, road development, education, and health, this will be a guiding framework", Mr. Tweah said during the formal opening of the Gender Responsive Planning Budget Policy and Gender Responsive Planning Budget (GRBP) National Coordination Unit.

The GRPB Policy according to him was achieved through efforts of extreme collaboration with development partners.

Mr. Tweah lauds development partners for their support in mainstreaming gender in Liberia's development approach.



He assures partners that government's development programs will reflect gender balance.

He informs partners that government in the execution of its people-centered Pro - Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development will prioritize girls' education and the GRBP will be used as an instrument for such purpose.

Also speaking, Deputy

Finance Minister for Budget Tanneh G. Brunson, says the policy has defined a clear roadmap for mainstreaming gender responsive budget into government's Public Finance Management (PFM) processes.

Deputy Minister Brunson says it is necessary to advocate for gender mainstreaming and equity as government implements its national development plan.

She expresses the need to integrate gender equity and to align the policy objective with the country's development agenda and processes.

According to Madam Brunson, Liberia has come a long way in understanding the concept of gender-responsive budgeting and in recognizing the importance to adopt the implementation of GRBP.

Madam Brunson indicates that strong commitment and determination are sown in the policy design and institutional structures to address gender inequalities in the country's PFM practices.

For his part, UN Resident Coordinator and Assistant Secretary-General Mr. Yacoub El Hillo thanks the Finance Ministry for leading the GRPB

process and the opening of the unit.

Mr. Hillo says gender responsive budget is an important mechanism for ensuring greater consistency between government's development agenda, economic growth and social commitment.

He states that the GRBP serves as a framework for the implementation of gender inclusive budgeting at the national and sub-national levels.

He adds that the GRBP is important because it determines how public funds are generated, used and who benefits from public spending. --*Edited by Winston W. Parley*

Equality now calls for anti FGM law

A non-governmental organization, Equality Now, calls on President George M. Weah, Vice President Jewel Howard Taylor and the 54th Liberian Legislature to enact and enforce a permanent and comprehensive law against practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) here.

The organization made the call in a press release Friday during celebration of International Women's Day, and after a one-year ban on FGM pronounced by former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf through Executive Order 92. The ban ended on January 19th, 2019.

While expressing concern over lack of strong anti-FGM law in the country, Equality Now Programme Officer Felister Gitonga, points out that Liberia is bound by regional and international human rights instruments it had ratified. She says therefore, it is important the country should legislate its own law domestically, prohibiting the practice in the shortest time possible. "Presently, more than half of Liberian women are living with the consequences of the cut and many more are at risk. As it is, Liberia remains one of the three West African countries that do not have a law criminalizing FGM," Ms Gitonga stresses.

According to a press release, she also urges the Government of Liberia to support educational outreach efforts in relevant communities, noting that it was also important to

educate local chiefs on the harms of FGM.

She reminds Liberian authorities to treat women's rights and health matters as a national priority, especially now when the world is collectively working towards advancing women's rights.

"During its one year of existence as a law, the temporary ban on FGM was not as effective as initially anticipated. This was mainly due to lack of knowledge on the existence of the ban and lack of a coordinated multi-sectoral implementation by state agencies. On this day therefore, we would like to remind Liberia to put in place a permanent anti FGM law," she reiterates.

On 19th January 2018, ex-President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed Executive Order 92, banning Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) for one year. The temporary ban however only covered girls below 18, and imposed lenient penalties on perpetrators. Other than the temporary ban on FGM, there has never been any solid attempt at making FGM illegal in Liberia.

The few cases that have gone through the justice system have been covered under Section 242 of the Penal Code which speaks to malicious and unlawful injuries towards another person by cutting off or otherwise depriving him or her of any of the members of his body, finding a person guilty of a felony. This is punishable by up to five years in prison. -*Press Release*

Liberia still faces food challenges

By Bridgett Milton

The Assistant Minister of Agriculture for Administration, Ernest Clark says despite gains made in the Agriculture sector after the civil crisis and the Ebola epidemic in the country, Liberia is still grappling with food security challenges.

He says 18 percent or 875,430 Liberians are food insecure, and of these

total, rural areas constitute 23 percent of food insecurity, while 11 percent is in urban areas.

Minister Clark made the statement recently at the start of the ScalingUp Nutrition (SUN) meeting held with the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition movement, Ms. Gerda Verburg, currently in the country.

He says the Ministry of Agriculture plays a pivoted role in the successful implementation of the government's Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity (PADP).

Clark indicates that Liberia is an Agriculture-based country with over 70 percent of its citizens relying on Agriculture for livelihood.

According to him, the Agriculture Ministry is taking

the lead to reverse this ugly situation by inviting and motivating all stakeholders in the sector to unite and direct their efforts to introducing measures that will improve productivity of farmers.

He says key Agriculture areas for focus should be determined and activities clearly identified, if targets must be actualized within timeframe.

Clark notes that at a working session of stakeholders, there was agreement that rice, vegetable and meat value chains are priority areas for development, indicating there are plans to develop these value chains in perfect alignment with the Agriculture sector investment plan.

The visiting United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement lauds the Government of Liberia for developing the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PADP), which she terms as very ambitious.

She notes full implementation of the PADP will transform Liberia from its current state to a better country.

Ms Verburg adds that the government has an opportunity to change the

current state of the country's nutrition status by investing more in the agriculture sector.

She says Liberia is very blessed to have abundant land and fertile soil to not only become food sufficient, but to export to other countries as well. While in the country, the senior UN official is expected to meet with an array of senior government officials including President George M. Weah, the Ministers of Health, Agriculture, Finance and Development Planning as well as the United Nations, and nutrition leaders in the country as part of efforts to highlight the importance of investing in good nutrition for human and economic sustainable development.

She is also expected to underscore the importance of government's approach to nutrition and call for the country's leadership as a member country of the SUN Movement.

Liberia is committed to reducing malnutrition through multi-sectoral strategies that address the immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition. The country is also obligated to meeting the nutrition targets set at national, regional and international (SDGs) level. *Editing by Jonathan Browne*

Français

Affaire 25 millions USD : Le président Weah cède à la pression

Face à la pression qui arrivait de partout, surtout de l'alliance de quatre partis politiques de l'opposition, le président de la république n'a eu d'autres choix que d'ordonner un audit sur la manière dont les 25 millions de dollars US débloqués par l'Etat pour éponger l'excès de liquidité du dollar libérien ont été dépensés.

Dans un communiqué de presse publié le jeudi 7 mars, dans la soirée, la présidence a indiqué que le président Weah a donné instruction à la Commission générale d'audit de procéder à l'audit des fonds débloqués et de présenter ses conclusions dans deux semaines.

Le ministre libérien des Finances, Samuel Tweah, a présidé avec Nathaniel Patray, gouverneur exécutif de la Banque centrale du Libéria (CBL), l'équipe de gestion technique économique (TEMT) dont la mission était d'éponger l'excès de liquidité sur le marché des changes avec un montant de 25 millions de dollars américains mis à sa disposition par l'Etat du Libéria.

Mais depuis que cinq

responsables de la banque centrale, dont Charles E. Sirleaf, l'un des fils de l'ancienne présidente Ellen Johnson, ont été arrêtés, inculpés et incarcérés à la prison centrale de Monrovia dans le cadre de l'enquête sur la disparition présumée de plusieurs milliards de dollars libériens, le président Weah fait l'objet de pressions croissantes de la part de l'opposition qui réclame l'arrestation d'autres suspects,

dont le ministre des finances et de la planification du développement et le gouverneur exécutif actuel de la banque centrale. Ces derniers, selon l'opposition, doivent rendre compte des 25 millions de dollars US dont le décaissement avait pour objet le freinage de la dépréciation rapide de la monnaie locale en raison de la circulation d'un excès du dollar libérien.

L'appel de l'opposition fait suite au rapport d'enquête de

l'équipe d'investigation présidentielle qui fait état de ce que le ministère des finances et la banque centrale ont fait fi des meilleures pratiques conventionnelles, à savoir l'utilisation des institutions bancaires légitimes et des bureaux de change agréés, en injectant les 25 millions de dollars dans l'économie.

La commission d'enquête indépendante reproche au ministère des finances et à la banque centrale le fait d'avoir injecté les fonds dans l'économie de façon directe en ne faisant appel qu'à des bureaux de change et des entreprises locales méconnues, sans associer les banques commerciales au processus.

Selon la commission, le ministère des finances et la banque centrale ont échangé en tout 14 millions de dollars américains contre plus de 2, 15 milliards de dollars libériens du 17 juillet au 18 septembre 2018.

« C'est à partir du rapport de l'équipe d'enquête présidentielle, qui préconise une enquête judiciaire sur l'ensemble de l'opération menée par la Banque centrale du Libéria visant à éponger l'excès de liquidité de la monnaie locale, c'est aussi suite au rapport de Kroll - une institution de réputation internationale recommandée par le gouvernement des États-Unis - qui appelle à « mieux comprendre » la manière dont l'opération a été menée que le ministère de la Justice, sur directive du président George Manneh

Weah, a demandé à la Commission Générale des Audits de mener un audit complet sur la manière dont les 25 millions de dollars américains affectés à cette opération ont été utilisés », indique le communiqué.

En juillet 2018, l'Etat du Libéria décaissait 25 millions de dollars américains en vue de l'injecter dans l'économie libérienne afin de stabiliser la monnaie locale qui connaissait une dépréciation fulgurante et soudaine.

Les 4 et 5 mars dernier, M. Sirleaf, gouverneur adjoint de CBL, M. Milton Weeks, ancien gouverneur exécutif, et Dorbor Hagba, directeur des opérations bancaires de la CBL, Richard H. Walker, directeur des opérations, et Joseph Dennis, directeur adjoint de l'audit interne, ont été incarcérés à la prison centrale de Monrovia.

Ils ont été inculpés de multiples chefs d'accusation, dont sabotage économique, association de malfaiteurs et facilitation pénale pour leur rôle présumé dans l'affaire de la disparition présumée des 16 milliards de dollars libériens.

Les responsables ainsi mis en accusation devraient rendre compte d'un excédent de 2, 65 milliards de dollars libériens dont on ne retrouve pas les trace.

Mais pour l'opposition, cela n'était pas suffisant. Les quatre partis politiques alliés de l'opposition demandent au président George Manneh Weah d'ordonner immédiatement l'arrestation du ministre des Finances, Samuel Tweah, et du gouverneur exécutif de la Banque centrale du Libéria (CBL), Nathaniel Patray.



Armée ivoirienne : Ouattara prend des mesures pour contrer Soro

A mesure que l'on s'approche de 2020, les acteurs politiques ivoiriens affûtent leurs armes pour affronter la prochaine élection présidentielle. Le président Ouattara a ramené lors des dernières nominations

prononcées à la tête de l'armée, plusieurs « com'zones ». Cette appellation était en effet destinée aux ex-chefs rebelles issus de la crise politique de 2002. Ils l'avaient également aidé à prendre le pouvoir en 2011 au temps fort

de la crise.

« La Garde républicaine est plus prestigieuse... »

Cette redistribution au sein de l'armée est qualifiée de stratégique par certains observateurs. Elle est intervenue quelques semaines seulement après la démission du président de l'Assemblée nationale en la personne de Guillaume Soro. Ce dernier qui a quitté son fauteuil nourrit discrètement des ambitions présidentielles. Il y a donc eu lors de ce redéploiement, des proches du désormais ancien président de l'assemblée. Le colonel Issiaka Ouattara connu pour sa proximité avec Soro a pris le commandement des unités rattachées à l'état-major. Il dirigeait précédemment la Garde républicaine. Les anciens rebelles comme le colonel Chérif Ousmane est promu sous-chef d'état-major de l'armée de terre.

Plus connu sous le surnom « Loss », le colonel Losseny Fofana est désormais au 3e bataillon de Bouaké, l'ex-

capitale rebelle. Ces différentes nominations répondent à plusieurs critères selon certains observateurs avertis du paysage politique ivoirien. A en croire Arthur Banga, chercheur universitaire et spécialiste des questions militaires au micro de nos confrères de la presse internationale, ces nominations ne sont pas le fruit du hasard. Prenant

l'exemple du colonel Issiaka Ouattara, promu aux unités rattachées à l'état-major, il estime que son ancien poste était plus prestigieux que le nouveau. « La Garde républicaine est plus prestigieuse parce que c'est la garde la plus rapprochée du président de la République, c'est elle qui assure sa protection et elle des institutions » fait-il remarquer.



Articles traduits

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Français

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Les responsables ainsi mis en accusation devraient rendre compte d'un excédent de 2, 65 milliards de dollars libériens dont on ne retrouve pas les trace. Mais pour l'opposition, cela n'était pas suffisant. Les quatre partis politiques alliés de l'opposition demandent au président George Manneh Weah d'ordonner immédiatement l'arrestation du ministre des Finances, Samuel Tweah.

COMMENTAIRE

Par Jacqueline Musiitwa

Haute technologie et banques en ligne au service des réfugiés

KAMPALA - Chaque minute qui passe, 31 personnes en moyenne sont déplacées, contraintes de quitter leur emploi, leur maison et même parfois leur famille. Elles arrivent souvent dans un pays qu'elles ne connaissent pas après un voyage difficile, avec quelques maigres biens, mais souvent sans argent ni pièce d'identité. Mais loin de se retrouver à l'abri et de pouvoir envisager un avenir prospère, les réfugiés sont souvent marginalisés, exclus, parfois même diabolisés, et se voient refuser des possibilités d'intégration ou de contribution à l'économie du pays hôte. Or, l'un des moyens les plus simples de leur donner un minimum de contrôle sur leur vie serait de faciliter leur accès aux services financiers.

De longue date, en raison des difficultés d'identification et de leur perception des réfugiés comme un groupe à haut risque, les banques négligent cette population. Mais du fait des progrès technologiques de la dernière décennie, il est devenu plus facile, plus sûr et moins coûteux de leur donner accès aux services financiers.

Grâce aux technologies numériques et aux appareils mobiles, on accède désormais bien plus souvent aux services bancaires à partir de son téléphone portable où que l'on se trouve, plutôt qu'en se déplaçant dans une agence. C'est ce qui a facilité la diffusion des porte-monnaie électroniques qui permettent à leurs détenteurs de recevoir de l'argent, de le mettre sur leur compte ou de le dépenser à partir de leur téléphone. Depuis quelques années les banques en ligne se sont répandues à toute vitesse, notamment en Afrique sub-saharienne. Cela a complètement changé la vie de tous ceux, nombreux dans le monde (1,7 milliard de personnes), qui n'ont pas de compte en banque, mais dont les deux tiers disposent d'un téléphone mobile qui pourrait leur permettre d'accéder aux services financiers.

Il n'y a pas vraiment de raison de faire une distinction entre les réfugiés qui ne disposent pas d'un compte en banque et les autres personnes dans la même situation. Contrairement à ce que l'on croit trop souvent, les réfugiés ne présentent pas de risques supérieurs aux autres groupes : le rapport Kiva 2018 indique que les réfugiés remboursent leurs prêts au même titre que le reste de la population. Par ailleurs, grâce à la reconnaissance faciale et à l'intelligence artificielle, les banques peuvent vérifier instantanément l'identité des personnes qui s'adressent à elles, par exemple avec un scan rapide de l'iris.

L'absence de document d'identité des réfugiés, de garantie en cas de prêt et/ou d'adresse fixe ne pose plus véritablement un problème. Ce sera encore plus vrai avec l'introduction de l'initiative ID2020, un partenariat entre Microsoft, Accenture et l'ONU, destinée à développer un procédé d'identification des réfugiés reposant sur la technologie blockchain (qui facilite les transactions directes entre les parties et les enregistrent de manière permanente et immuable) et une base de données biométriques ouverte à toutes les parties prenantes, avec un degré de sécurité extrêmement élevé.

La blockchain est déjà utilisée au service des réfugiés. Ainsi dans le camp de réfugiés de Zaatari en Jordanie, la distribution de l'aide humanitaire est facilitée par l'utilisation de la blockchain et d'une cryptomonnaie. Chaque réfugié reçoit un porte-monnaie électronique dans lequel se trouve de l'argent pour la nourriture et d'autres fournitures, les transactions étant validées par reconnaissance faciale. Le résultat est largement positif : la distribution de l'aide est précise et équitable, le coût des transactions a diminué de 98% et il y a beaucoup moins de cas de fraudes.

En Finlande, une startup dans le secteur de la blockchain, MONI, et les services d'immigration finnois délivrent aux réfugiés une pièce d'identité

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électronique stockée dans la blockchain. Grâce à un compte MONI, les réfugiés peuvent toucher une allocation de l'Etat même s'ils ont perdu leur passeport. Ce type d'utilisation de la blockchain permet de moins s'appuyer sur un document délivré par l'Etat pour s'assurer de l'identité d'une personne, car elle incite à accepter d'autres moyens d'identification, telle une pièce d'identité électronique délivrée par l'ONU.

Il est de l'intérêt même des banques d'utiliser la technologie blockchain. Il est cependant exact que cette technologie pourrait leur nuire à long terme en mettant fin à leur monopole en tant qu'intermédiaire. Mais à court terme, son adoption par les banques pourrait réduire drastiquement les coûts et réduire les risques de fraude, ce qui permettrait entre autres aux réfugiés d'utiliser bien plus facilement leurs services. En ce sens, la blockchain pourrait révolutionner l'accès des réfugiés au crédit.

Offrir leurs services aux réfugiés présente néanmoins un avantage à long terme pour les banques. Elles pourraient collecter des données et en tirer des conclusions très utiles pour décider de leur stratégie à l'égard d'une clientèle de plus en plus mobile qui tend à abandonner les emplois à temps plein pour travailler à distance en indépendant dans le cadre de l'économie à la tâche mondialisée.

La solvabilité de ces indépendants (qui devraient constituer 43% de la main d'œuvre en 2020) est difficile à évaluer du fait de l'irrégularité et de l'imprévisibilité de leurs revenus. Ceux que l'on nomme les nomades numériques n'ont souvent pas d'adresse permanente, ce qui peut rendre plus difficile le recouvrement de leurs crédits. En ce qui concerne les services financiers traditionnels, ces travailleurs du futur soulèvent au moins en partie les mêmes problèmes que les réfugiés. Aussi, les méthodes d'évaluation de la solvabilité des réfugiés pourraient-elles être étendues demain à d'autres populations.

Dans ce contexte, les banques devraient dès à présent offrir leurs services aux réfugiés. Elles pourraient suivre l'exemple de MyBucks, une fintech (entreprise spécialisée dans les nouvelles technologies financières) qui a ouvert une agence dans le camp de réfugiés de Dzaleka au Malawi pour leur proposer des prêts, des services de banque en ligne et une formation à la gestion financière et à l'utilisation des services bancaires.

Certes, résoudre la crise des réfugiés et exploiter le potentiel économique de plus de 25 millions de réfugiés à travers le monde suppose d'autres changements, en commençant par le discours politique des pays de destination. Dans nombre d'entre eux, les politiciens et les médias présentent les réfugiés comme une menace pour la sécurité, la cohésion sociale et les ressources publiques.

L'ancienne secrétaire d'Etat américaine Hillary Clinton a imputé sa défaite face à Donald Trump en 2016, et le vote en faveur du Brexit qui l'a précédée à la réaction de l'opinion publique face à l'immigration. Elle a déclaré récemment que l'Europe devrait accueillir moins de réfugiés pour limiter la montée du populisme. Gunter Nooke, le représentant spécial pour l'Afrique de la chancelière allemande, a fait une suggestion encore plus choquante en proposant que les pays africains concèdent l'administration de "zones économiques spéciales" à l'UE - autrement dit une forme de colonialisme volontaire.

Ce genre de proposition est non seulement contraire à l'éthique, mais elle ne mettrait pas fin à la crise. L'aide humanitaire seule ne suffit pas non plus, si ce n'est à titre de pis-aller. Pour préserver la stabilité et le dynamisme à long terme, les pays hôtes doivent ouvrir leur économie aux réfugiés. Connues pour leurs capacités innovatrices, les banques et les fintechs peuvent jouer un rôle clé dans ce processus.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Old Nation but No 'Library', Proxy in Shamble!

By: James Kokulo Fasuekoi | A special contributor in Minneapolis, MN.

Cont'd from last edition

Opposite the adult library, the staff also runs a skeletal library for children and like the adult library, the kids' library exists only in name because it practically lacks computers, and current reading books, magazines and toys for children.

Donation

Doryen Wreh said he and his staff had been hopeful for some aid from Mrs. Jewel Howard Taylor, now vice president of Liberia. He explained while Mrs. Taylor was still senator for Bong County, she had promised to give help to the library but according to him, "She hasn't made meaningful contribution to the library."

Wreh didn't make it clear whether he made any attempt to contact Mrs. Taylor's office in the past concerning such pledge. Attempt by writer to contact Mrs. Taylor's office proved futile.

On the other hand, a pledge made by a local Lions Club regarding renovating the library came through in 2009. Wreh maintained that the Club also donated chairs and tables, enabling the facility to stay somewhat functional.

Library's History

This iconic one storey building opposite Centennial Pavilion on Ashmun Street, where all of the country's past and current president were sworn into office, is the private home of Liberia's first president, Joseph Jenkins Roberts who served a two terms.

According to Doryen Wreh, Pres. Roberts turned the family residence into a 'presidential palace' soon after he became head of state in 1847. Roberts is said to have lived and conducted state's affairs from this building till the first state's house down the street, was erected.



Roberts Family later donated it the local lawyers committee to be used as a library.

Manager 'Steals'

In a country where states leaders barely show respect for law and order, amid widespread corruption and abuse of power, even junior staffers, including heads of government bureaus think stealing of public funds or properties is normal.

In the months leading to the end of Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's regime, Wreh said a senior female Sirleaf's appointee seized and took the library's single big screen television home for her personal use.

"She came one day, just packed it and took it home," Wreh told this writer. The TV was donated not long ago by an organization. No action was taken against the woman, he said.

'Blind Steals'

Amid hardship and a culture of impunity, in the post-war nation, a blind too, took his chance, carrying away one of the library's treasured books, "The History and Life Style of Braille," the inventor of braille.

How did the library staff get to know it was a blind person who has stolen the missing referenced braille? I asked.

"We know because, he [blind] hasn't come back since that incident. Besides, he had expressed love for this book several times and wanted to take it home but we refused because that's the only copy we have here," says Wreh.

Meantime, the library staffers are pleading for aid from philanthropic individuals and groups to help rescue the proxy national library already nearing collapse. The appeal, Wreh says, also goes to Mrs. Taylor to make good on her promises.

Wreh named two wall fans, twelve desk computers, several laptops, a copier and a digital camera, as items they need badly in order to keep library functional. The laptops and cameras he said, would go a long way in training staff to do a documentary on the history and cultures of the country's distinct sixteen ethnic groups.



Sirleaf, Weeks bailed out

By Winston W. Parley

The son of former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Charles Sirleaf and former Central Bank Governor, Milton A. Weeks have been released on bail.

Both Mr. Sirleaf and Mr. Weeks were granted bail by the criminal Court "C" Judge Boimah

Kontoe on Friday March 8, after the men filed their criminal appearance bond.

Conditions set for their release require that Mr. Sirleaf and Mr. Weeks will not travel outside of Montserrado County without the court's approval. They will submit all their travel documents to the Sheriff of Court "C" and report to the court twice each month.

Following two investigative reports here, Mr. Sirleaf, a Deputy Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) Governor for Operations; Mr. Weeks, former CBL Executive Governor; Mr. Dorbor Hagba, CBL Director for Banking; Mr. Richard H. Walker, Director for Operations and Mr. Joseph



Dennis, Deputy Director for Internal Audit were arrested, indicted and jailed for their alleged roles in Liberia's alleged "missing" 16 billion Liberian bank note scandal.

Upon Mr. Sirleaf and Mr. Weeks' release Friday on bail, Judge Boima Kontoe says only the two defendants had posted

their bonds before the court, which means the rest of the three defendants in persons of Mr. Hagba, Mr. Walker and Mr. Dennis remained in detention.

According to Judge Kontoe, the Court granted Mr. Sirleaf and Mr. Weeks' bonds on condition that they cannot leave Montserrado County

without leave of court. Further they are required to report to the Sheriff of Court "C" twice every month.

Additionally, the third condition for their bonds is that they will submit all their travel documents to the sheriff.

The Presidential Investigative Team (PIT) set up by President George Manneh Weah finds that the CBL reported receiving a total of LRD\$15,506,000,000 from its contracted firm Crane Currency AB, but analysis of the packing list submitted by the CBL to PIT actually reveals that 18,151,000,000 was printed and shipped by the firm.

The indicted officials are expected to give account for an excess amount of LRD\$2,645, 000,000, which is yet to be fully accounted for.

This suggests that each of the defendants are expected to submit bonds in billions of Liberian dollars.

They have been indicted for multiple charges, including economic sabotage, criminal conspiracy and criminal facilitation following their arrests for their alleged roles in the billions of Liberian dollars scandal.

However, Judge Kontoe declines to state the value of each of the bonds tendered by Mr. Sirleaf and Mr. Weeks, and instead urges the media to search through the court records to establish the amounts.

Reporters could not get access to the documents referred to by Judge Kontoe at the time of the interview since all the formalities to get the defendants released concluded about the evening hours on Friday.

According to Judge Kontoe, some of the bonds are cash bonds and some are insurance

bonds.

He says initially, Mr. Sirleaf had filed a motion for compassionate release on grounds that he has medical condition that requires care.

But in responding to Mr. Sirleaf's motion for compassionate release, Judge Kontoe says prosecutors were resisting and requiring that Mr. Sirleaf be placed under house arrest to prevent the defendant from going anywhere.

When the court granted the motion for Mr. Sirleaf's compassionate release and set the condition for his house arrest, Judge Kontoe explains that prosecutors later on reviewed the bond and subsequently dropped the condition for house arrest against Mr. Sirleaf and all the defendants posting their bonds.

Between Monday and Tuesday, 4 to 5 March, prosecutors here incarcerated the indictees upon their failures to secure criminal appearance bonds in billions of Liberian Dollars.

In the indictment, the prosecutors here clarify that it is from the PIT's findings that these officials have been indicted, and not the findings from Kroll's investigation, a firm hired by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to help Liberia in the probe.

The indictment indicates that the indictees had no authority to print an excess amount of LRD\$2,645,000,000 to infuse it into the Liberian market.

The indictment reveals further that the defendants had no authority to pay the amount of US\$835,367.72 to the CBL's hired firm, co-defendant Crane Currency AB for the printing of the excess amount.

800,000 youths out of school

By Lewis S. Teh

Liberia's Minister of Finance and Development Planning Samuel Tweah, notes that rural-based citizens are hit by serious challenges due to lack of education.

"The statistics shown to me is scaring; it shows that young children between the ages of 6-9 and even young people, about 800,000 are believed to be out of school and that depends on everyone of us to turn their situation around, and in doing that, it has to be a gender balance."

Speaking over the weekend during the formal launch and opening of the Gender-Response Policy Budgeting unit within the ministry, he says the unit will help in addressing the stark reality of girl's education

in Liberia, and their participation in the overall nation building process of the country.

Minister Tweah reminds that the burden of those numbers of children that are out of school rests mainly on young girls, saying "We all know that when a girl child is out of school, her entire future is lost; it is not just one man's future that is lost, but a future of an entire family, and community, because the power of women lies in their education."

He says research has shown that if women are educated, the result for a nation is better, and this is what makes the policy important, stressing a need to make sure the 2018-2019 budget becomes the most sensitive budget in Liberia's

history.

"Against this I say girl's education should be a priority, because we all are aware of teenage pregnancy, it is dangerous to our society, and we are committed to supporting this effort in making sure this policy meets its objective."

According to Minister Tweah, the issue of girl's education in every society cannot be over-emphasized, noting that employment and empowerment of women and girls is paramount to the growth and development of a nation.

Tweah continues that Liberia has come a long way from gender violence, all geared toward gender mainstreaming with the help of government and partners such as UN Women, EU, SIDA and others.

He says government is mainstreaming gender in its development approach to the extent that the Ministry of Finance has established a gender response budget policy within the ministry.

He says the formal launch and opening ceremony demonstrates that gender response policy budgeting is an effort that is well collaborated across government, and development partners.

"We are going to make the best in ensuring that anything that will be done will reflect gender balance in planning, execution, road development, in Agriculture and Health there will be gender balance.



#Stop prioritizing foreign businesses over Liberian businesses!#

For her part, Madam Lorpu G. Mannah, Director of Girl's Education at the Ministry of Education expresses satisfaction over the launch and opening of the gender-response policy budgeting unit at the ministry, saying such will help to propagate, and highlights issues relating to gender.

"I want to thank the MFDP for taking such a bold step in forming this policy that we believe will help to address some of the issues of gender response budgeting, this brings me joy because this initiative started long ago."

Director Mannah continues

that now the policy has been launched, "We are hoping that the budget that will be developed should not be trashed by members of the Legislature, because what we have noticed every time, budget is passed; gender issues are trashed out, and that is something that we don't want."

The ceremony brought together officials of government from line ministries, agencies, and commission, including development partners like the European Union, ADB, World Bank, Swedish Embassy. -
Editing by Jonathan Browne

Police probe Central Bank official's death



Deputy Director for Micro-finance Matthew J. Innis

By Winston W. Parley

The Liberia National Police (LNP) says it has launched an investigation aimed at establishing circumstances leading to the death of Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) official

the late Matthew Innis.

Following reports into Liberia's billions dollars scandal, shocking

news of Mr. Innis' death came early this month as pressure mounted here both from the public and opposition

parties for government to ensure that officials who spearheaded a controversial US\$25m mop-up exercise face investigation.

Addressing journalists Friday, 8 March at the LNP Headquarters, Deputy

Police Director for Crimes Services Division Col. Prince Mulbah says police at Zone 9 were informed on 3 March of an alleged hit and run incident around the 72nd - SKD Boulevard Community.

Col. Mulbah notes that the police officers reported that upon their arrival on the scene, they met Mr. L. Henry F. Davis, Sr., and Mr. Eric J. Vah.

According to the officers, Mr. Davis and Mr. Vah are neighbors of the late Mr. Innis and residents of 72nd Community.

Col. Mulbah says the officers reported that Mr. Innis was seen lying helpless near his car.

According to him, Mr. Davis, Mr. Vah and the two officers immediately



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Trading Across Borders

In continuation of improving the business climate in Liberia, the Business Climate Working Group held a two-day forum in Gompa City, Nimba County. The forum with theme: "Resolving Constraint to Trading across Borders" one of the World

Bank's ten doing business indicators brought together a cross section of participants. According to the recent World Bank Doing Business Report, Liberia ranks 179 out of 190 economies in trading across borders. The report notes that on average, it takes 28 days to import or export goods into, or

out of Liberia. Documentary and borders compliance as well as domestic transports were cited as some of the problems to trading across borders.

Thematic issues such as expanding the port systems, port operations for



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#To empower Liberians, enforce the exclusive Liberians business act. #
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