



PUBLIC DISSERVICE

How poor African countries waste billions

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INTRODUCTION

It is often assumed that African countries are poor and many, indeed, are. But there are also countries like Nigeria, with its massive oil income, and Kenya and Ghana, -well on their way to middle income status-, that really aren't that poor (anymore). Yet, in these countries too, a majority of citizens live on very meagre incomes; they, most often, also don't have access to decent medical care, transport or education. Indeed, very often, Nigerians, Kenyans and Ghanaians are just as underfed, ill, and desperate as the majority of people in poorer African nations.

In this transnational investigation (TI) we looked at state budgets for services like health, education, food security and safety in six African countries and discovered that in all cases the problem was not the budgets. It was what was done with the money.

In our previous TI, *The Associates*, we investigated theft of budgets and goods from states by African kleptocrats and their business allies. In the year before that, we portrayed the Oligarchs at the head of African kleptocracies. In *The Last Resource*, done just before *The Associates*, we showed how the lack of any support for children, the elderly and the sick in these states, forces large numbers of women to do sex work to help provide for themselves and their families. In this, the last investigation in what could be called the 'bad governance' series, we asked how, even where budgets are not stolen, good services to citizens still don't result.

The conclusions were enlightening. For example, shiny new X Ray and other machines were in fact bought as budgeted in Kenya, but still amounted to waste and patient neglect. Officials in Ghana do worry about the yearly suicides among tomato farmers who cannot sell their harvests, but somehow

don't seem to be able to get canning factories going. A recent Minister of Health has been trying hard to improve primary health care in Nigeria, battling an incredibly complicated and dysfunctional system, so far with no luck.

Even where we found actual real corruption and theft at the root of the problems, more complex pictures emerged. Somehow, some roads were actually properly constructed in Cameroon, and toll-free corruption-busting telephone numbers opened, but there are fears that the success will be temporary. The fact that, in Mali, malnourished children are deprived of their one school meal per day, confirms the assumption that state officials simply steal the food and the money, but does that explain why not even well-meaning education ministry employees know how much porridge there was to begin with? In Somalia, the picture was clear: practically everything gets stolen. But, even there, the question why is the start of a new story altogether.

Welcome to bad governance in Africa, where countries stereotyped as too poor to feed their people waste billions of dollars every year.

HOW WE DID IT

How do you investigate water if you are a fish? It was a question our team members asked themselves and one another over and over again during the nine months we worked on investigating faulty and badly governed state machineries. The only thing we knew from the start -because we had all read our state budgets and, in the case of very poor countries like Mali, the budgets of our donors- was that there was money. There was plenty. Perhaps not enough for top-of-the-range free and advanced health-care for all our citizens, but normal basic healthcare was affordable in almost all our countries. There was money for roads, for school meals in areas where these were needed, and for agricultural production to supply our own countries' markets.

We therefore had a very clear question: why were these services -health care, roads, school meals, support for farmers- not happening?

We set out to first identify the thieves, who simply pocket money meant for state services and use it for themselves. We found some of those, and their international and local associates who help them convert the loot into assets or channel it off-shore. We wrote about them in 'The Associates,' the first investigation in this series.

Tomato canning never worked

But corruption and theft did not explain everything. There was more going on. Team members knew where a lot of money was: not stolen, but 'trapped' somewhere in the Nigerian bureaucracy, or spent on items – medical machines, tomato canning industry material – that were not doing any good. They realised that, in the case of the medical machines, an X ray cannot work if there is no electricity for it, or if patients can't get

to it because they died already of preventable conditions at primary health care level. They knew that there had been four tomato canning projects already and that these had never worked.

That was where it got tough. If you live in a country where processing factories have rarely, if ever, worked, you tend to stop asking why. Your politicians and officials are simply not capable, you think, and move on. If you live in a country where state expenditure is, as one Kenyan politician put it, 'vendor driven,' you might want to experience a country – wherever that exists – where those in charge of budgets first ask what citizens need before they say 'OK' to a salesman with dollar signs in his eyes. But what if you have never even dared imagine living in such a country?

Similarly, those of us who live in countries with more organically developed states, built to serve their own, likewise often don't see what goes wrong in former colonial state machineries that were engineered to plunder. "Well, yes, they are corrupt and incompetent over there," is the impression then. This, however, totally ignores how a minister in Nigeria is actually trying against all odds to make the machine work.

Barrage of lies

But something happens when the dynamics of state services in the public interest are discussed between members who each have backgrounds in differently developed nations. A school child in the centre of Mali does not know it has a *right* to at least one good meal a day. But a networked, budget-scrutinising Malian journalist knows that not only does the child have that right: there is money available for it, too. He knows, also, that most children elsewhere

are better cared for. That is so even in Kenya, which in turn has its own problems: there, the team member has just discovered that the list of health equipment sales has been finalised before anyone even asked a question about the health care needs in the country. Simultaneously, in Cameroon, the team member discovers that some state officials are suddenly frantically doing their jobs (what on earth could be going on?) and our woman in war-torn Somalia finds out that an expert in South Africa has raised prospects for peace that her own government has buried in a daily barrage of lies.

It is in this intra-team dialogue that important observations are made. As a collective, you discover that there are things you did not only not know, but never suspected. For example, who knew that corruption and theft are often not the cause of bad governance, but a symptom? Well-functioning systems create much less opportunity for such things. On the other hand, system faults are also sometimes engineered on purpose to create loopholes that enable theft. We have only just started to investigate the ins and outs of our systems – the water in our fish bowls – but the disconcerting and exhilarating findings already convince us that there is much, much more to do.

Doing this it is very different from chasing a ‘bad guy’ and unearthing evidence to ‘nail’ said bad guy. We do that too, and with gusto, of course. But there is something to be said for investigating the unknown. You find out things you never knew you never knew. And these findings might just help the citizens in our countries to get a tomato canning factory that works.

2 July

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CAMEROON | THE GODFATHERS WHO OWN THE PROJECTS

As the president ages, a kleptocracy disintegrates

Chief Bisong Etahoben

Cameroon was used to ruling party ‘godfathers’ mismanaging and fleecing state projects. But now that the country’s leader is 86 years old, a struggle for succession may bring improvement in governance. Or it may make things worse.

There is no road connecting the Obang villages in Manyu in South West Cameroon to any market town – a sad state of affairs, considering that farmers need a road to be able to bring their produce to consumers.

It is not that there was never any money to build one, though. An annual budgetary allocation to construct the needed roads was made to a contractor, a Mr Ndifor (1), starting from the early 2000’s. When I encountered the elusive Mr Ndifor at a party in Yaoundé, I asked him about it. Ndifor said he did not know the said villages. Reminded that he was supposed to have built roads through these very villages, the man laughed and said: “Oh, that. Don’t believe everything you read in the state budget.”

That meeting took place fourteen years ago, in 2005. Today there are no roads in the Obang area save for the old timber extraction sand roads that were always there. And since the timber companies, after depleting it, have stopped extracting wood from the forest, they are virtually impassable now.

You should not believe everything you read in the state budget

Ordinary citizens of Cameroon have spent the past four decades, all governed over by President Paul Biya, now 86, like this: seeing money pass by like mirages and rarely receiving any benefit of it. During the October 2018 presidential election campaign in Cameroon, in a TV debate, a panelist for an opposition candidate asked a Biya representative to name just one single development project that his government in its thirty-six years in power had completed successfully. Hard-pressed for an answer, the representative started harping on Biya’s long experience as a head of state without answering the question.

Even official reports note that state activities very often do not benefit the population. The 2016 report of the Regional Follow-up Commission for Public Investment Projects of the East Region (2) says that in 2015 alone, forty percent of all investment projects earmarked for the region were abandoned. They included road infrastructure projects, health facilities, classrooms, and water bore holes: all executed badly by those charged with managing them and, probably, most often also fleeced.

Reports on losses to corruption in the country differ wildly, from two million US\$ in a five year period to one and a half billion US\$ over the past decade. Deciding which one you go with depends for a large part on your definition of corruption: where does it start and stop? Outright theft from state contracts -such as roads- may happen in a part of the cases, but what about state salaries paid to nepotist appointments of incompetent individuals, massive perks and



Cellucam, the paper mill that burned down two months after its opening

bonuses for ministers and high officials, subsidies for development NGOs and catering companies that happen to be run by friends and relatives of ruling party politicians? The Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) calculated last year that President Biya spends at least three US\$ million every year on visits to Geneva, Switzerland, alone (3).

The anti-corruption commission CONAC does good work in unearthing fraudulent state expenditure on big projects. But the political powers-that-be decide if the identified culprits go to jail or whether the report in question is ignored. (More on this below.)

Ghost farmers

This, then, is Cameroon as we know it: a country that could hardly ever build or maintain a road, hospital, school, bus route, agricultural or employment project without it being used for own gain by those close to power; that is, to Paul Biya. It is the country where in 1982, the year President Biya came to power, a new paper mill burned down two months after its opening after ‘experts’ without much expertise -their feasibility studies were never subjected to verification or peer review- had pocketed the equivalent

of sixteen million US\$ (4). It is the country where the farmers’ loans bank Fonader went bankrupt in 1989 after having loaned most of the moneys to non-existent ‘ghost’ farmer accounts behind which hid friends and relatives of the managers (5); and where the grains development initiative Sodeblé closed its doors after barely producing only one twentieth of the 120,000 tonnes of corn per year the government had promised. The downfall happened amid much muttering about how the outfit had “financed voyages, baptisms, marriages and various kinds of gifts for senior staff of the company as well as administrative officials of the region.” (6) Sodeblé never reopened; Cameroon still spends around three million US\$ of its foreign reserves yearly on the importation of corn alone.

Sodeblé had financed voyages, baptisms, marriages and various kinds of gifts

Immunity

Under the pressure of donor countries an anti-corruption commission was established in the country in 2006. The investigations of the Anti-Corruption Commission of

Cameroon, CONAC, have since led to some hard-hitting reports, incidental recovery of moneys and occasionally even to arrests and imprisonment of culprits. Most notably among these was a former Prime Minister, Ephraim Inoni, who was arrested in 2012 after having been implicated in decades of large scale embezzlement that had bankrupted the national airline Camair. (Ironically, Inoni himself had kickstarted the judicial anti-corruption drive – called Operation Sparrowhawk – to add to the work of the anti-corruption commission six years earlier).

However, Biya’s inner circle and favourites always seemed immune. A report by CONAC in 2011 (7) that accused then secretary general in the Prime Minister’s office Jules Doret Ndong of complicity in double-invoicing the state for the construction of a road in the centre of the country – at an extra cost of thirty-one million US\$ – was strongly contested by the Ministry of Public Works, which called it “false.” Its implications were ignored and Doret Ndong is still a minister today. Likewise, nothing at all happened when current Minister of Finance Louis Motaze – in 2011, when he was Minister of Transport – overspent twelve million US\$ state money on an inflated invoice for two Chinese airplanes, even after opposition MP Joshua Osih accused Motaze in parliament of diversion of the funds to benefit a ‘mafia.’

Nothing happened when the Minister of Transport overspent US\$ 12 million

Media and opposition parties have denounced Cameroon’s corrupt systems and judicial favouritism for years. But, like CONAC, these are often also ignored, which is made easier because of the abundant



amounts of fake news and ‘brown envelope’ journalism – the practice whereby hacks in the media accept money from powerful individuals to publish stories that favour these individuals and slander their rivals in the country. As a result, the system always remained the system: to advance in Cameroon, you simply had to maneuver yourself as close as you could get to any Biya government and ruling party official, hope for spoils, and start living the high life when your efforts paid off.



The bigger the budget, the bigger the festivities

Very unpopular

Even when new enterprises were established with the explicit intention to put them on good management footing, often with outside help, it kept going wrong. In 2012, a new farmers' loan scheme, Credit Agricole, suffered the same fate as the previous rural bank Fonader, even though it had been assisted by the German Investment and Development Corporation (DEG) and was managed by an equally German manager, Hubert Rauch. When it was liquidated, Credit Agricole was owing its customers the equivalent of US\$ 314 million due to bad debts contracted mostly by ministers, general managers of state corporations and other senior government officials. And though a source in the Ministry of Finance at the time roundly admitted that "big government and ruling party officials had borrowed large sums of money knowing they would never pay back" and that "manager Hubert Rauch was induced in error to grant (the) loans to several barons of the ruling party," the downfall was blamed on one sole individual: the bank's liquidator Frederick Ekande, a judicial expert and former Member of Parliament. Convicted of embezzling the equivalent of over and a half million US\$, Ekande still languishes in jail.

As former Minister of National Education, now one of Cameroon's opposition party leaders, Adamu Ndam Njoya once put it: "We are yet to see the day that, when a Cameroonian is appointed to a high post of responsibility, they bend their heads down and cry due to the heavy responsibilities that go along with the post. On the contrary, people always organise feasts to celebrate appointments and this because the appointees and their families and close ones see in the appointments the opportunities to enrich themselves from the budgets allocated to positions to which they have been appointed. The bigger the budget, the bigger the festivities".

The pattern again repeated itself when in 2011 a new airline was started to replace the bankrupt Camair. Even though two managers had already been jailed, and a Prime Minister was about to follow the same fate, for the "mismanagement, embezzlement, and excessive borrowing," that had destroyed the previous airline enterprise, the practice by "ministers and general managers

of state corporations (to) take their wives and girlfriends on jolly rides round the world without buying tickets (8)” simply started again in Camair-Co. Once again, also, there was “excessive recruitment” of workers “without necessary qualifications” who had been “brought in by the usual godfathers in high places (9).” All this happened again, even if there were now two Dutch new managers seconded to the enterprise with an explicit mission to put the airline on the right path.

They are not enthusiastic because they don't see the possibility for personal gains

They lasted less than two years. At his departure in 2012 the first Dutch manager, Alex van Elk told local press that his attempts to “streamline the recruitment process according to international norms” had been thwarted by senior government officials who had once again imposed “unskilled staff” on the company. Johannes Boertien, who had been Van Elk’s deputy and took over after the latter’s departure, lasted until September 2013 but then also left, saying that he had not been able to “put into practice his management roadmap.” A Cameroonian publication revealed that Boertien had become “very unpopular for solely appointing a commercial director for the corporation without the concern of the other board directors,” with the directors’ concern, presumably, for the individuals they had wanted to appoint (10).

Even a whole series of six public-private partnerships – called CARPA (*Conseil d’Appui a la Realisation des Contrats de Partenariat*) – that was, under the watchful eye of French development organisations and the World Bank, to create tramways, a hospital, an entire university city and rail transport

network from 2013 onwards- delivered little besides, as one Cameroon news site called it in April his year, ‘flops.’ “Most of those charged with seeing to the realisation of the projects are not enthusiastic about them because (...) they don’t see the possibility of personal gains for themselves by way of kickbacks and bribes”, a senior official in the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Regional Development said when asked to comment.

Palace wars

But as Paul Biya ages, some change finally seems to be on the horizon. What anti-corruption investigations, opposition parties and foreign development partners’ consultancies could not achieve, -an end to the Biya kleptocracy-, might now occur naturally as its founder is about to turn 87 years old. The problem is that no one can foresee what will replace it.

The supreme godfather started leaving the reins of Cameroon in the hands of a new generation in January this year. A new state minister, a confidante of Paul Biya’s wife Chantal called Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh, started taking over the day to day work of governing. It set tongues wagging in Yaoundé. Was Ngoh Ngoh going to be a seamless successor, a new Biya? Or was he, as a close friend of Biya’s much younger wife Chantal (48) – the two even came from the same village in Cameroon’s Nanga Eboko community – actually part of a new faction about to take power away from Biya’s predominantly ethnic Bulu elite? And if there was such a new faction, what would that mean in terms of privileged access to state coffers and legal protection?

Chantal was holding Paul Biya’s hands and doing his waving for him



Mansion built by a Cameroonian general in his home village

Simultaneous new appointments in the government seemed to confirm that Chantal Pulchérie Biya-Vigouroux – whose flaming red big hairdos have inspired the creation of entire websites – had her own designs on power. Not only was her old friend Ngoh Ngoh, now the most powerful minister in Cameroon, another four new ministers and high level bureaucrats had all previously worked, or still worked, with Chantal’s office, charity foundations, or church. Chantal had for some time been seen as a force ready to take over from her husband, an impression that was reinforced again when she, at a public event in May this year, appeared next to a very old and weak looking Paul, holding his hands and doing his waving for him.

The rumours were fueled by the pan-African francophone monthly *Jeune Afrique*, which, in February this year, wrote about Chantal’s rise. Not to be outdone, the pro-Biya newspaper *l’Avocat* then even printed a picture of Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh on its front pages headlining “a mafia out to conquer power.” In a tweet Chantal Biya angrily denied having any such designs and insisted that she remained only interested in charity work.

But then, yet another former Biya acolyte, veteran minister Laurent Eso – now minister of justice – was said to make a play for the succession. Many a Yaoundé palace watcher interpreted the increased public antics of Eso’s close associate, TV mogul Amougou Belinga, as a sign of the justice ministers’ participation in the race. When Belinga’s TV Channel Vision4

published ethnic hate speech (11) of a kind that could have meant a prison term under the country's strict defamation laws, not only did Belinga get off scot free, but the head of the Communications Commission, Peter Essoka, was fined the equivalent of US\$ 30, 000 after Belinga complained that he had 'damaged' him by comparing his TV station to the genocidal Radio Mil Collines in Rwanda.

Next, relatively lowly Vision4 reporter Parfait Ayissi was mysteriously released after having been arrested for the rape of a 14-year old. When, after his release, Ayissi repeatedly mocked the girl on TV with impunity, too, Yaoundé's elites started asking themselves which powerful new godfathers they should now turn to for assistance and protection.

A weakened hand

It was surely not so much Biya anymore. Because even individuals who had always been close to the president, had recently been rounded up by the police. Last year that fate already befell businessman Mohammadou Dabo, a big sponsor of the ruling party and a close associate of Biya himself. Though the fact that Dabo had pocketed an advance of over one million US\$ to renovate Garoua airport in 2011 and had delivered nothing since had not bothered the justice system for seven years, Dabo was suddenly in and out of court for interrogation and could, according to a source at the Special Criminal Tribunal, soon be doing actual jailtime for "deceit of associates, crookery, forgery of commercial and bank documents and embezzlement of public funds." "All indications are that it is almost certain that he will not (remain) a free man for long," the source, a senior lawyer in the office of the prosecutor at the Special Criminal Tribunal, said.

Suddenly even 'sons' of Biya were arrested

Then in January this year, even more shockingly, former Minister of Defence Edgar Alain Mebe Ngo'o was arrested for a corrupt arms procurement deal with French company MagForce (12). The contracts in question had been signed years ago, in 2010 and 2011, and French justice authorities -who had arrested MagForce counterparts in France- had pressured Cameroon to take action against him since at least 2014, but publications both in France and Cameroon had surmised that Mebe Ngo'o enjoyed so much protection that he would never face the law. The man was always very intimately connected to President Paul Biya after all; Yaoundé pundits and their *radio trottoir* even commonly refer to him as Biya's illegitimate "son."

The arrest in January therefore sent a shock-wave through Cameroon. The pundits, quoted in many a newspaper and on radio, now said that "the faction" of Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh and Chantal Biya were "behind the arrest."

And then it happened to yet another Biya 'son', too (13). This time the target was Gilbert Baongla, a politician who leads the opposition Republican Party. Baongla, who has gone around saying he is Biya's son for years without being contradicted, had also always enjoyed protection. He seemed to have an extraordinary privilege when it came to speaking his mind wherever and whenever he wanted: he even once accused powerful minister Atanga Nji of corruption, conspiracy and 'betraying the people' on prime time TV without suffering any consequence. But in early June Gilbert Baongla, too was arrested, after a complaint by none other than Justice Minister Eso's close friend, TV boss

Amougou Belinga, whom he had accused of smuggling and espionage (14).

A good looking road

Whether the succession struggle, with its weakening of the presidents' iron grip on the state, will result in a better-run country remains doubtful. The judiciary under Esso seem to suffer as much from favouritism as always, and new minister of State Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh -he who is associated with the 'Chantal faction' – has already been implicated in disastrous construction contracts around the African Cup of Nations, as a result of which – simply because needed roads, hotels and stadia were never built-Cameroon lost the opportunity to host the soccer event this year.

There have been signs, though, even if ever so faint, that civil servants – perhaps motivated by uncertainty around their positions and career paths, or, in contrast, perhaps finally enjoying space to focus on their actual jobs – have started to achieve better results than before. The Ayos-Abong Mbang-Bognis road, the focus of the 2010 double billing scandal, is actually looking well-maintained today. A recent set of roads scheduled to be completed last year in the usually neglected south-and north west of Cameroon, has been almost totally completed. Even if in some cases the roads had once again come with a heavier price tag than they should have had, and a few were delayed due to armed action by militants who have taken up arms against the Yaoundé state, our team (15) found that almost all had indeed been built. What seems to have helped is the increasingly rigorous practice by donor organisations of withholding money until actual results are visible.

Another new development is the establishment by law enforcement agencies of toll free numbers through which citizens can denounce wrongdoings.

The old elite may spawn new kleptocratic factions

On the other hand, as the interregnum plays out, there is a real danger that the victorious candidate for Paul Biya's succession may simply re-establish the kleptocracy in his -or her- own image. Another scenario is a prolonged fight between the factions for access to various troughs, which will risk fragmenting the entire state. If that happens, the military may feel justified to take power with the excuse of re-establishing law and order.

A first sign of such a possible scenario unfolding was the circulation in the media, early June, of a rather curious unsigned declaration purportedly from senior military officers which criticised the factional fighting between what it called the (ethnic) "Bulu clan" around Paul Biya and Chantal Biya's "Nanga Eboko" community. In the letter, the anonymous military men threatened to intervene if the situation was not redressed pronto.

If that letter is authentic (which it may not be, because you never know in Cameroon), there is a third force building up within the military. And with Cameroon's military riddled with embezzlement as well as human rights abuse scandals, this would undoubtedly be the worst case scenario. The international community might take note.

1. Name changed; he has since died and could therefore not be asked for comment.
2. For the Regional Report see: <https://allafrica.com/stories/201602241006.html>.

3. For the OCCRP investigation click here <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigations/7653-paul-biya-cameroon-s-roaming-president>.
4. According to an investigation done by a group of journalists (of which Chief Bisong Etahoben was part) at the time.
5. The takeover by the 'elites' of smallholdings previously formally subsidised by Fonader is documented here: http://www.cifor.org/publications/pdf_files/WPapers/WPaper139Nkongho.pdf.
6. According to interviewed Sodeblé staff members at the time.
7. The affair is described by Franklin Tougwa on www.researchgate.net.
8. According to Camair sources and later also Camair-Co sources who were interviewed at different occasions over time.
9. Idem
10. See <https://cameroonpostline.com/cameroonian-born-mbotto-edimo-is-new-camair-co-gm/>
11. The hate speech was directed against Cameroons' anglophone population, who have long felt disadvantaged by the francophone elite in Yaoundé. During the rant, the senior commentator on Vision4 equated all anglophones to a small group of insurgents now active in the country's north west region and called for action against "all the terrorists." See: <http://cameroonnewsagency.com/40-bitter-anglophone-journalists-petition-ncc-hate-speech-vision-4-journalist-anglophones/>.
12. See for example <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/748540/societe/soupcons-de-corruption-au-cameroon-les-enquetes-qui-touchent-mebe-ngoo-se-poursuivent/> (French).
13. Biya has, next to his official offspring, at least three such 'illegitimate sons': Minister of Finance Louis Motaze -he of the Chinese planes-is rumoured to be the third one.
14. See: <http://natimesnews.com/yaoundenational-times-the-purported-eldest-son-of-president-paul-biya-georges-gilbert-baongla-has-been-arrested-and-detained-at-the-yaounde-judicial-police/>
15. The NGO Data Cameroon <http://datacameroon.com/> helped to map a set of roads and then carry out the check on their completion.



GHANA | THE TOMATO FARMER SUICIDES

How harvests go to waste next to idle canning factories

Zack Ohemeng Tawiah

The Ghanaian government thought that processing tomatoes into paste would help its starving and desperate farmers. So canning factories kept being festively opened. Only they never worked.

“There was this pesticide; it was called Aerocon. Reddish in colour. Two of them drank it and they died because they had borrowed a huge amount from money lenders. It is true. I witnessed it”. Collins Offiman Takyi, municipal chief executive officer for Tano South, confirms the death of two tomato farmers, identified only as Abuu and Appau, who committed suicide after they could not sell their harvests last year. According to regional sources, similar deaths -either by poisoning or by hanging- have occurred in Akomadan in the Offinso North District of the Ashanti region; and in Derma, Techimantia and Subriso, all tomato farming areas in the Ahafo region. They have also occurred in Zaare, Vea and Bolgatanga in the Upper East.

Sometimes farmers also simply leave, to go into ‘exile,’ as it is called, since no one knows where they are going.

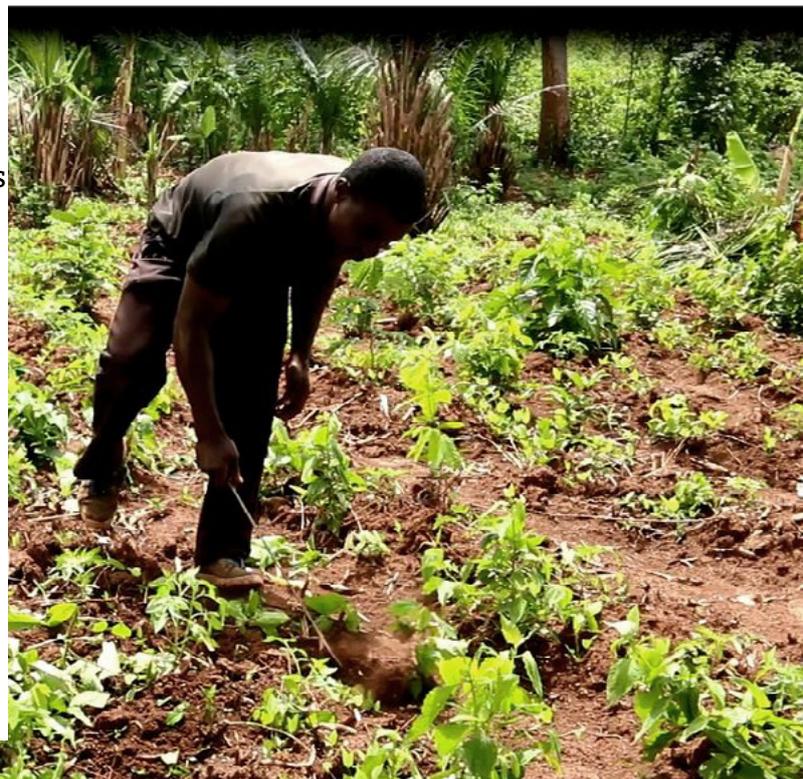
It has happened every year since at least 2007. A Ghanaian News Agency report from 2009 notes that “in the Upper East Region there is no tomato season that passes without some farmers committing suicide as a result of frustration. As a matter of fact it has become an annual ritual.”

Ghana is one of the world’s top tomato consumers per capita, but it can’t sustain its tomato farmers, who in regions like Ahafo

and Bolgatanga make up seventy percent of the population. Tomato diseases, production cost, failing irrigation systems and government neglect make them unable to compete with neighbouring countries like Burkina Faso, a lower-income and lower-production cost country, where agricultural produce sells for much less. “The market women will come and leave our tomatoes here. They prefer to go to Burkina and buy. Mine always go waste. That has been my predicament,” says Kwabena Asante (40) who farms in the Ahafo region.

His colleague Issahaku Ayama, who won Upper East Regional Best Tomato Farmer in 2012 and 2013 but now also sees his harvests go to waste on the fields, agrees: “the

Frustrations will force you to commit suicide by poisoning



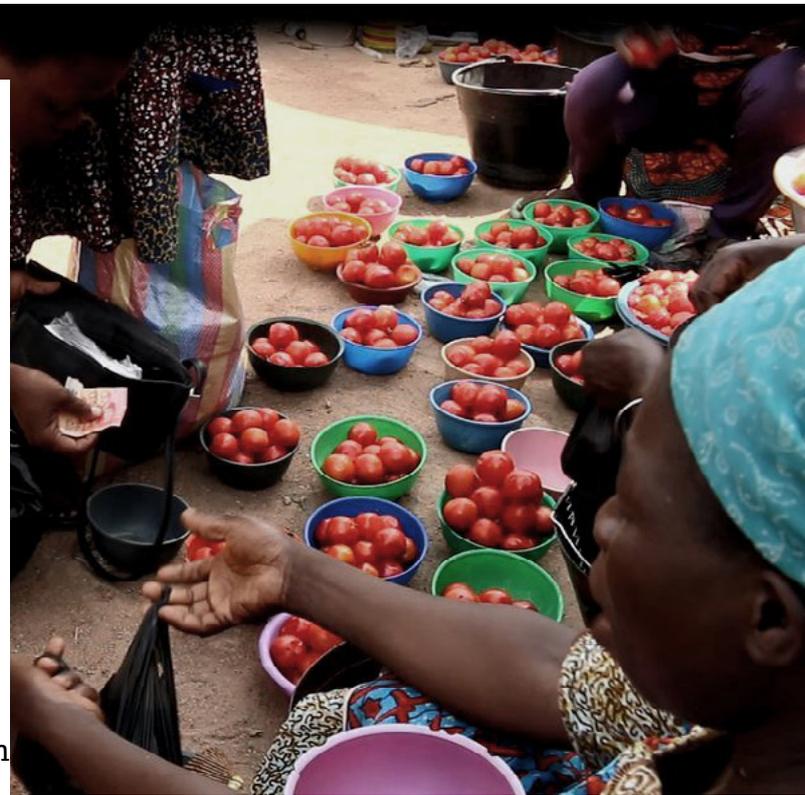
traders who buy on large scale prefer to buy from Burkina Faso. Frustrations will force you to commit suicide by poisoning.” Several farmers say they feel despair when they see the market women’s trucks passing through the region on their way to Burkina Faso and Mali.

Forcing and persuading

Local authorities sympathise. Officials of Ghana’s Food and Agriculture department have tried in vain to apply the only solution they could think of: to persuade the market women to buy from Ghanaian tomato farmers. But “even when you ask the women what (kind of) tomato they want to buy, and you tell the farmer here to cultivate that kind, they still go and get it in Burkina,” says Upper East regional extension officer, Zimi Al-Hassan. Al-Hassan feels that the market women should be obliged to buy Ghanaian. “The only way that we can address this concern is through contract farming so that when they produce and the buyers refused to buy, the farmers can institute legal action against the market women,” he says.

But forcing the market women to buy more expensively is not likely to work: they would then feel obliged to raise the prices for consumers, -and food is already expensive for most Ghanaian citizens. Raising import tariffs so that Burkina tomatoes would become more expensive to the market women would have the same effect. A 2010 research study by the International Food Policy Research Institute IFPRI in Washington, USA, warns against such measures and advocates more support for national farmers instead.

The women prefer Burkina tomatoes



The women themselves are adamant that they prefer the tomatoes from Burkina. Ghana’s tomato farmers don’t produce as much as they once did, says Lorencia Asibi, who is taking a break in Upper East’s Paga border town on her way back into Ghana from Burkina Faso with her truck, helpers and interpreters. “Those few of them who are still in business can only fill a KIA (van), but not this large cargo truck.” Ghanaians like Burkina tomatoes, she says: they are cheap, they don’t have as much chemicals. She adds that diseases like nematode in Ghana are also a problem. “Ghanaian farmers used to produce quality tomatoes but the story is different now.”

A report from Ghana’s own ministry of agriculture, dated 2017, highlights important failings of its own policies in this regard. Over 2016, it mentions that improved seeds and fertilisers were supposed to be provided, as well as expert assistance for farmers to help them “modernise agriculture.” But “inadequate quantity and quality of storage space for the seeds and

fertiliser at regional and district offices,” combined with “inadequate (transport) logistics,” a “limited number of (training) personnel,” an “inadequate supply of seeds,” not to mention an “unavailable farmer database,” bedeviled the efforts. The only thing the ministry did manage to deliver in its entirety, according to the report, was a (written) “production guide.”

problem and save the tomato farmers by various governments at different times. But the most any of these have worked is a few years – at the most.

Pwalugu was part of the reason why Issahaku Ayama did so well in 2012 and 2013. “I never ran at a loss when that factory was in operation,” he reminisces.



The only thing the ministry delivered was a written production guide

Tomato paste

Remarkably, the report doesn't mention the fact that there are five tomato canning factories in Ghana: one for each tomato producing region. Northern Star, in Pwalugu in the North; Wenchi in Bono; Derma in Ahafo; Nwasam in the Eastern region, and Tema, close to the capital, Accra. Fully equipped, repeatedly refurbished and sometimes also repeatedly inaugurated, they have been announced to solve the

Market women's trucks on their way home to Ghana
Photo Zack Ohemeng Tawiah

The Northern Star factory is the oldest tomato canning factory in Ghana. It had been one of the legacies of Ghana's first president after independence in 1960, Kwame Nkrumah, but it was first closed in 1967, after Nkrumah had been overthrown and it had spiralled into debt. It had been reopened close to four decades later, by the John Kufuor government in 2006, but it had only worked for one year then. A new government refurbished and inaugurated it again in 2010. Then – it is the period that Ayama remembers so well – it worked for two years.

The processing plants in Wenchi and Nsawam have never worked since the eighties, says the IFPRI report. It mentions “a combination of structural reforms promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (*the World Bank and IMF generally advised to bring down state investment in general in agriculture, OT*), frequent breakdowns resulting from a lack of spare parts and obsolete machinery, lack of technical competence, bad financial management and poor marketing” as causes for the failure. “The following two decades can be characterised by multiple failed efforts to reopen the factories to process domestically grown tomatoes,” the report adds.

Beside the above mentioned issues, the IFPRI report also warns that even with sound financial management and good machines the problems will not be immediately solved. Assistance to farmers will be crucial to keep up supply to the plants, it says, because a processing factory -rather like the market women- will need much more and much cheaper tomato supply than possible at present, especially if it is to compete with imported paste from Europe and China.

Puzzlingly however, consecutive agricultural and trade ministers, regional officials and even presidents (Kufuor in 2006, Atta Mills in 2010, Mahama in 2015) keep re-opening the factories and saying that this will now solve the problem once and for all. Mahama has even come to conduct an opening ceremony of the same plant, Tema in Accra, twice, expressing hopes for local tomato processing both in 2015 and in 2017. In 2019, Tema is still only repackaging imported tomato paste.

We have been neglected with no attempt from government to resolve the matter

The failed efforts are among the most cited painful experiences in our interviews with farmers. Kwabena Asante was about twelve in 1992, when there was a plan to reopen the Wenchi plant, but that never progressed beyond the level of the feasibility study that was carried out then. “We have been neglected with no single attempt from government to help resolve the matter,” he says. Osman Salifu (53) still has hope that the factory in Pwalugu will be reopened again, as new Upper East regional minister-designate, Paulina Abayaye, has promised to do in November last year “as soon as she is confirmed and sworn into office as a Minister.” “It will help us,” Salifu says. He won the prestigious National Best Tomato farmer award in 2004, but has not broken even for several years.

Meanwhile, no politician or official in Ghana has ever been fired for the project failures. The caretakers and administrators of the tomato paste factories still come to work at the dilapidated structures every day to sit around and observe.

No response

Repeated phone calls made over a period of a week to Ghana’s Ministry of Trade, which is in charge of the factories, have not been met with a response. One deputy minister, after earlier agreeing to give an interview, switched off his phone. The other deputy minister did not respond to phone calls at all. The minister who had also initially agreed to an interview but later said he was delayed in Senegal, also did not respond again for several days afterwards. A member of the government’s economic team said he had no permission to speak to the issue and recommended that we speak to the minister of trade or either of his two deputies.



Issahaku Ayama Photo Zack Ohemeng Tawiah



Kwabena Asante Photo Zack Ohemeng Tawiah

In Ahafo, Kwabena Asante carefully strikes his cutlass in multiple careful strokes on a rock. His left hand intermittently pours water to sharpen it. He then sets off to clear the weeds that have sprung on tomato beds on the field.

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Ghana's food supply at risk

Farming and local food supply are generally in danger in Ghana. The World Bank projects a fourfold increase in the country's food import bill over the next twenty years, with the country becoming a net importer of basic food unless local production is increased. According to a 2017 World Bank Agriculture Sector policy note, Ghana's annual food import bill now exceeds even the estimated annual cocoa earnings of two billion US\$.

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The trucks at the border

At the border town of Paga in Ghana's Upper East region, every morning, a convoy of trucks loaded with tomatoes in carefully arranged wooden and paper boxes enter here from Burkina Faso into Ghana. The drivers joyfully respond to colleagues driving from the opposite direction by blowing the horns of their trucks. Those travelling from Bolgatanga in Ghana have empty wooden boxes packed in the cargo truck, those from the opposite direction have several boxes filled with fresh tomatoes. Those that come from the Paga direction towards southern Bolgatanga have market women seated on boxes filled with tomatoes.

They look weary, having travelled several hundreds of miles from Ghana's south



either to Burkina Faso or Mali, through the desert for several days without sleep or shower.

Thirty-six year old Gifty Agyene from Prestea has nine years' experience in buying tomatoes from Burkina Faso, she says, adding that she travels four times a month and spends 40,000 Ghanaian Cedi, about US\$ 7,500, on each trip. Today, she has been sitting for hours already on top of her truck from Kaya, ninety-four kilometers north of Burkina's capital Ouagadougou, with eighty boxes of tomatoes. She hopes to arrive in Prestea in Ghana's south in two days. With the help of an interpreter she travels around Burkinabe towns and cities to buy tomatoes from the Mossi farmers who, she says, produce the best. She sacrifices for her trade. Besides not or only intermittently sleeping for at least four days, her hired interpreter charges her two thousand Central African Francs (CAF), slightly more than three US\$, per every box of tomatoes bought. Ten farm hands whom she employs to sort, arrange and pack the tomatoes charge between five hundred and a thousand CAF per box. None of them, including Gifty who travel day and night, have any life

insurance cover. "This tomatoes business is the most difficult and cumbersome venture I have ever seen. Whoever says it's not difficult is a liar," she says.

The risk involved in the tomatoes supply chain process is enormous. Traders have become targets for local and foreign highway robbers who often attack them. Gifty recounts how armed men have attacked her and her team on this road and says she now pays extra money in bribes to Burkinabe soldiers to escort her and her team in robbery-prone areas. Traders and their truck drivers are also often involved in accidents, sometimes deadly. At least ten accidents involving five deaths, have been recorded on the Paga-Bolgatanga stretch between February and April this year alone.

But despite the risks involved Gifty will return next Thursday to buy tomatoes from Burkina Faso. "Burkina Faso has more fertile land than Ghana. There are too many chemicals in tomatoes produced in Ghana. In Burkina most of the farmers use cow dung. Burkina Faso's tomatoes look good, hard and they are abundant," she insists, as her truck moves on, Ghana way.



The mysterious contracts that emptied the health budget and left patients in the cold

Joy Kirigia / *Africa Uncensored*

Using hundreds of millions of dollars to buy new medical equipment for the country's main hospitals was presented as a good idea. It wasn't. But those who objected were arm-twisted and run over in a process driven by 'coercive vendors.'

On a sidewalk next to the Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi stands a weeping woman. She is holding another smaller, woman who is also crying and appears to be struggling to stand upright. They are sisters, they say: Gladys Mwhiki and Esther Wambui. Esther, the younger and smaller one, has to leave the hospital to go home since she can't afford the hospitalisation fee of about twenty US\$. She has cervical cancer.

The Kenyan Constitution's Bill of Rights says that "every Kenyan citizen has a right to the highest attainable standard level of health, which includes the right to health care services." In addition, Kenya's Health Act of 2017 seeks to specifically safeguard health care services for vulnerable groups, like women, the aged, persons with disabilities, children, youth, as well as members of minority or marginalised communities. So far, however, these rights exist only on paper. Most health treatment still needs to be paid out of pocket in the country.

In the following days well-wishers will scrape together the twenty US\$ needed to get Esther Wambui a hospital bed for the night, some tests and some pain killers. But to be treated with the chemotherapy she needs, she must pay a deposit of two hundred US\$: more money than she will ever be able to get. At the time of writing this,

Wambui remains bedridden at home, in pain and unable to sit down or move much. All that Gladys can afford at the moment is to provide food for her sister and the five children they have between them. "All Esther does is cry all night and we just don't have the money," she sighs. Gladys makes about four US\$ a day washing clothes for people.

Buying things

On paper, the Kenyan government tries hard to improve the situation. In policies called the 'Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030' and the long-term development agenda, 'Vision 2030' among others, it pledges to provide quality health care services to all its citizens as provided in the Constitution. In October 2013, the national and local governments (through representatives from forty-seven regional counties) came together to discuss functional and accessible hospitals, including staffing and quality of care, in the Health Sector Intergovernmental Consultative Forum.

That is where it started to go wrong. Because instead of thoroughly exercising through Kenyan citizens' health needs – like Esther Wambui's need for chemotherapy – the forum immediately jumped to buying things. A proposal to buy modern equipment for close to a hundred hospitals – a project that would henceforth be referred to as the MES (Managed Equipment Services) – was announced by government. MES would supply apparatus like X-ray and dialysis machines, operating tools and tables, lab necessities and intensive care beds to in total ninety-eight hospitals in forty-seven counties.



Counties and hospitals were not consulted

Remarkably, according to the – now retired – Ministry of Health head of clinical services, Dr John Odondi, successful bidders for the contracts had already been identified by then. “At the time of the meeting, the technical and financial evaluation had been completed to determine the successful bidders and the tender processing committee was preparing an evaluation report,” the 2013 Intergovernmental Forum Committee report quotes Odondi as having said. Which means that a list of physical things to be bought – a process notorious for the opportunities it creates for kickbacks, since the lucky companies can often be persuaded to share with the relevant officials – had already been decided upon by the time the discussions at the Forum took place. The Kenyan government would later argue that they had conducted a ‘needs assessment’ with the counties before issuing the final tender, but county representatives disputed this.

Not that some equipment was not needed in the ninety-eight hospitals country wide, roughly two per county. But, as is often the case with big procurement packages for material things to buy, many necessities were overlooked. To work the machines, hospitals would need trained and paid nurses and doctors, as well as the infrastructure to place the shiny new machines and instruments correctly and connect them to the needed electricity. The machines would need to be cleaned and maintained. Moreover, patients would not only need the equipment, but also a clean environment, specialist treatment and medication supply. Esther Wambui’s chemotherapy treatment depends more on specialist care and the right medicines than on a machine.

Many necessities were overlooked

Nevertheless, in July 2014, nine months after the initial forum, Tender No. MOH/001/2014/2015 to a value of thirty-eight billion Kenyan Shillings (Ksh), the equivalent of US\$ 375 million, was formally issued by the Ministry of Health for supply, installation, testing, training, maintenance and replacement of medical equipment through the MES programme. Shenzhen Mindray Bio-medical of China, Esteem Industries of India, Bellco SRL of Italy, Philips Medical Systems of the Netherlands and General Electric of the USA were contracted to deliver the identified items. The contracts under the MES project were signed on 5 February 2015.



Arm-twisting the regions

The forty-seven Kenyan regional counties who are in charge of the hospitals in their areas, were then arm-twisted into signing their approval. In a letter to the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) dated June 9, 2015, the counties' Board of Governors said that the regional authorities "had been under a lot of pressure (...) to agree and sign the MoU (*Memorandum of Understanding*, JK) prepared by the National Government to effectively start the project." They added that "the entire process has been undertaken by the national government (...) without consultation (...) but that nevertheless, "due to the pressure, the Council of Governors has agreed to sign the MoU as they await the outstanding answers."

The pressure, the governors said in the letter, had not only come from the government, but also from a public that, desperate for better health care, hoped that the medical equipment scheme would help. "I first had refused to sign for a long time, but there was a lot of politics. People were saying "he is refusing and people are dying," (now former) Narok County Governor, John Nkediye, confided.

Most of the counties, however, were not given the actual procurement contracts, nor were they consulted on what equipment was needed in their regions. Checking the MoUs between central government and counties that were signed under the aforementioned pressure, Africa Uncensored discovered that each county was to purchase the exact same equipment list -regardless of size of population or hospital needs.

Hospitals now sat with stuff they had not asked for

The EACC did not undertake any action on the basis of the county governors letter, however, and the MES purchases continued. Throughout 2016 and 2017 at least half of the targeted hospitals received stuff they had not asked for, did not need, or in many instances, could not use. The Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Teaching and Referral Hospital in Kisumu County, for example, received seven intensive care beds even though they had just recently bought the seven beds they needed. "We did not have enough staff (for those extra beds)," says former Kisumu County Minister, Dr Elizabeth Ogaja, in an interview. "So some remained unused." Local media reported hospital staff sources complaining that their new CT scan or X Ray machines stood unused as well, either because they already had these or could not operate them.

In Ndanai Hospital in Bomet county, operating theatre equipment that was received in 2016 stood unused for three years because the hospital did not even have surgery facilities at the time. Former Bomet County governor Isaac Ruto said in media interviews that he had not even signed the MoU for the deliveries, but that these were made nevertheless.

The governor had not signed but the deliveries came anyway

Still other reports mentioned that non-medical companies had come to construct new buildings, or do roofing, landscaping and painting at exorbitant prices on the orders of ministry officials as part of the MES programme. This raised suspicions that contracts with the main providers had been adjusted to include certain subcontractors -again, presumably because kickbacks could have been involved. In one case, the Kenya Standard newspaper

quoted hospital staff as saying that instead of anything medical, air conditioners and office furniture had been delivered.

Lack of full disclosure

The Senate Finance Committee, in a report about the MES project issued in 2018, stated that in several cases equipment had been received by hospitals that “already existed in the facility and (was) therefore of low priority” and that this “clearly (indicated) a lack of consultation between the two levels of government.” In the report, as part of a segment titled “Issues for Consideration”, under “Lack of full disclosure by the Ministry on the contracts” it is also stated that “Some (hospital) facility heads are not fully aware of the exact equipment they expect to benefit from. As such some MES providers are suspected to have supplied incomplete sets of equipment to facilities.” According to Senate Finance Committee member, Makeni County Senator Mutula Kilonzo Junior, the Senate “has records to show that half of the (...) hospitals in the contract have not utilised the equipment because they do not have the (...) infrastructure, trained personnel or staff who can run the radiology and other advanced equipment that are part of this (project).”

The Senate Committee requested Kenya’s auditor general Edward Ouko to look into the case of the MES deliveries, which he did, resulting in a series of “systemic weaknesses” found and “listed in audit reports,” Ouko told Africa Uncensored in an interview. He also said that “in some cases we have actually gone to counties when things were delivered, but there is actually nothing there or there is something but (it is) in boxes,” adding that he had requested to see the main contracts with the suppliers but that these had not (yet) been made available to him.

Senator Mutula Kilonzo Junior did get to see the main supplier contracts briefly in November last year, when the Senate’s Finance Committee summoned the Cabinet Secretary to account for the problems with the MES, but said that as soon as they had seen the documents they were taken away again. Kilonzo did notice, he said, that the contracts were not signed by the Cabinet Secretary for Health as they should have been.

Only the Senators briefly saw the contracts

Besides the contractors and the Ministry of Health, the Senators are the only ones who have so far succeeded in seeing the main documents. A request from Africa Uncensored to see the contracts has resulted in a reply from the Ministry of Health that it had “written to the Attorney General for legal advice” on the request.

The government’s procurement database shows that up to February 2018 the total amount paid out to the contractors under the MES project was Ksh 26,033,720,377 (US\$ 257 million). Close to twenty-seven million US\$ of this amount, was, remarkably, already paid out to suppliers Esteem (India) and Bellco (Italy) before the contracts were even signed. In the case of Chinese Shenzhen Mindray, contract and payments to the tune of twenty million US\$ commenced in May 2015, whereas the contract was only signed in March 2017.

Skyrocketing costs

Meanwhile, the cost for installation and maintenance of the MES equipment is skyrocketing, too. Though the regional Counties had initially been told by Government Health Secretary Sicily Kariuki



that the new burden on their health budgets would come from a ‘grant’ that the central government was to make available for this purpose, several county governors and health ministers when contacted by Africa Uncensored all said they had not received such allocations and that deductions were being made from their regional budgets. These deductions had now doubled from one hundred million Ksh (roughly one million US\$) per year per county to two hundred million Ksh, two million US\$ per county, bringing the total yearly maintenance budget up from forty-seven million US\$ to ninety-four million US\$. It is a severe cut in a county where health care in many regions is already severely underfunded (*see box*).

A severe extra cut was made to the regional health budgets to pay for the MES

The increase was partly, according to the government Health Secretary who had been quizzed about this by the Senate Finance Committee, because twenty-one more

hospitals had been included as recipients of MES equipment- again without consultation with the counties. Senator Mutula Kilonzo Junior expressed his concern about the expansion and further deductions, saying that “The contract was fixed (and that) the variation to increase the hospitals (...) has no basis.”

Uasin Gishu County Finance Minister Julius Rutto is currently filing an appeal to the Ministry of Health, because his county budget was deducted two hundred million Ksh during the 2018/2019 budget, but, Rutto told AU, the value his county has received in equipment is “less than ninety million shillings”.

Coercive vendors

In an interview with AU, one former regional health minister who had been serving at the time the MES contracts were initiated and who asked to remain anonymous, blamed “coercive vendors,” i.e. companies who supply goods to the

government: “We learnt sadly that you easily get run over if you stand in the way of coercive vendors in Kenya,” he said, adding that “budget development (in the Kenyan state) in general, is largely vendor driven; and the objective types among us do not survive long enough in the policy space to effect sustainable change.”

Recent Cabinet reshuffles have complicated our quest for answers from central government. The Health Cabinet Secretary whose responsibility was to sign the contracts (but who apparently did not do so) is now the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development; the Principal Secretary for Health is now assigned to the Lands Ministry and the later Cabinet Secretary for Health, who was in charge of the contracts after 2015, is now Kenya’s Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva.

In general, besides the response received from the Ministry of Health on our request to see the contracts, no responses were received on numerous requests for comment directed at government by phone, in written emails and hand-delivered physical letters.

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“Remove the politicians from health care”

Beside the issue of buying wrong or unnecessary machines, the focus on the material outfitting of hospitals is also putting the cart before the horse, says former Kisumu County Health Minister Dr Elizabeth Ogaja. “Yes of course we need hospitals that work,” she says. “But if more discussion would have been allowed, we would have focused on the

primary health care base and then see what we need to do to have hospitals take care of what cannot be handled at the primary health care level.”

Most health policies in the world, and indeed in Kenya, envisage that basic patient care -for conditions such as colds, flu, allergies, simple infections, diarrhea and head and stomach aches without underlying conditions, as well as the diagnosis of more severe conditions that should be referred to a hospital– should be primarily provided in communities, close to citizens. In that way, larger hospitals can be freed to provide specialist care, for example for the over 165,000 (1) people who die yearly in Kenya from diseases that (regularly or often) need more advanced treatment such as TB, pneumonia, AIDS and cancer. Esther Wambui might get the care she needs if the hospital where she sought it was not overburdened with patients who could have been treated at primary level.

“On a community health care level, counties are struggling. They need strengthening and budgets and strong policy support,” says health policy and management specialist at the World Bank, Dr Frank Wafula. “Primary healthcare in the country is only getting two billion Ksh (twenty million US\$) altogether per year at the moment, whilst the budget for Kenyatta National Hospital (the largest hospital in the country, ed.) gets close to fifteen billion KSH (148 million US\$) annually.”

Wafula attributes the focus on hospitals to the “politicisation” of health care, where hospital building and equipping have “become something for politicians to get votes. Then, when a new politician

comes in, he does not want that hospital completed because he thinks it will make the (previous) guy look good. So he starts his own. Then you have a whole lot of abandoned projects. It is just a mess.”

Asked whether patients like Esther Wambui would not also need health insurance that would help pay for the expensive chemotherapy she needs, Wafula says it is “fantastic” that, recently, some national health insurance pilots have been initiated, but that the “financial element” should not be confused with effective care. “The big problem is the (lack of) effective care. You can’t just give people a health insurance card and tell them to go to hospitals. What do people actually get when they get to hospital?”

Emphasising again that the main challenge in Kenya is to remove the management of health care from “the political process and people who are looking for political survival,” Wafula explains that it is only then that the national government will be able to “manage the large hospitals and the specialised services (properly) centrally and also support the decentralised primary health care levels and give them enough budget.”

1. Figures from 2012 in the 2014 Kenyan Ministry of Health’s Human Resources Strategy plan <http://www.health.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Kenya-HRH-Strategy-2014-2018.pdf>
2. Thanks to the attention given to the case of Esther Wambui by Africa Uncensored in Nairobi, well-wishers have organised funds to help pay for her cancer treatment.



A school meal programme is hijacked while children starve

David Dembélé

Over a thousand schools in Mali are supposed to be provided with school meals, meant to provide malnourished children with at least one good meal a day. But town mayors, civil servants, principals and others along the way make food and money disappear under the less-than-watchful eye of a friend of the president.

The sun burns the skull in Dianwély, a small village in the centre of Mali eight hundred kilometers north of the capital Bamako. This region, called Douentza, has been in the throes of various militia attacks for years. Nomadic Peulh herdsman and Dogon farmers fight each other for resources and land, and there are jihadists, too: in the absence of a coherent state able to provide employment or even water, all manage their own interests and agendas. There are – dilapidated – schools, however, and many families try to live a peaceful life and educate their children.

But Samerou (12) is not going to school today. It is 42 degrees Celsius, far too hot to walk the seven kilometers distance. As it turns out, Samerou hasn't made the trip at any day during the past two months. "He gets sick," his mother says. "He cannot physically manage to walk so far, twice a day, and with no food."

The mother is young, but already a widow; she has been one for the past two years. Lacking employment or other means to provide for her household, the food at Samerou's home is often not enough. Which is why the government is supposed to provide him and the other children in

the region daily with a school meal. The food, budgeted at a hundred Central African Francs (CAF), twenty US\$ cents, is vital in more ways than one: not only will it help the boy fight off malnutrition and the risk of stunted growth as well as get education; it may also save him from the 'siren call' (1) of the groups that use war and plunder to look after themselves.

The president emphasised the importance of school meals

The school meal project, conducted in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) and a number of other aid organisations, is meant to provide at least one plate of food per day per child in 2236 schools in total throughout Mali. Out of the 2236 schools in the programme, the state is supposed to provide for 1301, slightly more than half; the WFP and other aid organisations cater for the rest.

Going for twenty years now, it targets the regions of Bamako, Gao, Kayes, Koulikoro, Segou, Sikasso, Mopti, Taoudeni and Timbuktu: most of these places are in the north and east of Mali, where unemployment, hunger and armed conflict are at their worst. In his New Year's Address to the nation in 2019, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta emphasised the importance of school canteens, and announced that another thousand schools would be equipped with the school meals facility.

Only that did not happen, as much as the present programme has not been happening. "My child cannot find food at school,"



Samerou's mother repeats, sadly. "That is why he is not going."

Three spoons of porridge

Hoping for food, children have still come to attend the primary school in Youwarou, close to Mopti, six hundred kilometers north east of the capital. Seated on the floor in three dilapidated classrooms, some of them say they have in fact had a bit today: three spoons of a thin millet porridge called *gnêgnêkini* each. Others haven't. "The other children should receive food the next working day. They will be prioritised then," says Ousmane Dicko, a teacher in charge of the food programme. He waves a paper with the names of the sixty-three students who will eat at noon on Monday. "You see the difference clearly," says a colleague of Dicko's, a third grade teacher. "Those who have eaten nothing are much less receptive than those who have something in their stomachs."

Those who have eaten nothing are much less receptive

When asked why some of the children did not eat, Ousmane Dicko replies that the Youwarou town hall only delivers fifty bags of fifty kilogrammes of millet per quarter instead of the ninety bags that are due. "So we have to manage like that until the situation improves." But when will that be? A visit to the Youwarou town hall to ask for an answer turns out to be fruitless: not one municipal officer is available for comment. "Three letters have been sent to the Mayor to ask about this since October last year. Most recently we wrote in February this year, 2019. We have not received any response," says Ousmane Dicko.

About three hundred kilometers south, in the Macina school cluster in the Ségou region, children eat only three days a week. On Tuesdays and Thursdays there is nothing, so Modibo Cissé (10) and his sister Anna (7) stay home on those days. "They come from ten kilometers away and it is too much," says teacher Arsène Kamaté. The school, where once over two hundred children received education, now faces closure. "Less and less children come," a parent

committee member says. “About eighty per cent stay home because of the lack of food. Only parents who can afford to give their children money still send them here.”

Diverted funds and missing grains

The problem lies with the municipal mayors, says education department official Moussa Fofana. “Mayors regularly tell us that they don’t have to account to us. They manage the money as they please, conducting the contracts with local suppliers, without providing financial statements.” Financial director of the Ministry of Education, Aliou Coulibaly, confirms that the support given to the school management committee via the municipality of Douentza, where Samerou and his mother live, has been suspended since March this year. “Douentza has been receiving five million CAF (US\$ 8,500) per year for school meals. But no one knows how these funds are managed. We don’t get accounts.” Hence the suspension. “In 2017 alone, eight hundred million CAF (close to US\$ 1,4 million, over one fifth of the entire annual state school meal budget of US\$ 6,3 million, DD) were diverted and not used for their purpose,” he adds.

Getting into the percentages of foods and moneys missing from the programme is tricky, however. In a situation where few municipalities even send accounts, and there is no capacity to trace the deliveries to the schools, how can it be said with certainty that just one fifth of the budget went missing? Asked how the eight hundred million was calculated, and if he was certain that the other eighty percent was in fact used for school meals, the financial director changed the subject of the conversation.

Tracing the actual food in the programme

equally presents challenges. Education ministry procurement official Moïse Togo says that, according to a report that was prepared by his department recently, sixty-eight tonnes of grain went missing in 2017. But Togo also says he does not know how much grain there was supposed to be in the first place. He suspects “foul play” in a considerable number of cases, emphasising that “the justice department should take a look at what is happening with the resources for school meals in the programme.” But how is the police going to build a case of theft if it is not known how many resources there were per region to begin with?

No one knows how much grain is bought annually

Three days of phoning officials in the Ministry of Education are to no avail. No one knows how much grain, dried fish, vegetables, or any other food is supposed to be bought annually, by whom or in which region. Which is puzzling because on town hall level, schools do seem to have been told how much food they were to be supplied with. If teacher Ousmane Dicko in Youwarou knew that his school was supposed to receive ninety bags of millet of fifty kilograms each per quarter – which translates to 18000 kg of millet per year for his school – how is it possible that the government does not know how much food needs to be delivered to each of the 1301 schools it is supposed to cater for?

According to the Chief Executive Officer of the National Centre for School Canteens (CNCS), Sarmoye Boussanga, the question does not arise. “In 2018 the state indeed suspended the transfer of funds (for the programme), due to malfunction in many canteens,” Boussanga says over the phone. “But this year all 1301 canteens financed by the



national budget are working fine.” Told that according to observations on the ground, this is really not the case, Boussanga refuses to respond to any more questions. He also did not answer to phone calls afterwards.

The Chief Officer for Planning and Communication of the CNCS, Nouhoum Doumbia, however, admits that all is not well. “No, we are not satisfied with the management of the school canteens. The children are suffering. The funds allocated are not used properly,” he says. He suggests that the state should “assume responsibility and take action.”

The director says all the school canteens are working fine

But isn't he, or rather his institution, the CNCS, supposed to be in charge? Should the state take action against the CNCS itself? No, says Doumbia. “Here all we do is paperwork. We do not manage the money. This is directly paid into the budget of the

(municipal) communities that house the school cafeterias.” Asked if the CNCS then is not responsible to follow up the use of the moneys by the very municipalities by requesting reports and procurement invoices, and establish a success and failure rate on this basis, he responds that “we will in fact do an audit exercise” in the near future.

The Office of the Auditor General says it is too busy to audit the funds for the school meal programme or the functioning of the CNCS. “We are a small team and we cannot control everything at the same time,” says Executive Officer Mamoutou Traoré. Head of the economic and financial State Office in charge of repressing corruption and protecting state property, Bandiougou Diawara, also pleads “very limited means of covering all the structures of the State.” Nevertheless, he adds, his office “cannot exclude that the entire chain of management of school canteens will be the subject of financial audit (at some stage.)” He cannot say when, though.



Mali's public services being somewhat deficient in the first place – Mali ranks 120 on the list of Transparency International's corruption perception index of 180 countries – the problems with the school meal programme may be symptomatic for the functioning of the state in general. "Aid programmes for the rural regions always go wrong," says a former Mali state official who has been involved in both state and aid organisations' efforts to bring services, food and other aid to the country's deprived areas. "Because, outside being employed by the state, there is no work. So any aid programme is used to deliver jobs, money and goods to individuals who participate in the (state and development partners') channels. The ultimate recipients are everybody's last concern."

The ultimate recipients are everybody's last concern

That independent aid organisations are also affected by what happens in the "channels," is illustrated by a visit to the school community in Zantiébougou, a hamlet outside the capital Bamako, which should be catered for by the World Food Programme. A member of a parents' committee in the area says that food was actually brought in by the WFP, but that the principal "got the food delivered to his home all through 2018, depriving our two hundred students". Asked to comment on the case, the WFP's Virgo Ngarbaroum says she will have to look into it and come back to us, as well as with regard to general questions regarding the WFP's success and failure rate. However, by the time of going to production, no response had been received.

When asked for thoughts on how to improve management of the school meal project, education expert Augustin Poudiougou says that the Mali state should strengthen

the CNCS, “to manage the chain from beginning to end, while it should be regularly audited for better efficiency.” But he also reflects, despondently, that it might be better if the state was not involved at all, and that “school canteens should (rather) be managed by an independent body to ensure supply and efficiency monitoring.”

Former prime minister and former mayor of Bamako, now opposition politician, Moussa Mara, however, thinks that system failures – which are often maintained precisely because these allow opportunities for corruption – can be addressed. “Regions and municipalities can and should be held responsible. Working more structurally with civil society and schools themselves will also help. You have to involve parent and school management committees in the selection of food providers in the area, and also in the reporting on the food deliveries. The reports from the municipalities must be co-signed by the school management committees.”

But could such processes take place in a dysfunctional state like Mali? Mara concedes that it will be difficult. “When I was a Minister for nine months between April 2014 to January 2015, at the time of an acute security crisis, I did not have time to monitor what other ministers did, even though I always encouraged them to liaise with civil society in their portfolios. But we did achieve results in the school meal programme when I was mayor of Bamako, in liaison with the school management committees. This is why I say that local responsibility is crucial.”

At least one local municipal council member in Youwarou, Amadou Bah, says he would gladly play such a role in monitoring food deliveries to the schools in his area. The parents in the school committees we visited all

say they are anxiously waiting for such a liaison, too. But the question remains whether the current school meal programme leadership will see a need to improve its ways as long as director Boussanga believes that there is no problem and “all school canteens are functioning well.”

And Boussanga is not just anybody. “He is a longstanding campaigner for President Keita,” says a source in the know. “He was carrying the president’s portrait with fellow activists everywhere during the campaign last year. He is a great friend of the current administration. That is how he got this job.”

★

The importance of school meals

Just over five hundred thousand school children (less than five percent of the ten million children of school going age in Mali) are covered by the school meal programme. Over eighty percent of the nine thousand schools in the country don’t even have food preparation facilities. The school meal programme is therefore little more than the proverbial drop in the ocean.

Nevertheless, it has been shown that where food security through school meals improves, school attendance goes up. A school canteen impact assessment conducted jointly by the Imperial College Consortium in London, UK, and the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, US, indicates that between 2012 and 2017 school meals supported by the WFP in Mali have led to an increase in school enrollment rates by eleven percent and a reduction in child labour. The effect was even higher

in areas with higher conflict intensity. “School feeding has helped (on average) to increase the duration of schooling by 0,5 years for boys and by 1,1 years for girls,” says the report.

1. The transnational investigative report ‘The Siren Call’ by the AIPC and ZAM outlined in 2015 how misrule and exploitation drive youth into the arms of jihadist and other militants in East and West Africa. David Dembélé provided the chapter on Mali for this investigation. See: <https://www.zammagazine.com/chronicle/chronicle-19/316-the-siren-call>



How millions meant for the sick are never spent

Theophilus Abbah

Health care in Nigeria is incredibly complicated. Large budgets are trapped on different government levels, only accessible to those who know how to work the system. A minister wants to change that -but is he still the minister?

The Primary Healthcare Centre in Ugbamaka-Igah village in Kogi State, Nigeria, is overgrown with grasses. The labour and patient wards as well as the other rooms of the clinic are covered with dust and cobwebs and the lab is void of equipment and chemicals. Health personnel at the facility idle around. They do have some medicines for common conditions, they say, which they could dispense if a patient would show up, but for many ailments there are no drugs or treatments at all. “There are no cleaners, too,” says staff member Adejo Omale. “We do clean ourselves at times.”

The Olamaboro Local Government Area (LGA) in which this village is located, should in January 2019 (1) have received a budget equivalent to US\$ 457,000. Part of this should have been used to buy medicines, sterilising equipment and other chemicals for this and the other four primary health care centres that should serve a population of 165,000 in this Nigerian region of roughly one thousand square kilometers. It should have paid nurses, technicians and cleaners to staff and maintain the five rooms and beds as well as the solar refrigerator, handwash basin, desk and wheelchair. The centres should have taken care of most common ailments that occur from time to time: from colds to simple infections and wounds to bouts of malaria

and antenatal care, childbirth, vaccinations and infant care.

But the local government did not do any of these things and patients who needed antibiotics, bandages, treatment for various fevers and other primary level care needs were left to cope, and sometimes die, alone. It is estimated that yearly one million children in Nigeria die because of lack of care, including vaccinations and malaria treatment, at primary level.

Trapped budgets

Remarkably, as said above, this is not because there is no money. The budget is trapped in a joint account that is managed by Nigeria’s Kogi State, -of which the Olamaboro local government area is a part on behalf of the region. The state has not paid the locality its due allocation in years. As a result, an adjacent rural electrification project, built at the same time as the clinic, is also not working.

The story is the same in Yaryasa and Doguwa in Kano State, and Gwer East and Edikwe, in the Apa and Gboko local government areas in Benue state. “There are no medicines or doctors,” says Abdullahi Balarabe, a member of the local health care committee in Yaryasa that is supposed to act as liaison between villagers, their health needs, and the local centre. “The officials don’t even come here often. Today none of them came.” Bala Alasan, a 47-year-old farmer and a neighbour to the facility in Doguwa, adds that “the (health care) person who works here knocks off as early as 11:30

Local Government	January 2016	January 2017	January 2018	January 2019
Apa, Benue State	N90,955,205.06 (US\$ 252,653.34)	N88,954,351.12 (US\$ 247,095.41)	N145,835,433.18 (US\$ 405,098.42)	N145,354,953.95 (US\$ 403,763.76)
Gboko, Benue State	N145,192,554.46 (US\$ 403,312.65)	N142,029,845.15 (US\$ 394,527.34)	N230,369,259.55 (US\$ 639,914.60)	N230,231,402.25 (US\$ 639,531.67)
Olamaboro, Kogi State	N107,893,899.02 (US\$ 299,705.22)	N101,652,611.09 (US\$ 282,368.36)	N164,343,543.15 (US\$ 456,509.84)	N164,459,350.21 (US\$ 456,831.52)
Doguwa, Kano State	N114,550,512.51 (US\$ 318,195.86)	N107,076,543.09 (US\$ 297,434.84)	N161,742,744.41 (US\$ 449,285.40)	N162,612,096.98 (US\$ 451,700.29)

Table 1. Source: Ministry of Finance website

AM and even when you were lucky to meet him, you will still have to buy your medicines outside.”

“Outside” means the markets or the streets, where fake and expired medicines abound. Nigerian health authorities have repeatedly warned the public against buying dodgy medicines from the street because these aggravate conditions rather than cure them, but what does one do when the street is all you have?

In Gwer East, a local government staff employee in the vicinity says that staff only show up “when they like and if you ask them, they complain that they are not being paid.” An elder in the community, David Kighir Vanger, confirms that “the local government staff came for take-over once (after the project was completed) but up till now they have not come back.”

A data search done by Nigeria’s Premium Times recently showed that none of the local government areas have received their budget allocations for years now. State governments have “pocketed or diverted over fifteen trillion Naira (N) in federal allocations – about US\$ 41.7 billion – meant for local government areas in the last twelve years, depriving the nation’s third tier of government funds for desperately needed

developmental projects,” the respected news site wrote in May this year.

The deprivation of funding applies to the local government areas visited for this investigation as per the following table, which shows typical monthly allocations from the federal government account in January alone over a period of four years (see table 1).

The *Premium Times* added that this could happen “because there is no real autonomy for that level of government, and its heads are often hand-picked by state governors.” This may also explain why local government heads themselves haven’t protested the arrangements that stopped them from doing any work for their communities.

A dysfunctional system

Former Minister of Health Isaac Adewole (2), -who called the Nigerian health care system ‘dysfunctional’ already in 2017- admitted, when still in his portfolio earlier this year, that 20,000 out of 30,000 primary health care facilities in Nigeria were not working. And even of the remaining 10,000 he did not seem to be too sure, saying that “Nigerians were dying” and that “we only need 10,000 working facilities, rather than be building 30,000 ones.”(3)



Dilapidated clinics Photos Theophilus Abbah

Piles of rubble all over Nigeria

Adewole's comment highlighted a focus on building and construction that has been a knee-jerk answer to Nigerian's health needs for a long time now. An entire programme of building clinics, started in 2009, which focuses entirely on construction and only counts completion, has been an unmitigated disaster. In most years, between 2009 and 2014 (these are the most recent figures), not even half – mostly a third – of planned buildings were completed. In 2014 alone, 132 should have been built but only 38 were completed.

It's anybody's guess whether the other 94 are just foundations, entire buildings without furniture and equipment, or heaps of bricks littered across the country.

A basic problem on the level of the building of the clinics alone, is that much of that task has been left to federal state Senators. These Senators propose budgetary allocations in order for them to 'bring health projects to their constituents.' When the government gives them such budgets, the Senators then -while pretending that they 'influenced' the projects 'for the benefit of the people',- often

execute these in a way that opens opportunities for nepotist contracts and shoddy or negligent building. The local government area responsible for maintaining the clinic in question is then faced with a non-completed facility that is impossible to maintain in the first place, even if it had the budgets to do so.

Accessories of all kinds

At the Doguwa Primary Healthcare Centre, in Kano, for example, there is a working vaccine storage facility for routine immunisation, but for the rest only a hand pump for water. The floor is tattered and dusty, the bed in the antenatal room looks dirty and there is not much else. Thirty-seven million Naira, over US\$ 102,000, was paid for this to a contractor called Young Stallion Nigeria Limited. But Young Stallion is, according to its own description in the company registry, not in the healthcare construction business at all. It does "trading, marketing, sales, distribution of general goods, and commission agents to (...) deal in all articles (...) and things in connection with the company's business, engineering works and construction."

Year	Total PHC Projects	PHC Projects completed	PHC Projects Not Completed	% Completed	%Not Completed
2009	177	92	85	52	48
2010	188	65	123	35	65
2012	129	28	101	22	78
2013	175	123	52	72	28
2014	132	38	94	29	71

Table 2. Source: National Primary Health Care Development Agency's 2015 Annual Report (3)



Meanwhile, the company Wawu Investment that built the clinic in Tse Vanger, Gwer East, in Benue State, is listed as able to do electrification works. According to the company registry it can even “install computers” and “accessories of all kinds.” However, up to today, the building has not yet been fitted with or connected to electricity; neither has any of the required equipment been installed. “This project has been a “mere strategy adopted by politicians used to win an election,” shrugs local Aondowase Yonov (25). “Or how would you explain that this small project started in 2013 but is not completed and put to use up to this moment?”

Local Government Area chairman Solomon Danjuma in Edikwu, sixty-three kilometers down to the south west of Gwer East, likewise blames “politicians” for the “abandonment of the clinic project in his area.”

He says his LGA cannot do much about this because “we did not award the contract.” However, Danjuma did a “preliminary investigation,” into the project, which, he says, showed that “the people who attracted (it) to the area” – *in this case House of Representatives member Adams Entonu, TA* – may have “collected all the monies for the project, but then failed to pay the contractors for its completion.” Danjuma said he discovered that the job was left undone because the contractors “left on grounds that they were not given money to complete the project. And you know some of them [lawmakers] lost elections, so they wouldn’t want to spend any further money.”

Some lawmakers lost elections so they won't spend any more money

Lawmaker Adams Entonu did not respond to phone calls nor to a text message sent to his phone.

Poor and shoddy

In the case of the clinic in Ugbamaka-Igah in Olamoboro, locals also complain that the project was not completed as it should have been. They say that Senator Attai Aidoko (*who 'donated' the clinic, TA*) "once came with an expert to scan the environment and do the costing." After that they had not seen the senator again. The projects had been executed by what the locals thought were 'close associates' of the senator, who had been handed the US\$ 133,000 the building of the clinic cost. "They diverted some things and never built (the clinic) to

(measure up to what) it was actually meant for", a member of the community, who prefers to remain anonymous, says. "It was done in a poor and shoddy manner. After that nothing has happened."

Senator Attai Aidoko's legislative aide, Felix Jimba – who picks up the phone at the Senator's office- says this is untrue. "He did his best (getting the) projects to his constituents," says Jimba, adding that it was not Aidoko, but "the executive" (*the federal government, TA*) that awarded the contracts and that reports that the Senator had awarded contracts to cronies were "nothing but smear campaigns." He attributes all the problems to lack of maintenance by the local government area. Moreover, Jimba says, it could not be true that the projects



Administration room in health facility Photo Theophilus Abbah

were done in a shoddy manner because “they would have been checked before being handed over” to the LGA and that the “functionality and sustenance of the projects” after that were the “duty of the local authorities.” “The local authorities should be queried about what they are doing to sustain these projects,” he concludes.

Which means we are back to blaming the local government authorities for not maintaining the clinic, for which we have to blame the states because they don’t pay the allocations, whilst the federal government is also blaming the states for not paying their share to a national health care fund, that to make things even more complicated, also exists as a parallel structure.

It is one massive game of passing the buck

It is one massive game of passing the buck.

And it only gets worse. Because the LGAs, even if they *would* get the money to complete and run the clinics, are not fully authorised to do so.

There is yet another level.

Bureaucratic nightmare

Formally – and yes, different regulations contradict one another – the supervision of clinics in local government areas is a responsibility of state agencies called primary health care development agencies (PHCDA’s). So the state governments, under which the PHCDA’s fall, *do* carry responsibility for the clinics after all. And since they also hold the budgets for primary health care, the solution should be simple: it is to manage the finances and the operations of the clinics on state level.

But not so in Nigeria, where state senators use clinics as a game to win elections, then point for their staffing and maintenance needs to local government areas, then blame the local government areas for not doing their duties whilst also not paying them needed budgets, then justifying their non-payment of the budgets because they need to manage their state level health care agencies, the PHCDA’s. It is the stuff of bureaucratic nightmares.

Neither state Senator Aidoko, nor his legal aide Felix Jimba -who had said the local government was supposed to maintain local clinics – answer subsequent phone calls meant to ask them about the responsibilities of his state government with regard to the clinic that, in 2014, Aidoko ‘donated’ to his constituents.

The Health Ministry wants to streamline

During his term that ended this year in June, recent Health Minister Isaac Adewole (4) has made efforts to streamline the ‘dysfunctional’ system by decreeing that central budgets should be made available only to the provincial Primary Health Care Development Agencies and that these should shoulder all responsibilities with regard to supervising, supplying, maintaining and staffing local clinics from now on. (see box). This would be a positive structural reform, in line with Adewole’s passion for -as it says on his Twitter bio- “achieving Universal Health Coverage by fixing the PHC system” in his country. However, in Nigeria’s turbulent political landscape after recent elections it remains unclear whether Adewole will return as Health Minister for a new term.

*

The most recent Minister of Health in Nigeria, Isaac Adewole, directed harsh words about the non-working clinics in May last year mainly to the Nigerian states which, he said, are not complying with their duties in terms of the Primary Health Care Development Agencies (PHCDA's) and the allocations that should enable these structures to supervise the clinics and their functioning. He decreed that primary health care funding would henceforth be made available directly to the PHCDA's and that these would now oversee both the building, equipping, medicines distributions, staffing and other needs of the centres.

This was welcomed throughout the structures of the PHCDAs. The Executive Director of the Kogi State PHCDA, Dr Abubakar Yakubu, said in an interview that a lot has already been done to “address the issues of manpower gaps and inadequate drug supplies in (the clinics.)” Giving examples, he mentioned that a census of personnel and facility needs had been done in the state and that “the state governor recently signed a bill to bring all primary health care in the state under one roof to ensure proper coordination and efficient service delivery to the people.”

Yakubu also said that about two weeks ago, medicines had been supplied to over three hundred primary health care centres in the state. Improvements were reported also in Kano State where, according to PHCDA executive official, Dr Nasir Mahmood, over three thousand primary health care facilities “are now under (the overall agency's) control” and

that “renovation of many identified dilapidated centres” had already begun. Under the new arrangement, PHCDA's in the states would also take over maintenance and the supply of medicines and other essentials in cases where state Senators would attract new health care projects to the regions. This would relieve local councils, who could then use funds they receive from the central government plus their internally generated revenues for other purposes. Locals in Ugbamaka-Igah village continue to hope in that respect for some attention to their electricity supply, which is needed for the clinic as well as their households.

1. See table 1
2. A new minister of health still needs to be appointed after recent elections in Nigeria
3. <https://leadership.ng/2019/05/22/20000-health-centres-abandoned-minister/>
4. Data over 2011 are missing from the Primary Health Care programme report.
5. At the time of writing this, government formation was ongoing in Nigeria after elections and it was uncertain if Health Minister Adewole would return to his post.
6. The regional case studies for this report were selected as follows: Kogi State, because author Theophilus Abbah is from there (which helped access important sources in the area). The other clinic locations in Benue and Kano States were randomly selected.

SOMALIA | AN ARMY IN NAME ONLY

How unpaid and unmotivated soldiers desert to join the terrorists

Muno Gedi

Western allies pump billions of dollars into the Somali security forces in the name of the fight against terrorism. But the money disappears, soldiers starve and the insurgency grows.

“The good news is that there is now a government ready to uphold your rights,” says a man in a blue suit to a battalion of soldiers in uniform. “When you go for risky deployments you will have your weapon, the tool of your trade. And you will have your wages. Do not be weak. You will be defending your parents, your siblings, your children, our land and our religion. The Somali army will be free of any corruption, God willing.”

The man in the blue suit is Somali Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire, who uploaded this video of his own speech on Twitter on 13 June. The clip shows how the soldiers squint a bit in the sunlight, with feet every now and then shuffling in the sand. They do clap for the man who is addressing them, but not very enthusiastically. Most responses on the Twitter feed also seem skeptical. “Wishful thinking,” says one. “You speak well, but you can’t do it,” another. “Al-Shabab is raising tax in the streets. You can’t even protect Mogadishu,” puts a third. And a fourth, referring to the sunglasses the prime minister is wearing: “Why don’t you allow the soldiers to see your eyes?”

Why don’t you allow the soldiers to see your eyes?

It’s just three months after April 2019, when three bases of soldiers went on strike over four – some say six, yet others eight – months of unpaid wages. Residents of the Middle Shabelle region, where much



fighting with the Islamic fundamentalist insurgents of Al-Shabab takes place, reported that they had seen entire garrisons leaving their towns. Simultaneously protests erupted among fellow soldiers in the capital Mogadishu, who left the key points they were defending to block roads in the capital. There have been few updates since but individual reports from soldiers indicate that the situation of discontent and desertion is continuing to simmer.

Remarkably, there are those who, like Prime Minister Ali Khaire, insist that all is well again. “The past year has seen developments on the security front and Somali security forces have proved their increased capabilities (...) This is a strong signal to Al-Shabab and other armed groups that their days are numbered,” African Union Somali office representative Francisco Madeira wrote on 21 June 2019 in the South African Mail & Guardian (1). In the op-ed, Madeira announced that the African Union’s Somali AMISOM troops – which he heads and who have been doing much of the fighting in the past decade – are ready to complete their scheduled withdrawal from Somalia in 2021. The Somali National Army (SNA) is completely



ready to take over, Madeira asserted. That would be an enormous turn around for the Somali army indeed. After all, a 'readiness assessment' conducted last year by the Somali government itself in partnership with supporting countries and donors, stated that over a third of the countries estimated 10,000 soldiers were expected to fight the well-organised and well-armed Al-Shabab without any weapons at all. Somali army expert Paul D. Williams (2), quoting the same 'readiness assessment,' wrote just one month before the very optimistic Francisco Madeira, on 20 May this year, that "the army was in a dire state: there were fewer front-line personnel than previously estimated (on average battalions had only sixty-three percent of their authorized strength), there were inconsistent recruiting standards, and most battalions lacked basic equipment, including weapons, ammunition, communications kit, and vehicles. The result was an army in name only."

Misrule

It would actually be surprising if the Somali army did well; it would make it the only effective state institution in Somalia, the thin sliver of a country in the Horn of Africa wrecked by over a decade of misrule under a weak and incapable government (*see box*). Somalia has consistently ranked the worst on Transparency International's corruption perception index of 180 countries in the past twelve years.

When the new Somali government of President Farmajo – he who appointed the prime minister in the blue suit who was addressing new recruits in the video clip – was elected into power two years ago in 2017, the President announced that Al-Shabab would be defeated in three months' time. But the opposite seems to be happening, interviews

Al-Shabab is organised. They have uniforms and weapons.

on the ground in Somalia show. Mohamed-yare (26) graduated in business administration, but joined the army in one of the recruitment drives the government conducts every six months among young men in the country. He received one year military training in Sudan and after that, he says, he "hoped to fight terrorism." Now, he confides that he has lost that hope. "There is no salary and we are not fighting any war. Al-Shabab is organised. They have uniforms, they have weapons. We are not even close to where they are, we are just sitting and waiting for our salaries with no weapons, just fearing that Al-Shabab might come to us."

Army commander Wardon (50), who heads a battalion in the Middle Shabelle region where Al-Shabab controls many towns, agrees. "We have no motivation, we are like a car without petrol. We can't move." Angrily, the commander outlines the fate of his men. "They have family. Their kids can't go to school. All because somewhere that US\$ 100 (*salary that every soldier is supposed to receive monthly, MG*) gets lost."

Abdinur's best friends are dead

Abdinur (27) still fights with the battalion in Middle Shabelle, but says he is about to give up. "We cannot move them (Al-Shabab.) Without weapons or equipment or salaries, how are we supposed to fight? The government is not even motivating us." The last six years have been hard, he adds. "When I came here (in 2013) I had three friends with me, we all fought in the same platoon. Two are dead now, killed by Al-Shabab, and the other one is badly injured and still in hospital. That was during a fight in Adale district. They had a lot more men and a lot more



Al-Shabab is not good but with them I will live without fear

weapons. I lost my best friends because the government won't motivate more men and won't give us equipment."

He sighs. "I cannot live with this fear. If the government does not change its ways, I will just join Al-Shabab. They are not good, but at least I will live a life without that fear."

Fellow SNA soldier Ali (20), whom I meet checking cars at a roadblock in a dirty uniform and with a cigarette dangling from his mouth, shares his doubts. "It would be easier for me to be with the other 'youth.' They are in charge where I am from, in Middle Shabelle. My parents live in Jowhar. As a government soldier I cannot even visit them. If I walk the streets there I will be killed. I would like to see Al-Shabab destroyed, but the government is not committed. We don't get salaries or weapons." In Lower Shabelle the mood is the same.

"Even if we are committed to fight, the government clearly isn't. They misuse the army budget. They don't care," says an officer at the frontlines called Sadaq (45). Further down in the region, in Al-Shabab controlled territory, I meet Abshir (19), who was an SNA soldier but recently joined the insurgents. Looking rather snappy in his blue shirt and dark green trousers he tells me he is much happier now. "I saw how all the safest places are under the control of Al-Shabab. It is only here that I can be safe and get a little salary," he says.

Not good

To say that Al-Shabab is widely perceived as "not good," is putting it mildly. For many years now hardly a month goes by without an Al-Shabab bomb exploding in a car, or near a shopping centre, government office or hotel in Mogadishu, all in the name of an insurgency against what 'the youth' call a Western occupation. Almost every Somali family has deaths to mourn on a regular

basis. Citizens in the regions occupied by the Islamist hardliners generally mutter and roll their eyes when they tell you in private conversations how they have to drop whatever they are doing to go to prayer in the mosque five times a day, or wear thick body coverings in the heat, because even light fabric burka and hijab are considered sinful.

Most Somali's, therefore, just like some of the soldiers who spoke to me, would like to see Al-Shabab 'destroyed.' But they also know that that won't happen: not as long as the government is, as a defence ministry advisor was quoted in a hard-hitting article by Amanda Sperber in *Foreign Policy* (3) recently, little more than a "criminal patronage network," established and kept alive by billions and billions of dollars from Western countries, hoping, as it turns out largely in vain, for a coherent Somali ally in the global fight against Islamic fundamentalism.

As Paul Williams' diplomatically phrased article puts it: "the (Western) organisations that have tried to build the SNA since 2008 (...) ignored the political problems of elite disagreements, clan politics, and corruption."

The Somali government is little more than a criminal patronage network

The soldiers know that there is money in the state budget for their weapons, vehicles, shelter, salaries, uniforms and food. The 2018-2019 armed forces budget of over US\$ 44 million (with almost half of that, just like the entire national budget, funded by international allies and donors like the World Bank), formally provides for US\$ 100 in wages monthly for every one of the estimated 10,000 soldiers in active service (4).

It's just that they don't get it. "I believe that the President and the Prime Minister -*the man in the blue suit, MG-* know exactly where our money goes. This is why many of us soldiers have joined Al-Shabab," says Abdi (30), a deputy commander of a platoon stationed in Mogadishu. He laughs angrily and shakes his head.

Private agendas

Their suspicions are confirmed by a former chief officer at the Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), who told me that "during my office time in 2014, the soldiers' salaries were simply used by the offices of the president and the PM for their private agendas. They would have projects of their own going, which they funded from the army budget. They did not account to parliament about the budget at all."

The 'projects of their own' – and this goes not only for the President and PM but for practically all powerful government officials in Somalia – are related to the aforementioned 'elite disagreements' and 'clan politics.' Somalia is a country of regions and clans; of nomadic herdsman and farmers. Even government ministers and officials are often more loyal to their communities and the attached patronage networks than to a national government that is in reality little more than a mix-and-match of people and structures put together by forces from outside the country.

*

The origins of Al-Shabab

Until the end of 2006, a government composed of a set of regional Islamic courts – called the Islamic Courts Union

– controlled most of southern Somalia and the vast majority of its population, including most major cities such as Jowhar, Kismayo, Beledweyne, and the capital Mogadishu. The United States, who saw the ICU as an enemy in what it called its ‘War on Terror,’ supported a largely beaten and fledgling rival Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

In late December 2006, a U.S-backed Ethiopian military invaded Somalia and eventually captured the capital Mogadishu, driving out the Union of Islamic Courts from power and putting the Transitional Federal Government formally back in charge. The Al-Shabab militia was formed as a reaction to the invasion. It vowed to defeat the TFG and restore Somalia as an Islamic sharia state. Ironically, -the population of Somali being fully muslim- the TFG has also adopted Islamic sharia rule in the country’s constitution.

When, for example, armed conflict erupted between the cattle-farming Biyamal clan and the poorer, dispersed, formally refugee, community called the Habargidir five years ago, the latter accused the Biyamal of working with Al-Shabab, whilst the Biyamal said their opponents were receiving arms from Somali army sources. I discovered that, indeed, SNA Third Brigade Commander, General Roble and the national Security Minister were much closer to Habargidir warlord Yusuf Siyaad Ind’hade than to their own national army bosses. (5)

A little while later, the Global Post reported that in Qoryolley in Middle Shabelle, a shop keeper called Osman, who had survived for years under Al-Shabaab rule, was murdered by an SNA soldier after the army had

‘liberated’ the town. The reason: Osman was a target because he was prominent in a rival clan from the one the soldier belonged to – it was more the clan that occupied the town than the national army (6).

Somalis are therefore not surprised when we hear that guns and ammunition instead of being transported to SNA army bases are diverted from armories and given, by bureaucrats in charge of the distribution channels, to their clans rather than to our soldiers. Or when we hear that highly placed persons in the government will even hire or invite Al-Shabab to kill rivals and competitors in the same government, as Foreign Policy, quoting the same defence ministry advisor, reports. Of course people in government help Al-Shabab. How else do ‘the youth,’ when they want to plant a bomb in Mogadishu, pass unnoticed through the roadblocks?

Observers who spoke to Foreign Policy also shared their concern that the government doesn’t even want the war to end. Why would they? “ [Somali government officials] are laughing all the way to the banks and meanwhile secretly supporting al-Shabab,” said an SNA trainer in an email to Foreign Policy, stressing that government figures “don’t want to solve any problems because they want the money to keep coming.”

It’s the billions in patronage, stupid

It’s the billions in patronage, stupid. It’s the fact that the World Bank alone pays half the salaries of the entire Somali government.

The desperate situation, in which inhabitants of Mogadishu simply live each day as if it could be their last, because we may walk past a car that explodes, or burn to death in



a restaurant, or get machinegunned on the beach, resembles the eternal war situation in books like Orwell's 1984: things crumble and burn around you, but you continue your life, albeit numb, as if its just one of those things.

Unless there is negotiation.

A recent analysis by Akinola Olojo of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Pretoria (7) puts forward what many Somalis have long been thinking. Why not negotiate with Al-Shabab? Yes, they commit horrendous acts of terror, but our government leaders have done criminal and murderous things, too. Ideologically we are not that far apart. Our country is an Islamic country as per our constitution. Even in the video clip, the Prime Minister refers to our army as fighting for "our land and our religion." "It is the interpretation of sharia, Islamic law,

that is in question," Olojo correctly says in the ISS piece.

Prioritising communities

And if, as Olojo also suggests, all of us Somalis come together to discuss what 'Islamic' means – militants' and soldiers' family members, clerics, mediation experts, women's groups, traditional institutions, clan representatives and civil society organisations – we might get somewhere. (After all, we are also already dealing with issues such as women's emancipation and circumcision in our own way (8)). As Somalis we will of course want to prioritise the concerns of local communities who bear the brunt of terror attacks. Al-Shabab will demand that the foreign forces leave and we can discuss that. It is what AMISOM itself wants to do, too.



Caption: this cartoon from a Somali website (published in 2014) criticises the Habargidir clan’s invasion of Biyamal clan territory in Lower Shabelle. The man towering over the (Biyamal) victim says: “The other regions have no bananas, mango or papaya, so we will fight here.” Bystander 1, talking about the invader: “Is the government working with him?” Bystander 2: “Surely. This misdeed has a back-up.”

No, Al-Shabab is not good -but neither is our government. If Somalis can get Al-Shabab to stop bombing, and instead commit to help run a national structure and a budget – since they seem to be much better at it than our government – that would be the best outcome.

They are not accountable even to the World Bank

At a military checkpoint near state house, a soldier called Osman asks me for a dollar to eat lunch. “I have been working here for six months already but I was never paid once,” he says. I ask if he knows why and he nods. “The President and the Prime Minister steal from us, but they will not be held accountable, even by the World Bank.” He shakes his head at that last bit, as if he finds that in particular quite hard to believe.

1. <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-06-20-somalia-transition-plan-on-track-as-amisom-begins-exit>
2. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/what-went-wrong-with-the-somali-national-army/>
3. The official number of soldiers on the payroll of the Somali National Army is 26,000 but former Somali Defence Minister Mohamed Mursal Sheikh Abdirahman has explained that that number includes retired and older soldiers, the disabled and orphans. Reliable military sources told VOA that the actual number of soldiers on duty is far lower, possibly fewer than 10,000. With the exception of ‘orphans’, for whom there is formally a budget line, the armed forces budget is also supposed to provide for the older, retired and disabled soldiers.
4. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/07/somalia-is-a-country-without-an-army-al-shabab-terrorism-horn-africa-amisom/>
5. See: <https://www.zammagazine.com/chronicle/chronicle-7/66-rich-clan-poor-clan>
6. See: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-05-29/inside-fight-somalias-future>
7. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-06-11-time-to-consider-negotiating-with-al-shabaab-in-somalia/>
8. <https://www.zammagazine.com/chronicle/chronicle-2/23-circumcision-light>

CONCLUSION

After thoroughly exercising through all our observations with regard to state service expenditure in the six countries in this report, we are left with – in a variation on the saying “it’s the economy, stupid,” – one exasperated outcry alone: it is the governance, stupid!

In all six countries, whether terribly poor like Mali, or vastly rich like Nigeria, we found that it is simply the governance and state management systems that do not work. In Nigeria, literally hundreds of millions of dollars are ‘trapped’ in bureaucratic layers of governance. The incredibly top-heavy and complicated system is partly a result of generations of tinkering with a colonial system that once worked for British rulers but never so much for Nigerians themselves; partly, also, of functionaries who realise that clumsy and irrational processes provide for more stealing opportunities than sleek management. In Kenya, well-meaning politicians are powerless to stop valueless money-guzzling contracts before their term in office ends. In Mali, where there seems to be no governance system at all, auditors despair under the workload, because they should really check everything. In Cameroon, civil servants simply never know if they should do their job or focus on pleasing the next incoming political master: you can go to jail either way. In Ghana, many politicians keep – probably often in all sincerity – reinventing the wheel of the tomato paste factory to help tomato farmers, with disappointment and an idle factory – and another series of suicides – the result every time. In a case like Somalia, the investigation results in a nightmarish conundrum: who are better, the Islamist terrorists who blow up hotels, or the criminal patronage network that is in government and simply steals everything?

We don’t have a full set of answers. But our AIPC team members raise some thoughts

in their own country reports – and these thoughts invariably come back to the observation above.

It does seem, all in all, that, however well-meant it is, the international community, – development partner countries and donors – should stop pouring money down the black holes of malfunctioning and thieving state machineries. The result, as many a development expert has observed, is simply the continuation of a status quo where people continue to starve and die at the bottom with money accumulating on top. The starkest example of this is Somalia, where war is the status quo. As the country report says: “inhabitants of Mogadishu simply live each day as if it could be their last, because we may walk past a car that explodes, or burn to death in a restaurant, or get machinegunned on the beach, in an eternal state of war.”

A more constructive approach may be a dialogue with civil society and good-governance-pioneers in state structures on how to improve the management of the budgets that are already there. Even where budgets still need to be supported, like in desperately poor Mali, donors can do much more in terms of insisting on systems that will produce results. How does the World Food Programme accept that its partner in the school meal programme for starving children – the government – simply doesn’t oblige recipient municipalities and schools to account for receipt of money and food?

Many individuals and experts in the country reports indicate ways forward in this regard. The investigative journalists who live and work in these countries – as may be clear from the chapters – have ideas about this too.

The AIPC is ready to engage.

BIOGRAPHIES

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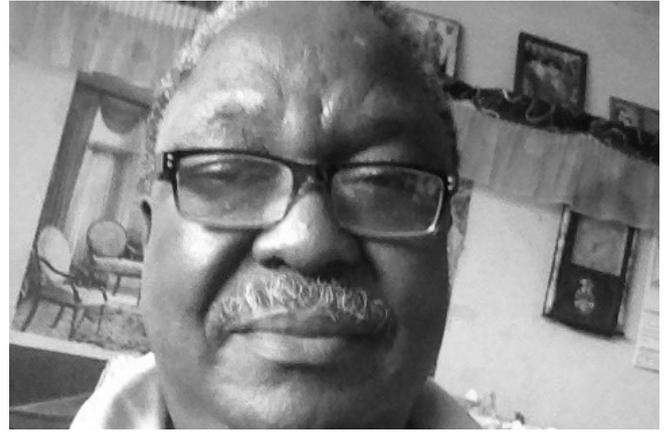
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