MEMORANDUM

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WELCOME BACK TO 2018, THE 12th YEAR OF PUBLICATION

SUMMARY

$5BN RAIL CORRIDOR IN MOZAMBIQUE TO “FEED AFRICA”

Artist’s render of the new coal port at Nacala, Mozambique, from consultant Arcadis, which is advising on the scheme

The African Development Bank (AfDB) has arranged a $300m loan to start the $5bn Nacala corridor rail and port project in Mozambique and Malawi, of one of Africa’s largest infrastructure schemes. Designed to integrate the region and open trade in coal and agricultural commodities, the project sees a 912km railway running from the Tete province in western Mozambique to Nacala port on the east coast, through a section of Malawi. A deep sea port at Nacala is also planned (pictured).

Announcing the financing from Japanese and other banks on 20 December 2017, following “years of financial structuring”, the AfDB said that when the railway opens, coal exports would increase by 40%, generating crucial foreign earnings for the struggling economy of Mozambique.

The railway will also carry 4 million tons of other commodities a year, and give regional farmers access to world markets, the AfDB said.

“By providing a rail link across Mozambique and Malawi with a possible extension to Zambia, it will help integrate Africa, and by opening up markets for agricultural commodities it will help feed Africa,” said Pietro Toigo, AfDB country manager for Mozambique.

The AfDB is co-lead arranger in the transaction, which includes the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), the Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI), and the Export Credit Insurance Corporation of South Africa (ECIC), including a range of commercial banks providing finance to the project sponsored by VALE and Mitsui & Co.

The AfDB is also investing a million dollars in grants to help SMEs and agribusinesses along the corridor in Malawi and Mozambique.

“This project can provide wider benefits to Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia, and allow Mozambique to fulfil its ambition to be a regional gateway to world markets,” said Mozambique’s Minister of Transport, Carlos Mesquita. (GCR 22-12-2017)

MAROC : LA FAIBLE PLUVIOMETRIE FREINE LA CROISSANCE ECONOMIQUE DE CE DEBUT D’ANNEE

Selon la note de conjoncture du Haut-Commissariat au plan, publiée mardi, l’activité économique du Maroc va ralentir au premier trimestre de l’année 2018. Une situation qui s’explique par le faible niveau de la pluviométrie et par le remplissage insuffisant des barrages.

Le Haut-Commissariat au plan (HCP) a publié, le 2 janvier, sa première note de conjoncture de l'année, basée sur ses propres enquêtes auprès des différents acteurs économiques, et le spectre de la sécheresse plane déjà. En effet, l'institution prévoit un ralentissement de l'activité économique du pays au cours du premier trimestre.

Paysannes aux champs près de Chefchaouen, dans le Rif (Maroc)

La pluie se fait rare

Pour un pays aussi dépendant de son agriculture que le Maroc, la pluviométrie conditionne fortement la croissance économique. Le HCP prévoit, d'ailleurs, que la valeur ajoutée agricole s'établira ainsi à 3,1 % en variation annuelle, contre 14,2 % en 2017.

Une prévision qui trouve sa justification dans la faiblesse du niveau de la pluviométrie automnale, contrairement à la même période en 2017.

Les effets de cette situation climatique défavorable seraient plus perceptibles au niveau des surfaces ensemencées en céréales et en légumineuses, et même au niveau des cultures irriguées – le taux de remplissage des barrages à usage agricole se situait, à la mi-décembre de l'année écoulée, aux alentours de 32 %. C'est le niveau le plus bas enregistré sur les six dernières campagnes, selon les dires du HCP.

L'industrie peut profiter d'une Europe en forme

Du côté de la valeur ajoutée hors agriculture, elle devrait, selon la note de conjoncture du HCP, s'accélérer au premier trimestre de l'année.

Les équipes de l'institution dirigée par Ahmed Lahlimi Alami expliquent que le royaume profitera, ce premier trimestre, de la bonne santé des économies avancées et de la reprise graduelle de celle des pays émergents.

La demande mondiale adressée au Maroc devrait, en conséquence, enregistrer une hausse de 4,5 %, en glissement annuel. Quelques industries exportatrices marocaines vont ainsi pouvoir tirer profit de ce contexte favorable.

Des progrès attendus dans le secteur minier

Il s'agit plus particulièrement de l'automobile, de l'électronique, de l'habillement et du textile. Selon l'institution, la valeur ajoutée du secteur industriel réalisera, au titre du premier trimestre, une progression de 2,2 %, en variation annuelle.

La même tendance sera observée pour les activités minières, dont la valeur ajoutée devrait progresser de 5,2 % par rapport à la même période de l'année dernière. Les rédacteurs de la note ajoutent que la légère reprise attendue des cours mondiaux du pétrole pourrait avoir un impact sur la balance commerciale sur ces premiers mois de l'année.

La note de conjoncture revient aussi sur la fin de l'année de l'économie marocaine. Au titre du dernier trimestre de l'année écoulée, l'économie marocaine aura réalisé une croissance de 3,9 %. Une performance portée par la forte progression de la valeur ajoutée agricole qui s'est établie à 14,2 %, alors qu'à la même période de l'année dernière elle connaissait une baisse de 13,7 %. Sur les trois derniers mois de l'année 2017, la valeur ajoutée hors agriculture se serait accrue de 2,8 %, soit une augmentation de 20 points de base par rapport à son niveau une année auparavant.(JA 03-01-2018)

CAMEROON ON BRINK OF FULL-BLOWN SECESSIONIST REVOLT

A secessionist push in Cameroon’s English-speaking regions is on the brink of a full-blown revolt, threatening political stability in a country ruled by one of Africa’s longest-serving leaders.

Following a crackdown on independence supporters who tried to raise flags on government buildings in the central African nation’s English-speaking regions in October, at least 16 members of the security forces have been killed in attacks the government blames on the activists.

This month a mob of 200 men besieged a paramilitary police station, according to the government.

It marks a dangerous turn in the crisis that began about a year ago with peaceful protests against the French language’s dominance in courtrooms and schools.

Attacks on the military "presented those activists who were against armed combat before with a fait accompli — those who want to take up arms now have the upper hand", said Hans de Marie Heungoup from the International Crisis Group.

"There’s a real risk of rebellion that could make the Anglophone regions ungovernable."

The secession issue in Cameroon echoes a global trend, seen in Iraqi Kurdistan and Catalonia in Spain, where leaders this year led thwarted drives for independence, to Africa itself.

In neighbouring Nigeria there are new calls for a southeastern Biafran state, 50 years after a previous attempt led to a civil war that claimed a million lives.

Meanwhile, Kenya’s political opposition, smarting from an election loss it blames on rigging, has warned some regions could seek to secede.

Vital ports

Cameroon’s English-speaking minority, about a fifth of the population, has complained of marginalisation for decades and many highly educated Anglophones have moved abroad.

The country, whose roads and ports are vital for landlocked neighbours such as oil-producing Chad, was split after the First World War into a French-run zone and a smaller, British-controlled area.

Radical factions of the protest movement in the Northwest and Southwest regions now refer to the area as Ambazonia and discuss armed struggle on social media.

About 20% of the population in the affected regions is estimated to support secession, according to the Brussels-based International Crisis Group.

The unrest comes as Cameroon’s army struggles to halt a spate of bombings and raids by the Islamist militant organisation Boko Haram near the northern border with Nigeria.

While Boko Haram forced thousands of Cameroonians to flee their homes last year, the secession campaign poses a much bigger threat to the government, Heungoup said by phone from Nairobi, Kenya’s capital.

"Even if Boko Haram killed a lot of people, it was clear from the onset that they would never threaten or capture the state," he said. "But the Anglophone crisis calls the foundations of the Cameroonian state into question."

Heavy-handed response

President Paul Biya, who calls the secessionists criminals, is seeking to extend his 35-year rule in elections next year.

Biya is the continent’s second-longest serving head of state, after Teodoro Obiang of neighbouring Equatorial Guinea. Robert Mugabe, who ruled Zimbabwe since 1980, resigned in November.

Some say the radicalisation is a result of a heavy-handed government response that’s left dozens of people killed in protests this year and some leaders jailed.

While the government initially ignored the crisis, it switched tactics in a bid to suppress the movement. The internet was cut off for several months in the two regions and a nighttime curfew was imposed.

Activists responded by organising general strikes in the biggest towns, leaving schools and businesses closed.

Ambazonia now has a self-proclaimed president, a flag and an official government website. Commonwealth secretary-general Patricia Scotland spent five days in Cameroon this month in an attempt to defuse the crisis.

"When this crisis was in its beginning stages, the government thought it could kill a few protesters, arrest others and heavily militarise the North West and South regions for the crisis to be over," said Shadrack Mbirwang, an activist who claims to be a member of the Ambazonia army.

"This time around, we are ready to fight and fight till the restoration of our statehood." (Bloomberg 27-12-2017)

MAURITANIE : AU 1ER JANVIER, L'OUGUIYA PERDRA UN ZERO

Au premier janvier, 100 ouguiyas deviendront 10 ouguiyas

Les Mauritaniens vont devoir s'adapter à un changement de leur étalon monétaire : le 1er janvier 2018, une ouguiya « améliorée » comportant un zéro de moins sera mise en circulation avec de nouveaux billets et de nouvelles pièces. Une réforme qui n'est pas censée changer quoi que ce soit à la valeur de la monnaie.

Nouvelles pièces, nouveaux billets, mais aussi nouveaux formulaires et nouveaux bulletins de salaires : au 1er janvier 2018, la Mauritanie mettra en place sa réforme monétaire, dont la mesure phare est un changement de base de 10 à 1. En clair, il s'agit de réévaluer l'ouguiya en remplaçant respectivement les billets de 500, 1000 et 2000 ouguiyas en billets de 50, 100 et 200 ouguiyas, sans que cela n'affecte leur valeur.

Les deux monnaies cohabiteront jusqu'au 30 juin 2018, et l'échange de l'ancienne monnaie restera possible auprès de la Banque centrale jusqu'au 31 décembre 2018. Les autorités promettent également que tous les prix seront affichés jusqu'au 31 décembre 2020 dans l'ancienne ouguiya comme dans la nouvelle, pour permettre aux consommateurs de s'y retrouver.

Une réforme annoncée moins de cinq semaines avant sa mise en œuvre

La mesure avait été annoncée par le président Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz à Kaédi, le 28 novembre, à l'occasion du 57e anniversaire de l'Indépendance. Le chef de l'État avait alors promis « un nouvel ensemble de billets de banque et de pièces de monnaie plus sûrs contre la contrefaçon ». Il avait également assuré que la réévaluation permettrait à l'ouguiya « de reprendre sa place dans les transactions financières, de protéger le pouvoir d'achat du citoyen et de réduire la quantité de la monnaie en circulation » dans le pays.

À partir du 1er janvier, les Mauritaniens pourront donc se rendre aux guichets des banques pour échanger leurs anciennes ouguiyas contre des nouveaux billets en polymère fabriqués par Canadian Bank Note Company et de nouvelles pièces de monnaie battues par La Monnaie de Paris. Des modèles « d'une espérance de vie plus longue » que celle des anciens, selon les explications de Mohamed Ould Kembou, le ministre délégué chargé du budget auprès du ministre de l'Économie et des Finances, à l'Agence mauritanienne d'information.

Bancarisation et baisse des coûts

L'un des objectifs de la réforme est en effet de réduire le coût d'entretien de la monnaie, alors que les Mauritaniens paient essentiellement en liquide, ce qui use vite des billets de mauvaise qualité. Si la Banque centrale chiffre à 1,5 milliard d'ouguiyas (3,5 millions d'euros) le coût du remplacement annuel des billets usagés, elle peut espérer réduire fortement ses dépenses de gestion en réduisant le nombre des nouveaux billets et des nouvelles pièces à 5, au lieu de 6, et en faisant fabriquer les billets en polymère très résistant.

Mais la mesure vise aussi à faire de la finance numérique « une priorité nationale », selon les mots du président dans son discours à Kaédi. Cela suppose une hausse du taux de bancarisation, aujourd'hui très faible (environ 18 %). Les Mauritaniens souhaitant échanger plus de 500 000 ouguiyas sont ainsi contraints par le gouvernement d'ouvrir un compte bancaire, rendant ainsi plus difficiles les transactions « au noir ».

Pas de changement de valeur… mais une possible hausse des prix !

Cette réforme n'est pas sans risques. L'opposition radicale, qui y voit une preuve supplémentaire de la mégalomanie du chef de l'État, après la modification adoptée en août par référendum du drapeau et de l'hymne national, l'a déjà condamnée.

Déjà une hausse de l'ordre de 50 % du prix du riz, de 10 % pour le ciment

Mais il se peut aussi qu'en voyant leur feuille de salaire ou leur épargne amputées d'un zéro – car l'administration passera à la nouvelle monnaie dès le 1er janvier –, les Mauritaniens aient l'impression que leur pouvoir d'achat ou leur richesse diminuent, malgré les explications techniques leur assurant le contraire. Grogne politique assurée !

D'autre part, faute de contrôles, les commerçants seront tentés de profiter d'un effet d'aubaine à l'approche du changement, favorisant ainsi une accélération de l'inflation. Le 25 décembre, à quelques jours de la mise en circulation de la nouvelle ouguiya, RFI se faisait déjà l'écho d'une flambée des prix, évoquant une hausse de l'ordre de 50 % du prix du riz, de 10 % pour le ciment, tandis que le poids de la miche de pain (vendue à un prix fixe) a été divisé par deux.

Pourtant, dès lors que le gouvernement n'augmente pas la masse monétaire en circulation, comme l'affirment les autorités mauritaniennes, le changement de monnaie ne doit pas provoquer de hausse des prix.

Une décision souveraine

La transformation monétaire fait partie de la panoplie des politiques économiques, notamment en cas de forte inflation. Le général De Gaulle avait ainsi divisé le franc par 100, en 1960, tandis que le gouvernement polonais avait divisé le zloty par 10 000, en 1995.

Au cours d'une conférence de presse, qui s'est tenue le 5 décembre à Nouakchott et qui a été relayée par l'Agence mauritanienne d'information, le gouverneur de la Banque centrale de Mauritanie, Abdel Aziz Ould Dahi, avait tenu à préciser la nature « souveraine » de la réforme monétaire, excluant toute « pression de la Banque mondiale ou d'aucune autre institution », et évoquant une étude menée durant quatre ans par les autorités mauritaniennes. Il a toutefois précisé que la mesure était accompagnée par le Fonds monétaire international (FMI).

La Banque africaine de développement a elle aussi prêté son concours à la réforme (JA 28-12-2017)

HOW DR CONGO LOST CONTROL OF THE FABRIC OF ITS CULTURE AND ECONOMY

Positioning a stand at the entrance to one of Lubumbashi's largest breweries is part entrepreneurial savvy, part defiance by Mwehu Kashala. Each day he sells mobile phone airtime vouchers under a large umbrella, displaying the disposable vouchers on a rickety table. It's been his main source of income since he lost his job a decade ago from the textile factory that used to operate from the same large industrial complex that is now a brewery.

The Syntexkin textile factory was the economic heart and cultural soul of Lubumbashi. The Democratic Republic of Congo was known for its intricate fabrics, and this is one of the factories that produced them for decades. Syntexkin would produce thousands of rectangles of cotton cloth with myriad designs from patterns made of everyday objects to swirls that are almost abstract. The cloth is often brightly colored, always bold, and instantly recognizable as uniquely African.

Then in the early 2000s production buckled and eventually collapsed under an influx of cheap imports from China, unravelling the local economy. The cultural significance of these prints was not enough to save the factory or the jobs of hundreds of family breadwinners.

Chinese market entry in DRC was subtle. At first, they only supplied cotton bales. Then came the printed fabric. Then the quality improved. The fabric known as kangas are everywhere, even today. Their cuts have evolved, from simple wraps to tailored suits—the matching of their graphic print along a

modern seam is no easy task. It is also what springs to mind when people from outside the country and continent think of when they hear the generic words "African print," or Ankara.
Similar prints are worn in other African countries, and increasingly by a diaspora trying to reconnect with an African aesthetic. In the DRC, these printed fabrics about a yard wide and one and a half yards long have been a way of life for generations. It is why the loss of the commercial control of this print is so great.

Kashala, now 58, started working in the textile factory at 17, after lying about his age so that he could support his family. He spent his days working on the sewing machines, making sure that the industrial-sized bobbin never got stuck and that reams of fabric always ran through as smoothly.
By the 1990s, he'd worked his way up to a line manager of sorts, overseeing about 30 people in a factory of about 1,300 workers. The factory floor was a hive of activity, Kashala remembers. In one section workers mixed the inks that would dye the fabrics, in another they set the intricate design to a template, and in another they stamped the pattern onto fabric by hand, meticulously matching the lines and shapes with the naked eye. Kashala, a stern man who rarely smiles and always shines his shoes, ran a tight ship. Even today, his stall is never unmanned, with his unemployed son stepping in when necessary.
Years ago on the factory floor, there were whole teams responsible for applying specific families of color tones and others, like Kashala, who made sure the levers, gears and bobbins of the large sewing machines were always in perfect working condition. As the eldest of 17 orphaned children, Kashala made enough to feed his siblings, and then his own family, taking a second wife as the factory thrived.
Then the machines began to slow as demand for the textiles dropped. Kashala and other workers formed something of a civilian consumer watchdog group, checking local markets and shops to get to the bottom of why fewer Congolese were buying their fabrics. They inspected the hem of the cloth for the code that each factory prints as its signature, and interrogated vendors until they learned China had entered Lubumbashi's markets.
The Chinese entry was subtle, despite the large volumes of cloth that came to the Congo. At first they only supplied the bales of plain cotton fabric, according to Kashala. Then printed fabric began to arrive, the quality seeming to improve with every run until they were able to mimic the Congolese designs. Soon, it required a meticulous eye to notice the difference.
"We started changing our patterns and hiding them away from the Chinese," he said. "At one point we changed the sticker the Chinese had been mimicking so that we could check in the shops to see who was selling which one."
The subtle change of a number or letter in the code at the hem of the cloth was not enough. Each time the factory workers changed it, they would soon find a cheaper copy flooding the market. The unique designs they'd created were duplicated and printed in China on thinner fabric and brought back to the DRC and other African nations and sold for a lower price.
Syntexkin sold its fabrics for about 2000 Congolese francs (just over $1) for a piece of cloth measuring less than three yards, says Kashala. The Chinese sold theirs at about half that, and even the government took their business to Chinese dealers.

"I was a specialist, I could tell which was good or not," said Ngoyi wa Mwenze, a designer who has fallen on hard times since Syntexkin shut down. The home he built for his family has no roof because salaried work ran out before he could finish it. Instead he and his family live in a shack on the property, welcoming guests into the empty red-earthed shell what should have been the living room.
He holds dear the stained memories of better days: photographs of the models who showed off his designs and sported his creations in local beauty pageants. He is especially proud of images of himself at his work station: clean cut with pen in hand, proof of the man he once was.
Nowadays his art is confined the colorful shopfronts he is sometimes commissioned to paint. The rest of the time he brews and sells liquor, a meager source of income that his former colleague and friend Kashala says fuels his alcoholism.
Wa Mwenze's love of art and patterns came from his grandfather who designed ceramics. He joined Syntexin in 1987 and quickly gained a reputation for his textile designs. His colours and patterns were bright and bold and were worn by Lubumbashi's most stylish, wa Mwenze recalls as he eagerly thumbs through the photos. There's a whiff of stale beer about him, even as the day has only begun.
He excelled at making cloth for special occasions, knowing just what symbol to use for events like Easter, Christmas and significant days on the Catholic calendar. He also had a knack for the more political themes like independence celebrations or local political campaigns. Politicians who wanted their

candidates face emblazoned on a kanga or shirt would come to him from as far as neighboring Tanzania and Zambia to commission his work, he recalls. In the Congo and elsewhere in the Great Lakes region, cloth is not just covering but a means of communication and at times sloganeering.
"I was very proud and happy," he says, looking at his wife who is wrapped in her own faded cloth. "I remember my wife wearing it. I was beyond happy."
Wa Mwenze also blames the Chinese for his fate today: "Because things in Congo are bad, and people are suffering they settle for the Chinese products," he says. "I criticize the Chinese product because it is not good, I'm not impressed. The Chinese copied my designs."

In 1990, the then Zaire had seven textile factories around the country, but cotton production had virtually stalled as armies and militia groups targeted cotton farms. Farms became collateral damage as Congo's longtime rule Mobutu Sese Seko struggled to maintain his decades-long rule, the Zaire he held onto crumbling around him.
Textile production decreased by 83% (link in French) in the chaos of Sese Seko's last years in power, dropping from 70 million meters in 1990 to just 12 million in 1996. The economy was further battered by looting and country-wide riots in 1991 and 1993, which destroyed small to medium-sized businesses and disrupted distribution networks. The civil war that followed Sese Seko's demise obliterated any chance of a peaceful farm life, much less commercial crops.
By the time relative peace returned, the Congo's textile industry had seen little investment, made worse by aging machines and workers who were now less efficient than their Asian competitors. Despite the beliefs of workers like Kashala and wa Mwenze, some argued (pdf) that the quality of Congolese products simply could not keep up.
China's textile sector was industrialized during the first *Five Year Plan in 1955* (pdf). The state continued to devote resources to a sector that was labor intensive and required little technology, so that by the 1979 it was one of the domestic industries China was keen to expose to the world as it opened its economy.
In 2005, the Multifiber Agreement expired, ending global quotas on the textile and garment sectors and opening the world to Chinese textile manufacturers, including the DRC. Until then, China only made up 20% of the global market as the World Trade Organization tried to protect domestic textile industries.
The DRC's textile industry was already on its knees by then. China, it seems, was merely taking advantage of an opportunity, and became the scapegoat for internal troubles.
One after the other, the factories began to close. A merger between the Chinese Cha Textile and Belgian-headquartered Texaf that created Congote in 2005 was supposed to herald a turnaround but failed after only two years, citing the lack of locally produced cotton and the inability to compete with foreign producers.
What's more, the age-old model of selling in local markets by informal traders was hurting the formal industry. Tax collection is difficult to enforce with vendors, so their returns are their own, with little incentive to stock the more expensive local brands over the international imports.
It's a trend that continues today in Lubumbashi's markets, even though high-end wax fabrics like Vlisco can be found in more affluent parts of the DRC's economic capital. The presence of the well-known Dutch fabric company that has made a name for itself printing African designs shows that there could have been a market for higher quality, albeit more expensive fabrics, here and in neighboring countries.

"For now the material is down," says Elvine Mbombo, a trader in her 60s who has made peace with selling poorer quality fabric. "Money is difficult these days."
Since Syntexkin shut down, she and other traders club together as an informal cooperative and send money via Western Union to Kinshasa and Brazzaville, in the neighboring Republic of Congo, where fabrics enter the market from the Indian Ocean, she explains. Good wax print, and the few designs that are still made in the country, sell for 20,000 congolese francs ($13). She says she sells the Chinese-made fabric to students and trainee tailors at a negotiable 12,000 congolese francs, or $7,50. On a good day she makes about $20, on a bad day nothing.
The government's attempts to protect certain brands and locally designed patterns through an inter-ministerial decree in March 2002 proved too little, too late. Today, La Societe Textile de Kisangani (Sotexki) in northern Kisangani is the only surviving textile factory (pdf), working at only 15% of its capacity.
Syntexkin went under in 2008, having stopped designing any new patterns in 2007, said Christian Mwando, assistant general manager at Syntexkin for 10 years. Like Kashala and wa Mwenze, he also

blames the Chinese for stealing local designs but he also blames the government for failing to put in place copyright laws.

The government should have protected the cloth not just as a business investment, but to protect Congolese cultural heritage, he told Quartz in a telephone interview from Kinshasa. Instead, corruption scuppered any attempts to implement the inter-ministerial decree, while customs authorities looked away as imports flooded the market.

About 600 people lost their jobs, adding to the thousands already unemployed by the collapse of the cotton industry, all further adding to Lubumbashi's unemployed masses. Kashala launched a labor dispute in the local courts that has dragged on for nearly a decade. He has stacks of paperwork that he says prove corruption and unfair dismissal as the factory was on its last legs. Judging from the throngs of people milling about the Lubumbashi courthouse on any given day, and the stacks of yellowed precariously piled files from the floor to the ceiling of the clerk's office, Kashala and others are unlikely to get justice.

The textile industry itself and the government failed to turn a lucrative domestic sector into a globally competitive industry by not investing in the industry. They could have created higher value by placing an emphasis on the specialized skills and cultural significance of a product that has been a part of the country's fabric through much of the twentieth century.

In the factory's shadow, workers like Kashala, wa Mwenze and hundreds of others struggle to survive. The brewery that has recently opened there has not yet had the social impact the factory once did. Vendors like Mbombo make do with poorer products and lower profits. Lubumbashi, the commercial capital, and the DRC as a whole, lost a significant part of its social and economic fabric the day the machines stopped printing.(Quartz 01-01-2018)

SISI ANNOUNCES $5.6BN CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMME TO PACIFY TURBULENT NORTH SINAI REGION

Destroyed olive trees on the outskirts of al-Mehdiya in North Sinai

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt has announced a $5.6bn construction project in the northern Sinai Peninsula as part of a strategy to combat an Islamist insurgency in the area.

He was speaking at the opening ceremony for a development project at the southern Suez Canal city of Ismailia. He said: "We have entrusted the ministry of housing and the engineering authority with a national project of comprehensive urban planning," implying that the projects would involve improvements to living conditions in the North Sinai Governorate.

The region stretches from the Suez Canal to the Gaza Strip and has a population of about 500,000, predominantly made up of Bedouin tribes.

The insurgency in the area began after the 2011 overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, and has continued to the present day despite a number of military operations. The worst single incident occurred in November last year when more than 300 worshippers were killed and 100 injured in an attack on a Sufi mosque west of Al-Arish, the regional capital.

Sisi has used infrastructure spending to try and reduce political tension since he took power in 2013. (See articles below.)

Last year the economy was hit by a rapid rise in inflation after the floating of the Egyptian pound, a condition of a $12bn, three-year IMF-funded programme, which also imposed tax rises and subsidy cuts.

The IMF is predicting that Egypt's economy will grow 4.5% in 2018, compared with 4.1% last year. (GCR 02-01-2017)

MUGABE'S GENEROUS 'RETIREMENT' PACKAGE IS REVEALED

Zimbabwe's ousted president Robert Mugabe will get a residence, a car fleet and private air travel as part of a new government-funded retirement package for former leaders, state media reported on Thursday.

Mugabe will also be entitled to at least 20 staffers including six personal security guards, all paid for from state coffers, according to details of the benefits published in The Herald newspaper.

The 93-year-old, who quit last month under popular pressure following a military take-over, is the first beneficiary of the generous measures unveiled on Wednesday by new President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

No monetary details were spelt out, but the country's constitution stipulates that an ex-president is entitled to a pension equivalent to the salary of a sitting president. Local independent media reported last month that Mugabe was granted a $10m retirement bonus as part of a deal to persuade him to, eventually, resign. The government has denied the claims.

As part of the new package, Mugabe will have three cars — a Mercedes Benz S500 Series or an equivalent class of sedan, an all-terrain station wagon and a pick-up van — which will be replaced every five years. The government will also pay for fuel. Mugabe and his wife will be entitled to diplomatic passports. The couple can go on four first-class air or train trips within Zimbabwe and four trips abroad on a private plane.

Mugabe will also be awarded a fully-furnished official residence anywhere in the capital Harare, in addition to bills and entertainment allowances. Health insurance for the former leader, his spouse and dependants is also included in the raft of benefits. *(*AFP 28-12-2017)

TEARS OF JOY AS WHITE ZIMBABWEAN FARMER HAS HIS PROPERTY RETURNED

The last time white Zimbabwean farmer Rob Smart left his land it was at gunpoint, forced out in June by riot police armed with tear gas and AK-47 assault rifles.

He returned on Thursday to ululations and tears of joy from former workers and their families who were also kicked out — a jubilant return and the first sign that the president who has replaced Robert Mugabe is making good on a vow to stop illegal land seizures and restore property rights.

Scores of jubilant black Zimbabweans nearly knocked the 71-year-old off his feet as he and his two children stepped out of their car and onto their land for the first time in six months.

Smart's case was taken up by President Emmerson Mnangagwa, Zimbabwe's then vice-president who heard of Smart's violent eviction while at an investment conference in Johannesburg.

Mnangagwa became president last month following a de facto coup that ended 93-year-old Mugabe's rule. In the latter half of his 37 years in power, Zimbabwe's economy collapsed, especially after the seizure of thousands of white-owned commercial farms under the banner of post-colonial land reform.

Land ownership is one of Zimbabwe's most sensitive political topics. Colonialists seized some of the best agricultural land and much of it remained in the hands of white farmers after independence in 1980, leaving many blacks effectively landless.

Land ownership is one of Zimbabwe's most sensitive political topics. Colonialists seized some of the best agricultural land and much of it remained in the hands of white farmers after independence in 1980, leaving many blacks effectively landless.

Twenty years later, Mugabe authorised the violent invasion of many white-owned farms and justified it on the grounds that it was redressing imbalances from the colonial era. White farmers complained that well connected people used state security forces to force them off their farms, sometimes in the middle of harvesting, even after the Mugabe government indicated, some four years ago, that land seizures were over.

"We are overjoyed, over the moon. We thought we would never see this day coming," Smart's son, Darryn, told Reuters. "Getting back to the farm has given not just us, but the whole community hope that it's a new Zimbabwe, a new country."

Rob Smart, whose father said he started the farm from "virgin bush" in 1932, expressed confidence in the new government's pledge to protect the commercial farming sector, a mainstay of the struggling economy.

"It's early days but so far, what [the new government] said they are going to do they are doing," he told Reuters. "We just hope this whole incident will give hope to other farmers, who've had the same situation."

Mnangagwa, who is under pressure to revive the economy ahead of elections next year, said on Thursday that he was resolute about the changes he was introducing.

"There is no business as usual. Things have changed, it's a new era," he said at a meeting with business leaders in SA. "I'm from the military. If it's 'left turn' then it's 'left turn'. If it's 'right turn' it's 'right turn'. No confusion."

Mnangagwa's new agriculture minister, Perrance Shiri, last week ordered illegal occupiers of farms to vacate the land immediately, a move that could ultimately see some white farmers who say they were unfairly evicted return to farming. Shiri, a military hardliner who was head of the air force before being picked for the crucial ministry this month, called for "unquestionable sanity on the farms".

For 83-year-old Anna Matemani, whose late husband worked on the farm, Smart's return was long overdue. "I'm so happy he is finally back. He always helped us and the farm provides jobs for many of our young people," said the grandmother of 15, who grew up and raised her children on the farm and witnessed Rob's birth, wiping away tears.

Some of the Smarts' joy subsided as they walked into their ransacked farmhouses. The occupiers had looted property, including clothes, the children's toys, three guns, bottles of 100-year-old wine and Smart's late father Roy's medals from when he served with the Police Reserve Air Wing in the former Rhodesia.

"I'm sad about my grandfather's medals," Darryn Smart said, surveying a ransacked room. "You can buy tables and chairs, you can't buy that family history. But thank goodness we're here." (Reuters 22-12-2017)

CHINESE MIGRANTS HAVE CHANGED THE FACE OF SOUTH AFRICA. NOW THEY'RE LEAVING.

Zhu Jianying, the owner of a home goods shop in southwest Johannesburg, plans to leave South Africa as soon as she can. Her store is making less than half of what it was two years ago when it first opened. She worries about security—Chinese traders like herself are often targeted. She and her family hardly ever leave the mall that houses her store and their apartment on an upper floor.

"It's like we're prisoners in our home," Zhu says, standing by the cash register in her shop, "Forever Helen," after the English name she adopted when she moved to South Africa in 2000. Stuffed animals

hang from the wall. A digital sign by the entrance says: “We stock furniture, toys, beds.” On a Sunday afternoon Forever Helen is empty, as are many of the neighboring shops selling electronics, fake flowers, curtains, and furniture brought over from China.
Zhu’s store is in one of South Africa’s many “China malls,” shopping centers operated by Chinese entrepreneurs and used by Chinese traders across the country. These buildings have become one of the most visible reminders of China’s presence in South Africa, home to the largest Chinese community in Africa.
A bad economy, xenophobia, and competition are forcing Chinese traders to consider leaving. Africa’s most developed economy has been one of continent’s top destinations for Chinese investment for years. And traders like Zhu make up the bulk of the estimated 350,000 to 500,000 Chinese in South Africa, largely in the big cities of Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Durban.
Now, a relentlessly bad economy, a rising tide of xenophobia, and competition from new malls as well as African traders who have forged their own connections in China, are forcing Chinese traders and business people to consider leaving. The threat of a downgrade of South Africa’s debt, now a reality, and heavy regulations have also dissuaded Chinese businesses and investors from coming in the first place. The traders who can afford to are returning to China or moving to Western countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, or the United States. Others say they’ll try their luck in nearby African countries. Many, with debts to pay off or without enough money to return home, are stuck where they are.

“What’s the point of working in South Africa where it is more dangerous and lonely when you could be making the same wage in China?” says Mingwei Huang, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota, echoing sentiments expressed by traders during her research at the China malls.
An estimated half a million to more than 1 million Chinese live in Africa, many of them small-scale traders and entrepreneurs. Chinese traders in African countries from Botswana to Senegal are also struggling to make a profit in the once booming trade of importing cheap goods from China—a sign that the best days of an industry involving thousands of African and Chinese traders, agents, and middlemen across Africa and China might be over.

“Fong Kong”

The Chinese have always occupied an uneasy place in South African society. Some of the earliest Chinese migrants, who came from southern China after the discovery of gold and diamonds in the 1870s and 1880s, were barred from getting mining licenses. Later, Chinese laborers brought to work the gold mines of Witwatersrand in the 1900s were sent back after outcry from white miners.
Even South Africa’s former government, which assiduously classified and segregated its citizens by race, struggled to place the Chinese. Under the apartheid system, the Chinese were lumped together with the country’s Indian population and then with those of mixed race ancestry, in a category called “coloured.” They were barred from living in certain areas and traveling without approval.
Today, South Africa’s Chinese community, a mix of waves of Chinese migrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and almost every province in China, is still not completely welcome. Some South Africans resent the fact that the Chinese are included in black economic empowerment policies established to repair damage done during apartheid. (Only Chinese naturalized or born in South Africa before 1994 are included.)
Locals accuse the Chinese traders of causing the decline of South Africa’s own textile industry. The electronics and other items sold at the China malls are known among South Africans as “fong kong,” a term synonymous with fake or poor quality. Critics of the government’s ties with China call president Jacob Zuma “Fong Kong Zuma.”

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, the country has seen a new wave of Chinese migration from poorer Chinese towns and counties left behind by their country’s economic rise. They’ve come to work in the malls or in hopes of starting their own businesses selling Chinese-made goods.
Older generations of Chinese migrants criticize them as uneducated peasants. Many of them speak little English and keep to themselves, associating mainly with other Chinese from their same province or hometown.
These Chinese migrants have filled a niche in the country. As South Africa emerged from international isolation following the country’s first democratic elections in 1994, they were there to sell to the emerging middle and lower classes. The rand was strong, making goods sourced in China cheap. At the time, there were few other retailers.

"When we first came, people didn't even have shoes. There was nothing to buy. Chinese people could sell them so much," says Qian, a shopkeeper from Zhejiang province at another mall, China City, who moved to South Africa in 1995.

As South Africa's middle class expanded and the country, helped by commodity exports, became one of the world's biggest emerging markets, the China malls multiplied. By 2011, there were at least 18 Chinese-run shopping centers across Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town, in border cities like Musina between South Africa and Zimbabwe, and in some of the country's less developed urban townships.

The malls are hard to miss: the large fenced-in complexes are manned by security guards with guns and flanked by billboards advertising their latest deals. Driving along Main Reef road along the old mining belt, between the township of Soweto and inner city Johannesburg, one can stop at any number of China malls: "China Cash and Carry" "China Multiplex," "Dragon City," and more.

In a way, the China malls and the people who work in them are a kind of proxy for China and its growing role in South Africa. For almost a decade**,** China has been South Africa's largest trading partner and an ally of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), inviting the country to join the BRIC economic bloc in 2011. The ANC has sent several delegations to study China's economic model and recently said the Chinese Communist Party should be a "guiding lodestar of our own struggle." There are more than 300 Chinese businesses in South Africa, in finance, mining, telecom, automobile, and logistics.

For most South Africans, "what 'China' represents is still pretty abstract and behind doors when it comes to large-scale investment and diplomacy," says Huang, the doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota. "These malls are the everyday face of Chinese investment and capital to South Africa. They are small traders, but they are stand-ins for larger geopolitical forces."

"Not just for white people"

China City is a darkly lit warren of wholesale stalls in central Johannesburg. Signs direct customers to stores selling sneakers, luggage, wigs, and furniture. Music blares from a nearby stall as people sell popcorn and ice cream at the entrance. The center, the first China mall to open in 1995 when a Hong Kong businessman converted an old supermarket into storage and retail space, has been manned almost entirely by Chinese shop owners for years.

"It used to be that there were more [Chinese] people coming than leaving. Now it's the opposite," says Qian, the shopkeeper from Zhejiang province. She sits behind a display counter of watches at her store, identified by a half torn sign with her shop number, that she's operated for most of the last two decades. Now, almost as many African traders as Chinese are running stores at the mall. More Africans have forged connections in China and can go directly there to source their goods. Others haven't been as affected as the Chinese have been by the weakening rand since they buy their goods in South Africa.

"It's better because then the business is not just for one country, not just for white people," says Mathew Thyah, 26, from Malawi who manages a sneaker shop owned by a Senegalese entrepreneur. He's referring to the Chinese as white.

Thyah may get his wish. China malls across the city are increasingly deserted. At China Mart, a fortress-like shopping complex also in the Crown Mines industrial area, several stores sit empty. Qin Hans and his wife, who arrived in South Africa almost 30 years ago from Nanjing, sell clothing from traditional African wear to golf t-shirts.

On a recent Friday afternoon, they had just one customer who spent 600 rand (about $45). In the past they would expect at least 15 customers a day. The owners of a store across the hall selling panty hose and lingerie didn't even bother coming in. Another neighbor has left his store shut for the last two months. Switching to English from Mandarin, Qin says, "Not sustainable."

Most Chinese traders say the rand, one of the world's worst performing currencies last year, has been their biggest obstacle. Last year, it reached a record low and is tumbling again as protesters call for Zuma to step down and the country's economic outlook stays bleak.

Jeremy Zhao, who runs a party decoration store in China City, says the rand is hurting his business, which depends on people's willingness to splurge. "There are too many Chinese malls. That and the rand isn't so strong so people have less money to spend on parties."

In the face of inflation, low wage growth, and a prevailing sense of job insecurity, people are feeling squeezed. A McKinsey survey last year of about 1,000 South Africans found that 70% were afraid of losing their jobs and half were living paycheck to paycheck.

In some ways, the China malls that once filled the void of affordable consumer goods aren't as needed anymore. With 2,000 shopping centers, many of which have been built in the last 10 years for its population of 53 million, both middle and lower class South Africans have more options. South Africa is now seventh in the world in terms of space devoted to shopping centers.
It's not just the Chinese in South Africa who are struggling. In Senegal and Ghana, the Chinese find themselves competing in markets already saturated with Chinese goods. Chinese in Botswana are facing competition from local traders and a weakening local currency, according to researchers.
The number of Chinese in Angola has fallen to about a quarter of what it was four years ago, according to the Angola-China Industrial and Commerce Association. African traders based in China or on the continent importing Chinese goods are also seeing business slow.
As importing from China has become easier, competition has gotten worse. It's now much easier for a trader in Nairobi to go to Guangzhou, buy goods and ship them back. More Africans traders have brokers in China with whom they can place their orders over WhatsApp or email, eliminating the need for Chinese middlemen on the ground in Africa.
"Knowledge of China and how to get there has increased dramatically," says Emma Lochery, a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Liege in Belgium who has researched trade between Eastleigh and Guangzhou.

"It starts with words"

Life in South Africa is hard in other ways for the Chinese. Competition is fierce among traders and the Chinese community is far from unified. There are more than 100 different Chinese associations just in Johannesburg and various factions based on when and from where one moved to South Africa.
The Chinese haven't been attacked the way African migrants from elsewhere on the continent have. But they're often the target of robberies and hijackings, and growing anti-Chinese sentiment is a concern. As the South African economy has worsened, hostility towards the Chinese along with other foreigners has increased, according to Erwin Pon, head of the Chinese Association of Gauteng.

The association has filed hate speech lawsuits as well as a complaint with South Africa's Human Rights Commission over comments left on their Facebook page last month. After the association organized a Chinese New Year celebration, advertised on its page, users left remarks calling for the Chinese to be banned, "wiped out," or for their children to be killed. "Can we not stop these slant eyed freaks from coming into the country?!" one comment said.
"It always starts with words. Once those words become more angry, anger turns into violence," Pon says.

The trading economy

The departure of Chinese traders doesn't bode well for the thousands of traders, hawkers, and owners of small shops in South Africa and across southern Africa. Less than a few kilometers from China City is Park Station, a hub of trains and buses where traders transiting from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia and other nearby countries come into the city to buy goods.
They can walk over the China City, make their purchases, head back to the bus station and go straight home to sell them. In South Africa, hawkers that sell goods in traffic, Ethiopian traders downtown, and South Asian shopkeepers all buy their goods from the Chinese.
"It's really bad if the Chinese are going." Satiad Hussain sells gauzy fabric and rhinestone-studded chairs for weddings at China Mall, which also houses Zhu's home goods shop. He buys all his materials from the Chinese and takes their departure as a sign things aren't likely to improve. "It's really bad if the Chinese are going," he says.
These networks are important. In sub-Saharan Africa, the size of the informal economy as a percentage of gross domestic product is 41% on average, according to the International Labour Organisation. In South Africa that figure is around 30%, but the informal economy is even more important here given high rates of unemployment.
Right now, South Africa's Chinese community is "providing a particular service or function that is important to people involved in that business within trading communities," says Romain Dittgen, an urban studies researcher at Wits University in Johannesburg.

The overall Chinese community is feeling the effects of South Africa's slowdown and increasing hostility to foreigners. Chinese residents whose families have been in South Africa for generations have also

decided to move on. Pon, who was born in South Africa, says that as much as half of younger Chinese residents, those between the ages of 30 and 50, have left for the United States, the United Kingdom, or mega-cities in China where they believe they'll have more business opportunities.
Pon, also head of the China division at Rand Merchant Bank, part of one of the five largest banking groups in the country, says Chinese companies have become less interested in South Africa over the last four years. Chinese investment in the country, after peaking before the financial crisis, is still growing but more slowly now.
Officials at the Chinese Embassy in Pretoria say the number of Chinese in South Africa has always fluctuated, but Chinese businesses are still committed to the country. "The Chinese are everywhere in South Africa—from Chinatown in Johannesburg, to factories, mines, restaurants, and shops. These people have taken root and are working hard in South Africa," the embassy wrote in an email to Quartz. The embassy blamed current struggles of the Chinese community on the slow recovery of the global economy after the financial crisis. "South Africa's economy is also sliding, which affects Chinese people's investment and businesses in South Africa."

You can't go home again

Not all the Chinese who'd like to go home can. Many can't afford the costs of going back to China and starting over. Others find that after years of being away they've lost the contacts or *guanxi* they need for doing business or finding work. Some are too enmeshed here, with children in school, property to pay off, and goods left to sell.
"Business is bad but the opportunity is still better here than at home." Wei Zhihong, who runs a shop in Johannesburg's China City selling hats and belts says he can't afford to live in China where living costs have risen and inequality is among the highest in the world. "Business is bad but the opportunity is still better here than at home."
Many feel like they have more opportunity in African countries, even those whose economies are a fraction of the size of China's. Wang, a man from Guangdong province sells electronics at China Mall, down the hall from Zhu. Even though his business is struggling, he won't go back to China. "Comparing South Africa with China, there are good and bad sides. For poor people," he says, like him, "South Africa is better."(Quartz 01-01-2018)

UN WARNS OF FAMINES IN MIDEAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Undernourishment in conflict countries such as Libya, Iraq and Sudan is now six times larger than in nonconflict countries
Food security in the Middle East and North Africa "is fast deteriorating" because of conflicts in countries from Syria to Yemen, the UN's food agency said Thursday.
Violence in nations that also include Libya, Iraq and Sudan are leading to "a widening gap in wellbeing" compared with other parts of the region, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said in a report.
"The level of undernourishment in the conflict countries is now six times larger than that in nonconflict countries," it said.
Yemen is suffering the worst food insecurity and malnutrition of all the conflict-hit countries in the region, followed by Syria and Sudan, it said.
For more than two years, Yemen has been locked in a devastating civil war between the Saudi-backed government and Huthi rebels who swept into the capital in 2014.
More than 8,750 people have been killed since a Saudi-led coalition intervened on the side of the government in March 2015.
Nearly a quarter of the population of Yemen suffers from severe food insecurity, according to the FAO.
Mark Lowcock, the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, said in November that unless the coalition ended a blockade of the country, Yemen would face "the largest famine the world has seen for many decades, with millions of victims".
The FAO said the conflict-hit countries may not have sufficient resources to achieve the UN-adopted Sustainable Development Goals.

The goals include to "eliminate hunger, ensure food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" by 2030.
As "expenditures on violence crowd out other government spending, the likelihood of progress" on targets related to "reducing hunger and food insecurity and malnutrition becomes ever more remote", it said.
Between 21% and 67% of the conflict-hit countries’ gross domestic product was spent on committing, containing or preventing acts of violence, or on dealing with their consequences, it said.
The FAO reported "elevated levels of stunting" in the region and said many of the poorer countries have severe levels of anaemia in children under five years old. (AFP 21-12-2017)

SOUTH AFRICA: RAMAPHOSA: FROM TOILING UNIONIST TO ANC ACE

The African National Congress' newly-elected president, Cyril Ramaphosa, has finally made it to the top leadership of Africa’s oldest political movement, an achievement which rekindles memories of his life as an ordinary, everyday unionist in apartheid South Africa.

Beating, Nkosazanna Dlamini-Zuma, an ANC female heavyweight in her own right to the post, his election as the 14th leader of the party came after years toiling in the trenches as an activist, trade unionist, politician and one of the few success stories of blacks changing their fortune from rags to riches by way of local entrepreneurship.

Ramaphosa’s return to politics, after a successful business career, saw him becoming party deputy president after his election to the position in the ANC in 2012.

He was brought to Jacob Zuma’s camp to give the latter “credibility” when the then ANC deputy leader Kgalema Motlanthe contested Zuma for the top post.

Before this, the 65-year-old Ramaphosa was the chair of the national planning commission that produced the National Development Plan, the country’s blueprint for growth towards 2030.

In his heyday before joining politics, Ramaphosa founded one of the biggest and most powerful trade unions in the country – the National Union of Mineworkers in 1982.

He is credited as a skilful negotiator, playing a leading role as an ANC negotiator at the Congress for Democratic South Africa (Codesa), which charted the country’s path forward from apartheid to democracy.

Codesa was made of mainly stakeholders involved in the fight against apartheid who were based in the country.

The day Nelson Mandela was freed from prison in Cape Town after 27 years, Ramaphosa was the leading personality who walked ahead of the newly released political prisoner to meet the public and supporters.

After the first democratic elections in 1994, Ramaphosa became a Member of Parliament, was elected chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly and played a key role in drafting the country’s constitution, which legalized homosexuality as a human rights in South Africa.

Ramaphosa led the negotiations for a minimum wage, the first for South Africa, to be implemented on 1 May 2018.
Of all the presidential candidates, he is the only to have held the two most senior positions in the ANC’s top six – as secretary general and now deputy president.

Investors, markets and rating agencies have reacted positively to his election, with the local rand currency gained 4% in value.
This is based on their view that he understands the economy.
He has support from the Left wing of the ANC, which includes the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

Ramaphosa's role in the Marikana killings of August 2012 which left 34 miners shot dead by the police has been his only blemish on what otherwise would have been a clean slate for the hardworking former activists and businessman.

On that fateful day, Ramaphosa was a non-executive director of Lonmin, the owner of the platinum mine where the killings took place in Rustenburg, when he wrote letters to ministers asking for "concomitant action" in the illegal strike by miners who were demanding salary increments.

While he has since apologised, the miners and their families have refused to forgive him.

After losing to Thabo Mbeki to take over from President Nelson Mandela, Ramaphosa joined the business world to build a net worth of $500 million mostly through the Shanduka group.

His detractors have used his roles as chair and non-executive director in various private entities to describe him as a "lover" of "white monopoly capital" seen to be against the ANC's call for "radical economic transformation", a codename for wide black ownership of the country's wealth which is mainly in the hands of the minority whites.

Others have said leaving "active" politics was seen as him "sulking" after losing to Mbeki.
In 2012 he had to apologise for spending close to $3.0 million on raising buffalos at his farm "amid a sea of poverty" in the country.

Ramaphosa is part of Zuma's Cabinet and cannot completely avoid being seen as complicit in some of the decisions and he has been "silent" about over the years, only speaking out against Cabinet reshuffles and state capture recently as he campaigned to take over from him.

"I would say those who are dismissing this term (radical economic transformation), sit down, listen, smell the coffee… realise that the transformation of our economy is non-negotiable," Ramaphosa has said.

He has proposed a "new deal" to accelerate radical transformation with an ambitious plan to grow the country's economy by up to 3% by 2023 and create a million jobs in the next five years.

During the campaign for the top ANC post, Ramaphosa cited state capture (corruption) as a big challenge, placing it as the mantra of his campaign.
He said he wanted a judicial commission of inquiry, however he has never mentioned the controversial Gupta family or President Jacob Zuma by name on the trail of his anti-corruption campaign.

"There should be a judicial commission of inquiry. It is possibly the only process that will be able to get to the bottom of these allegations and determine the truthfulness or lack thereof," he said.

His rise to the top seems now unstoppable.
If the ANC wins the national elections in 2019, Ramaphosa is bound to be voted by Parliament as the country's next state President, succeeding Zuma whose controversial ten-year mandate would have come to an end. (APA 19-12-2017)

AFRICA'S HOTEL INDUSTRY BOOMS

In the plush Kigali Convention Centre, which features a spiralling dome inspired by traditional Rwandan culture, representatives from 45 different countries were bullish about the direction and speed of travel of the hospitality sector.

During the Africa Hotel Investment Forum hosted in Rwanda in October, delegates from across Africa's hospitality sector were toasting a bumper year for African tourism and travel.

Shortly before the forum, two of the largest multinational hospitality companies, Hilton Worldwide Holdings and Hyatt Hotels & Resorts, had announced ambitious plans to expand their operations across the continent. Hilton announced plans to invest $50m over the next five years to add 100 hotels to its portfolio, while Hyatt plans to develop six new hotels in Africa by 2020.

The decision by the American firms to invest comes at a time when the travel and tourism industry in Africa has experienced growth despite sluggishness in the economy. The industry contributed $165.6bn – or 7.8% – to Africa's GDP in 2016 and this figure is set to rise by 2.9% this year, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council.

Tourism and travel also directly supported 8.8m jobs, or 2.4% of Africa's total employment. Meanwhile, the number of planned hotel chain developments has doubled since 2009 from around 30,000 rooms in 144 hotels to 73,000 rooms in 417 hotels.

Africa's hotel industry has proven to be durable in the face of low growth because demand has continued to surge, according to Patrick Fitzgibbon, senior vice president of development at Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) at Hilton Group.

"Some of the driving forces for increased activity in sub-Saharan Africa are the strong GDP growth in parts of the continent, and a rapid growth of both domestic and international travellers into the market," says Fitzgibbon. "There is also a shortage of quality hotels in the continent, and as the middle class grows, we are seeing higher demand for the quality hotels."

Around 69% of all travel spend in Africa last year was made by leisure travellers, with the remaining figure being business. The travel and tourism industry received $28.5bn of investment during the same period, which is equivalent to 6.2% of all investment into Africa.

The growth potential for Africa is enormous because of the development seen across the region, according to Tejas Shah, Hyatt's director of acquisitions and development for sub-Saharan Africa.

"The hotel industry has proven to be resilient because Africa starts from a low base when it comes to supply of high-quality hotels in the continent," he says. "And Africa also has the right demographics for growth in the middle class."

The increase in intra-Africa travel is of particular interest for the hospitality sector because at least four out of every 10 travellers in Africa are from within the region, according to Shah. This untapped domestic market has helped drive development policies towards Africa for some of the large multinational firms.

"So there is a lot of demand and we expect continued growth as the continent experiences better connectivity, access to low-cost airlines, and more countries embracing visa-free travel within the region," he says. "These factors will be major drivers for growth in the hotel industry across the continent." However, as in any other region in the world, there still exist challenges to the expanding travel and tourism sector.

Lagging interconnectivity

One of the main challenges facing travellers within the continent is the ease of securing visas for visitors. For example, Nigerians travelling to South Africa have to deal with the laborious task of filling in countless pages of red tape, then attend an interview at the South African embassy nearest to them. But a UK tourist travelling to the same location can simply collect a visa on arrival.

However, some nations, such as Ghana, have made great strides to improve the ease of getting a visa on arrival or have even implemented visa-free travel for Africans. The African Union has also mooted the introduction of a single African passport that mirrors Europe's frontier-free Schengen area. Currently, the Seychelles is the only nation on the continent that offers visa-free access to all Africans.

Another challenge, which is also prevalent in most emerging markets, is the weak infrastructure and interconnectivity that predominates outside the capital cities in some countries. However, most African countries have invested significantly to try and improve infrastructure in areas beyond their central economic hubs.

"There is a misperception that Africa has more challenges than other markets," says Fitzgibbon. "There are issues just like in more developed markets which you have to work around. For example, it's still really challenging for Chinese visitors to get a UK visa, so every market has its challenges."

Meanwhile, some analysts have highlighted political instability in places such as Kenya as a reason for the chronic shortfall in supply of hotels across Africa. However, this view is disputed by Fitzgibbon.

"Instability, like we are seeing in Kenya, does not dent our confidence or plans in the country," he adds. "Hotels are long-term investments and we have to adapt and work through each cycle and, by the way, instability is not only an African challenge – look at Brexit or Trump and you can see that there is no perfect market."

Despite the challenges in Africa, hotel chains are popping up across most markets across the continent. The potential for long-term growth remains positive in the future.

Outlook

The travel and tourism industry is set to continue its trajectory of growth, with the total share of Africa's GDP rising year-on-year to reach $170.5bn. The tourist hubs of Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa are forecasted to see significant growth in visitors.

Meanwhile, commodity-export countries such as Nigeria and Algeria should also see an increase in business travellers. There will also likely be a proliferation of branded hotel chains across Africa as the large companies expand their businesses.

"Africa is an exciting market because it is still in its infancy and there is plenty of room for growth. People want to travel to the continent and once they do they will more than likely return," Fitzgibbon says. "We expect to see sustained growth overall and because there is a shortage of quality hotels, I think that the market will prove to be resilient." (BD 19-12-2017)

LE MAROC S'APPRETE A METTRE FIN A LA GRATUITE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR

Le gouvernement marocain s'apprête à adopter une loi instaurant des frais d'inscription dans l'enseignement supérieur public, ont rapporté vendredi des médias.
Selon plusieurs journaux marocains, le gouvernement va adopter la semaine prochaine une loi relative à la « réforme du système de l'éducation », visant notamment à « mettre fin à la gratuité de l'enseignement public supérieur« .

Interrogé par l'AFP, un haut responsable du ministère de l'Education ayant requis l'anonymat a indiqué que des « frais d'inscription seront instaurés dans certaines branches de l'enseignement supérieur public », assurant toutefois que « l'enseignement primaire et secondaire ne sont pas concernés ».

Les universités marocaines ont vu leur effectif passer de 780.000 étudiants l'an passé à quelque 900.000 étudiants cette année, dont plusieurs milliers d'étudiants ouest-africains.

Le Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, un organisme consultatif officiel, avait suggéré en novembre 2016 que « les familles aisées s'acquittent de frais d'inscription », à partir du lycée et jusqu'à l'université.

Défaillances du système éducatif

« La gratuité n'est pas en jeu, ce sont des frais d'inscription pour faire en sorte que les riches arrêtent de profiter du système », avait alors expliqué à l'AFP l'ex-ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur Lahcen Daoudi.

L'Etat met pourtant les moyens, avec 25% de son budget consacré à l'enseignement

Cette proposition avait déclenché une levée de boucliers dans ce pays où les défaillances du système éducatif sont constamment pointées du doigt : classes surchargées, fermetures en cascade d'écoles, manque de professeurs, abandon scolaire…

L'Etat met pourtant les moyens, avec 25% de son budget consacré à l'enseignement.

Un taux d'analphabétisme d'environ 30%

Mais les résultats ne sont pas à la hauteur des investissements : le Maroc fait partie des 25 pays les moins avancés en termes de scolarisation, selon l'Unesco, accusant un taux d'analphabétisme d'environ 30%.

Les enfants des familles aisées vont dans le privé ou dans les écoles du système français, espagnol ou américain, tandis que des dizaines d'écoles publiques sont fermées chaque année, parfois pour laisser place à des projets immobiliers.(JA 30-12-2017)

ABIDJAN: GERMANY DONATES CFA12B TO HEALTH SYSTEM

Germany through the KfW (Credit Institute for Reconstruction) on Monday donated CFA12 billion francs to Cote d'Ivoire to enhance family planning programmes in the country, as well as strengthen the health system.

The grant agreement was signed by Michael Grau, Germany's ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire, and Ivorian foreign affairs minister Marcel Amon Tanoh.

CFA3 billion francs are earmarked for the phase 5 of the programme for family planning and prevention of HIV/AIDS, and the other CFA9 billion francs are meant for reinforcement of the health system in Cote d'Ivoire. (APA 19-12-2017)

NIGERIAN MANUFACTURERS OPPOSE MOROCCO'S PROPOSED ECOWAS MEMBERSHIP

The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) has urged the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government to restrain Morocco from joining the bloc.

The President of the association, Mr. Frank Jacob, who made the appeal on Tuesday in Abuja, said that it had become necessary, following the discussion of Morocco's membership at the just concluded 52nd ECOWAS Heads of State and Government Summit in Abuja.

He said that Morocco's acceptance would have negative effects on member countries' manufacturing sector.

Jacob said that allowing Morocco to join the union would be completely disastrous for indigenous manufacturers because Morocco had signed various agreements of free trade with the European Union (EU).

Morocco and the EU signed many bilateral agreements since 2000, including the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area agreement.

The historic partnership between the EU and Morocco underpinned by a number of political and economic agreements, has given Morocco a new momentum for its modernisation and democratic transition process.

Jacob urged the Federal Government to ensure Morocco's effort failed because the EU had been eager to penetrate the West African market over the years and had not been successful.

"Allowing Morocco to become a member of the bloc will automatically consent to EU's effort through the back door.

"It is no news that Morocco has an economic partnership agreement with the EU, which will make Nigeria and other member countries a destination for EU products if allowed to join the bloc," he said.

He said that it was not proper for Morocco, a country in North Africa to want to be a member of West African union.

According to him, this idea of Morocco wanting to be a member of the bloc defies logic.

He noted that the manufacturing sector of the country, which is struggling due to challenges, will be seriously affected, adding that many companies will be shut down due to competitions leading to job loss and rise in unrest in the society.

The 52nd ECOWAS Heads of State and Government Summit was held in Abuja on Saturday and the leaders discussed Morocco's membership of the bloc and the security situation in Guinea Bissau.

Morocco had made its request to be a member of ECOWAS while Tunisia requested to be an observer country.

The 51st Ordinary Session held in Monrovia in June agreed in principle to Morocco's membership of the sub-regional bloc and directed the Commission to consider the implications of the country's membership.

Morocco was, however, not invited for the 52nd Summit. (APA 19-12-2017)

LA TUNISIE SUSPEND LES VOLS D'EMIRATES APRES UNE MESURE CIBLANT LES TUNISIENNES

Des avions de la compagnie aérienne Emirates, à l'aéroport de Dubai

La Tunisie a annoncé dimanche soir avoir décidé de suspendre les vols de la compagnie aérienne Emirates à la suite d'une mesure ciblant les Tunisiennes, qui fait scandale dans ce pays depuis quelques jours.

Le ministère tunisien du Transport a expliqué dans un communiqué avoir « décidé de suspendre les vols de la compagnie émiratie vers Tunis jusqu'à ce qu'elle soit capable de trouver la solution adéquate pour opérer ses vols conformément au droit et aux accords internationaux ».

«Emirates va cesser ses liaisons entre Tunis et Dubaï, comme ordonné par les autorités tunisiennes, à partir du 25 décembre 2017», a déclaré à l'AFP un porte-parole de cette compagnie.

Depuis vendredi, les Tunisiennes, quel que soit leur âge, ont été provisoirement empêchées d'embarquer sur des vols pour les Emirats arabes unis sans qu'aucune explication ne leur soit fournie.

La compagnie Emirates assure un aller-retour par jour entre Dubaï et Tunis.

Selon des témoignages de passagères diffusés par les médias tunisiens, les employés de la compagnie leur ont seulement dit que les porteuses d'un passeport tunisien n'étaient pas autorisées à se rendre aux Emirats, même pour une correspondance.

Les hommes, quant à eux, avaient été invités à embarquer.

Scandale en Tunisie

Cette mesure a été appliquée pour la première fois vendredi. Quelques heures plus tard, l'ambassadeur des Emirats en Tunisie avait évoqué une décision « temporaire », assurant qu'elle avait été « levée », et les Tunisiennes avaient finalement pu embarquer. Mais d'autres cas, comme celui d'une jeune femme à Beyrouth samedi, ont été enregistrés.

L'affaire fait depuis scandale en Tunisie, où médias et réseaux sociaux se sont enflammés.

Dimanche, les Emirats ont évoqué des questions de « sécurité » pour expliquer ces « mesures ».

« Nous avions été en contact avec (nos) frères en Tunisie sur une information concernant la sécurité qui a nécessité des mesures spécifiques et temporaires », a dit sur Twitter le ministre d'État émirati aux Affaires étrangères Anwar Gargash.

Plus tôt, quatre ONG tunisiennes, dont la Ligue tunisienne de défense des droits de l'Homme (LTDH) et l'Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates (ATFD), avaient dénoncé une « décision discriminatoire » qui « viole la dignité et les droits des femmes ».

Il s'agit aussi d'une violation de « la souveraineté de l'État tunisien », ont-elles poursuivi, en appelant les autorités tunisiennes à se montrer « fermes ».

Les relations entre les Emirats et la Tunisie se sont détériorées après la révolution de 2011 et, notamment, le passage au pouvoir du parti islamiste Ennahdha (fin 2011-début 2014), qui entretient des relations étroites avec le Qatar. Une crise diplomatique oppose depuis six mois Doha aux Emirats et à l'Arabie saoudite.(JA 25-12-2017)

LE BENIN REJOINT L'INITIATIVE OUEST-AFRICAINE DE FREE-ROAMING

Le protocole d'Abidjan sur le free-roaming en Afrique de l'Ouest a été signé le 31 mars

La réception gratuite des communications venant de l'Afrique de l'Ouest et un tarif local pour l'émission d'appels : c'est ce dont devraient bénéficier les usagers béninois, dont le pays vient de rejoindre le protocole d'Abidjan. Mais la mise en place de cet accord ne sera pas immédiate.

Hervé Guedegbe, secrétaire exécutif de l'Autorité de régulation des communications électroniques et de la poste du Bénin (Arcep), et Abdou Karim Sall, directeur général de l'Autorité de régulation des télécommunications et des postes du Sénégal (ARTP), ont signé le 12 décembre au Sénégal un accord par lequel Cotonou rejoint le protocole d'Abidjan sur le free-roaming.

Les trois piliers du free-roaming

Cette initiative est officiellement entrée en vigueur le 31 mars dans sept pays africains (Sénégal, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinée, Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo et Sierra Leone) après des années de discussions.

Elle repose sur trois leviers : la gratuité de la réception des appels venant des États signataires (sur la base d'un forfait-plafond de 300 minutes tous les 30 jours), la tarification au prix local des appels émis à partir du pays visité vers les autres pays signataires et un dispositif commun de lutte contre la fraude pour pérenniser le système.

Le Bénin est donc le septième pays à rejoindre le dispositif – dont la mise en place a été poussive : fin mai, soit deux mois après la signature du texte, il n'était toujours pas appliqué en Côte d'Ivoire, comme l'avait alors révélé *Jeune Afrique.*

Des modalités spécifiques pour la Côte d'Ivoire

Ce n'est, selon nos informations, toujours pas le cas pour la Sierra Leone. Quant à la Côte d'Ivoire, « elle applique le dispositif, mais selon des modalités un peu différentes : au lieu d'un plafond de 300 minutes tous les 30 jours, elle limite les appels extérieurs à tarif préférentiel à 10 minutes par jour », explique Fabrice André, directeur des opérations d'Orange pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest.

Selon ce dernier, le free-roaming ne sera pas non plus immédiatement effectif au Bénin : « L'accord vient juste d'être signé. En tant qu'opérateur télécom, nous attendons maintenant que les autorités locales nous communiquent un échéancier pour sa mise en application. »

Bien qu'absent du Bénin, le groupe français est concerné du fait de sa présence dans la majorité des autres pays concernés (Sénégal, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinée, Mali, Burkina Faso et Sierra Leone).

Selon le communiqué de l'ARTP, les négociations se poursuivent en vue de l'adhésion du Niger, de la Mauritanie et de la Gambie au protocole d'Abidjan.(JA 14-12-2017)

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

IMF Executive Board Concludes Annual Discussions on CEMAC Common Policies, and Common Policies in Support of Member Countries Reform Programs

Djibouti—Harnessing Trade and Technology for Inclusive Growth

Country Report No. 17/393 : Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) : Selected Issues

Country Report No. 17/389 : Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) : Common Policies of Member Countries and Policies in Support of Member Countries Reform Programs-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director

IMF Executive Board Completes First Review of Extended Credit Facility Arrangement for Cameroon and Approves US$ 117.2 Million Disbursement

Country Report No. 17/407 : Central African Republic : Third Review under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement, Requests for Waiver of Nonobservance of Performance Criterion, Modification of Performance Criteria, Augmentation of Access, and Financing Assurances Review-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for the Central African Republic

IMF Executive Board Completes Third Review Under the ECF Arrangement for the Central African Republic, Approves US$40.2 Million Disbursement, and an Augmentation of US$55.1 Million

IMF Staff Concludes Visit to The Republic of Congo

IMF Executive Board Concludes 2017 Article IV Consultation and Completes Second Review under the Extended Fund Facility with the Arab Republic of Egypt

IMF Executive Completes First Review of the Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility with Gabon and Approves US$ 101.1 Million Disbursement

Country Report No. 17/408 : Gabon : First Review of the Extended Arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility, Requests for a Waiver for Nonobservance of Performance Criterion, and Modifications of Performance Criteria, and Financing Assurances Review-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Gabon

Country Report No. 17/388 : Guinea : Economic Development Documents

Country Report No. 17/387 : Guinea : Request For A Three-Year Arrangement Under The Extended Credit Facility-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Guinea

IMF Executive Board Approves US$170.1 Million under the ECF Arrangement for Guinea

Country Report No. 17/380 : Guinea- Bissau : 2017 Article IV Consultation and Fourth Review Under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement, and Financing Assurances Review-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Guinea-Bissau Country Report No. 17/366 : Jordan : Technical Assistance Report-Public Investment Management Assessment (PIMA)

IMF Executive Board Completes Fourth Review Under the ECF Arrangement, Approves US$ 4.3 Million Disbursement, and Concludes 2017 Article IV Consultation with Guinea-Bissau

Country Report No. 17/385 : Republic of Madagascar : Second Review Under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement and Request for Modification of Performance Criteria-Press Release; and Staff Report

IMF Executive Board Completes First Review of Niger's ECF Arrangement and Approves US$19.9 Million

Country Report No. 17/394 : Niger : First Review under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement-Press Release and Staff Report

IMF Staff Completes 2018 Article IV Mission to Nigeria

Drones Proving a Lifeline in Rwanda

Country Report No. 17/382 : Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe : Third and Fourth Reviews under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement, Extension of the Arrangement, and Modification of Performance Criteria-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe

Country Report No. 17/401 : Seychelles : Request for a Three-Year Policy Coordination Instrument and Ex-Post Assessment of Longer-Term Program Engagement-Press Release; Staff Report

IMF Executive Board Completes Fifth Review Under the Policy Support Instrument (PSI)

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