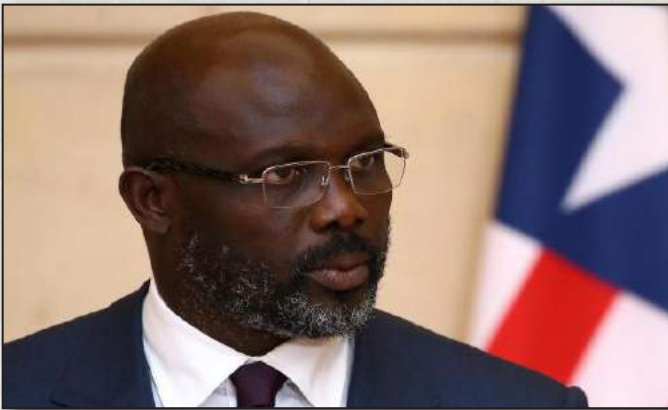


# WestAfrica

## INSIGHT



# NEW LEADERS

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## NEW DIRECTION



Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

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## EDITORIAL

### New Leaders, New Directions?

In recent elections across West Africa opposition mantras of change have succeeded in convincing voters to oust incumbent governments. The five countries focused on in this edition of West Africa Insight - Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia - have all seen an opposition presidential candidate emerge victorious since 2015. But faced with significant challenges and high expectations how are they doing in office?

In Nigeria, where President Muhammadu Buhari will soon stand for re-election, Cheta Nwanze provides an assessment of his government's economic performance. Arguing that whilst Buhari was dealt a "bad hand" when he assumed office in 2015, his approach has done little to improve the situation and in fact has exacerbated some of the economic challenges further.

In The Gambia the removal from office, after more than two decades, of the dictatorship of Yahya Jammeh was unexpected and thrust the little-known Adama Barrow into the country's highest office. Barrow, who headed a coalition of opposition groups, has taken steps to reform the system of government but as Ismaila Ceesay notes it hasn't all been plain sailing, with internal politics, accusations of corruption and pressing challenges, such as youth unemployment, styming progress.

In Ghana, Wunpini Mohammed looks at how marginalised women are being included in the New Patriotic Party's dispensation. She argues that symbolic appointments of women to ministerial positions masks a lack of government action when it comes to supporting women who hail from the country's poorer northern regions.

In the last year incumbent presidents in Sierra Leone and Liberia respected term limits to stand aside, but watched their parties lose the subsequent election. In Liberia that brought George Weah, a footballer turned politician to office. Ibrahim Al-bakri Nyei looks at whether the early signs are that his administration will be able to deliver on key election pledges.

In Sierra Leone, where President Bio has been in office for only six months, Andrew Lavali and Hassan Kallon offer some initial reflections on progress made on key electoral promises - tackling corruption and free education - and ask whether this government can do more to push ahead with much needed national political reconciliation.



**GEORGE WEAH:**

# **A NEW DIRECTION FOR TACKLING POVERTY IN LIBERIA**

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**Ibrahim Al-bakri Nyei**



## GEORGE WEAH:

### A NEW DIRECTION FOR TACKLING POVERTY IN LIBERIA?

In January 2018, former FIFA world footballer of the year George Weah was sworn in as President of Liberia. For the first time, Liberia's president was inaugurated at the National Stadium - a place of symbolic importance for Weah given his sporting background - and a venue that allowed thousands of Liberians, from all walks of life, to witness the first handover of power by a sitting leader to an elected president since 1944.

Weah's journey to the country's highest office began with his first tilt at the presidency in 2005. Despite leading the other 21 candidates after the first round, he was eventually defeated by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in a run-off. A similar scenario unfolded in 2011 when Weah, having teamed up with former UN diplomat Winston Tubman, again reached the second round of voting. This time he boycotted the run-off alleging fraud and Johnson-Sirleaf swept to a second term in office. Undaunted by the setbacks, Weah vied for a seat in the legislature in 2014. He was overwhelmingly elected the Senator of Montserrado County, winning 78% of the vote. The years in the Senate were crucial; allowing him to gain political and governmental experiences which he had been widely criticised for lacking in previous presidential bids. By the time of his election in 2017, Weah had earned a master's degree and appreciable political experience both in Liberia and in the West African region - he represented Liberia at the ECOWAS parliament.

In 2017, Weah's Coalition for Democratic Change

(CDC) formed a coalition with two other parties and sought the backing of several other smaller parties. A notable political ally, coalition member and subsequent running mate was Jewel Howard Taylor, leader of the National Patriotic Party; a party set up by former rebel leader and President, Charles Taylor, to whom she was married. Her strong support base in Bong County, combined well with Weah's own popularity in the country, placed them ahead after the first round of voting. In a run-off, delayed by an unsuccessful court challenge in which Weah's opponent and the outgoing vice-president, Joseph Boakai challenged the validity of the first round of voting, he was elected with 61.5% of the vote.

While the transition was seamless, the prevailing situation in the country posed challenges for a new government shouldering high expectations. Liberia was on the brink of economic recession occasioned by a faltering currency, inflation and a deep budget deficit. At the end of 2017 the World Bank noted GDP growth had dropped to 2.1% and inflation had increased to 12.5%; a result of the Liberian dollar depreciating as exports declined and capital was moved elsewhere. Crucial also, was the ongoing withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Since 2003 it has supported the government in carrying out a number of reforms in security, whilst playing an important part in maintaining the peace. Furthermore, it was estimated that the mission injected about a quarter of a billion dollars to the local

economy annually. The departure of UNMIL, coupled with the prevailing socio-economic challenges, meant the new government was quickly faced with the twin challenges of ensuring security whilst reinvigorating an economy in decline.



## PRO-POOR PRESIDENT?

**W**eah, who grew up in Gibraltar community, an extremely impoverished area of Monrovia was able, during the election campaign, to connect better with the daily experiences of poverty and hardship facing many Liberians. This was particularly true for Liberia's youth who constitute an estimated 64% of the population. During his inaugural address in January 2018, Weah announced his intention "to construct the greatest machinery of pro-poor governance in the history of this country". The first products of this pro-poor machinery were interventions to pay the public examination fees of high school students, hire new teachers in public schools, construct a military hospital for the army, procure medical supplies for the main public hospital and maintain rural roads. However, these short-term moves were criticised by political opponents for lack-

ing sustainability and having no links to a broader development plan.

In July 2018 the government announced the adoption of a comprehensive five-year development agenda outlining the government's plan for the country. The Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity (PAPD) does not mark a fundamental ideological shift from the policies pursued by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's administration. In fact, in his opening statement in the PAPD document, President Weah describes it as "the second in the series of plans leading towards the goals of Vision 2030". Vision 2030 was a national vision promulgated by the Government and people of Liberia under President Johnson-Sirleaf which envisioned Liberia becoming a middle income economy by 2030.

The PAPD has four main pillars centred around; economic development and job creation, sustaining peace, improved transparency in governance and greater citizen engagement in policy-making. It has ambitious targets. It seeks to lift “one million Liberians out of absolute poverty over the next six years... through sustained and inclusive growth driven by scaled-up investments in agriculture, in infrastructure, and in human resource development”. But finding the finance to support its implementation will not be easy. The government estimates that US\$6 billion will be needed over the next five years, with 42% of this capital to be raised domestically and the remaining 58% to be sourced from development partners and through loans.

A cocktail of fundraising measures are currently being put in place to raise the required capital. The most radical of which are the fiscal austerity measures adopted to reduce recurrent expenditure that will see the perks of public office reduced significantly. The austerity measures are also set to impact civil servants whose salaries have been reduced by between 3.5% and 10% depending on their income bracket. Tax reforms have also been promised with the aim of improving domestic revenue collection. Despite these cost-cutting and tax raising measures, recurrent expenditure still comprised 90% of Liberia’s 2018-2019 budget.

The government has also been keen to promote itself as open for business to foreign investors. In one measure aimed at attracting private sector investment the government announced major import tariff reductions of between 40-80% for over 2,000 commodities. Short-term capital is also being sought. In March 2018 two loan agreements were signed - one with Asian company, Eton Finance Ltd, and the other with Burkinabe construction firm EBOMAF - totalling almost US\$1 billion. These deals were criticised by Liberian think-tank the Center for Policy Action and Research for lacking economic viability and the quality assurance standards required for such a significant investment.

# PAPD


Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity



President Weah’s 5 year Development Agenda has 4 pillars:

- 1 Economic Development and Job Creation**
- 2 Sustaining Peace**
- 3 Improved Transparency in Governance**
- 4 Greater Citizen Engagement in Policy-making**





**President Weah promised a new beginning in the fight against corruption, however some of his own officials are already facing allegations of corruption**

Undeterred, in September the government announced a resource swap with the China Road and Bridge Corporation that will see the firm extracting Liberian resources up to a value of US\$2.5 billion; money to be paid to the government of Liberia over a period of five years. Traditional development partners have also reaffirmed their commitment to the Weah regime with the European Union having promised €27 million in direct budget support for the 2018-19 budget and France providing €10 million for infrastructure development.

## TRUTH AND JUSTICE

**P**resident Weah promised a new beginning in the fight against corruption; a fight that former President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf conceded she was losing before leaving office. To that end he has commissioned a number of investigations - to be conducted by specially constituted committees - into previous concessions contracts. Audit and investigative reports point to corrupt practices at the National Oil Company, previously headed by Sirleaf's son. A report by Global Witness concerning allegations of bribery in the signing of an oil deal led to further investigation by a special presidential committee which, in its final report, recommended that the officials implicated be forced to pay back the money paid to them as signature fees.

While these early efforts are laudable, Weah's efforts to tackle corruption will be measured on how these values are applied to his own officials - some of whom, are already facing media allegations of accumulating wealth illegally and evading the asset declaration as required by law - and to his commitment to strengthening anti-corruption and public integrity bodies. An early litmus test of the appetite and capacity for tackling corruption will be how the Weah administration proceeds with an investigation launched in September 2018 to ascertain the whereabouts of a shipment of Liberian dollars worth US\$104 million that were ordered by the Central Bank from printers but have since vanished from Liberia's ports. Initial efforts to blame the outgoing administration seem to have been contradicted by port records that suggest that containers were cleared after Weah took over in February and March 2018. An investigation has been launched but calls for an independent body to conduct it have been hampered by the sweeping cuts to the Governance Commission, Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Financial Intelligence Unit in the 2018/19 budget and the side-lining of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC). These are not the actions of a president keen on stamping out corruption. In fact more support, both financial and legislative, should be directed towards the General Auditing Commission and the LACC if Weah is to deliver on



his promise to stymie corruption in Liberia.

But balancing the pursuit of impartial accountability with the second objective of the PAPD, which focuses on building “a stable, resilient, and inclusive nation embracing our triple heritage and anchored on our identity as Africans”, will not be easy. The country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report of 2009 documented a series of violations and recommended senior politicians for prosecutions. Less than one year into his administration Weah is already burdened by the ghosts of this injustice which the previous government was seen to have deliberately evaded.

War victims and advocacy groups such as the Geneva-based Civitas Maxima and its local counterparts the Global Justice and Research Project and the Coalition for Justice in Liberia have heightened the debate for the establishment of a war and economic crimes court. Weah’s CDC had previously pledged to establish a war crimes court in line with the recommendations of the TRC, but a recent comment by deputy information minister, Eugene Fahngon, suggests the issue is far from settled. “We are not

ignoring the calls for a war crimes court; it’s just that we want to focus on the things that matter most to the Liberian people right now”. Fahngon went on to express his view that the TRC was “not at the top of the list [of people’s concerns] right now”.

Faced with mounting socio-economic challenges and heightened demands for justice, Weah’s administrations honeymoon period is quickly coming to an end as the anniversary of one year in office approaches. Protests by citizens angry at the lost shipment of dollars could be a sign of things to come as Liberians begin to question the credibility of his policies to tackle unemployment, facilitate economic growth and clamp down on corruption. Weah’s political survival, and to an extent the stability and progress of the Liberian state, will be shaped by the direction he follows to tackle unemployment, end impunity and improve accountability. The final verdict on whatever direction he chooses is left with the country’s poor whose life he has committed to transforming and who will vote him out, just as they voted him in, should he fail to do so.

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**NANA AKUFO - ADDO:**

**PUTTING MARGINALISED WOMEN  
ON THE AGENDA IN GHANA?**

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**Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed**

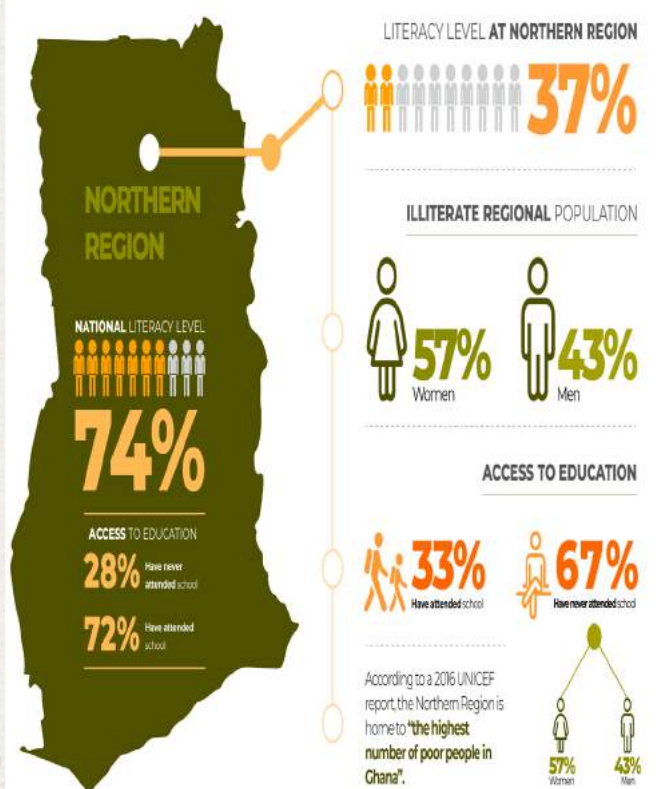


## NANA AKUFO-ADDO: PUTTING MARGINALISED WOMEN ON THE AGENDA IN GHANA?

Ghana's 2010 Population and Housing Census, compiled and tabulated by the Ghana Statistical Service, reveals an important division that continues to shape the country's development direction. The data demonstrates that there is a wide educational, economic and developmental gap between the Northern and Southern regions of Ghana. While the national literacy rate is 74% the literacy rate of the Northern Region is 37%. Women are the most marginalised group constituting 57% of the illiterate regional population. In terms of educational access, the national average on people who have never attended school is 28% while 67% of the Northern Region's population have never attended school. Here, women are at the bottom once again. 57% have never attended school. According to a 2016 UNICEF report, the Northern Region is home to "the highest number of poor people in Ghana".

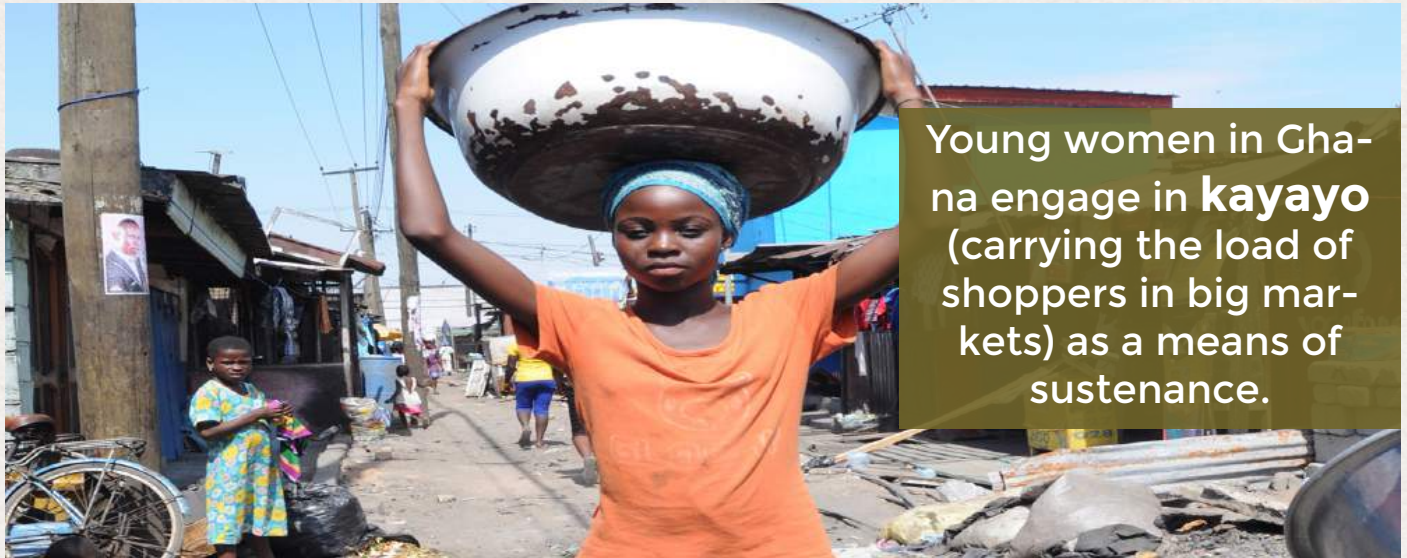
This north-south divide has existed since independence, but consecutive Ghanaian governments have done little to address poverty, low literacy and education levels and malnutrition in a more equitable way. These challenges have germinated on the back of inaction. The gap between innovative thinking and government approaches has further entrenched inequality in the country. So too has a lack of available resources. For example, high school education in northern Ghana, which was subsidised until free high school was recently introduced by the current Akufo-Addo government, was grossly underfunded, affecting school attendance and student perfor-

### LITERACY IN NORTHERN REGIONS OF GHANA



mance. The delay in feeding grants for students in northern Ghanaian public high schools alongside a lack of educational resources, human resources and facilities means they consistently lag behind in the standardised West African Senior School Certificate Examination.

In communities that are educationally and economically marginalised, women are usually the hardest hit. Many northern Ghanaian women, who are the backbone of the unpaid labor economy, are perpetually trapped in a cycle of poverty due to their limited access to transformative resources. Patriarchal cultural institutions have worked in tandem with governmental and national institutional incompetence to marginalise women in the region. Despite the important economic roles they play not much has been done by the government or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to protect and improve the lives of this class of citizens.



Young women in Ghana engage in **kayayo** (carrying the load of shoppers in big markets) as a means of sustenance.

## PROMISING PROGRESS

**N**ana Akufo-Addo was elected president of Ghana in December 2016. In a closely fought contest he defeated incumbent John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), winning almost 54% of the vote. During the campaign the New Patriotic Party (NPP), for which he was the flagbearer, committed to improving opportunities for women. Although the Northern Region is not the NPP's stronghold, the party has historic ties to the region through its Danquah-Busia-Dombo tradition. The NPP manifesto promised to restructure the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme (LEAP) to ensure that economically marginalised people are integrated into the economy by providing them with training opportunities in income generating activities. The manifesto indicated that female-headed households were to be identified and targeted as key beneficiaries of the LEAP programme.

Another relevant NPP campaign promise was a commitment to address the rural-urban migration of young women from the north to the south who engage in kayayo (carrying the load of shoppers in

big markets). According to the manifesto, the NPP government would address this phenomenon by improving the economy in the home districts of the young women in partnership with key stakeholders such as NGOs and the private sector. Providing "alternate life skills, training and capital" to improve the lives of these young women.

Akufo-Addo has been internationally commended for his efforts to support women's empowerment. He was nominated by the African Union's chairperson as "African Union Gender Champion" for 2017 for his work in promoting women's involvement in leadership and decision-making. The NPP manifesto promise to make 30% of public appointments women was nearly achieved in the president's first year; falling just short with 27% of ministerial appointees women. While this recognition is positive, further work needs to be done to address the way patriarchal institutions, supported by cultural and national systems, maintain the status quo to marginalise women in Ghana.

## A LACK OF LEADERSHIP

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, previously the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, was established in 2001. Although the ministry was established to address issues faced by marginalised groups in the country, projects implemented by the ministry have primarily been women-centered while paying little attention to groups marginalised on the basis of their sexuality, disability or ethnicity. However, the Akufo-Addo led NPP government sent a signal that it was not taking these groups seriously, when the women's organiser for the party's 2016 election campaign, Otiko Afisa Djaba, was appointed to head the ministry, despite an unproven track record. Women's political representation in and of itself is not always cause for celebration and a marker of progress. In feminist discourses, there are conversations on the ways in which women have been positioned as token figureheads in African political systems to present the illusion of progress and gender empowerment.

Ghanaian feminists like Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Adwoa Osei-Tutu, Hikmat Baba Dua, Nana Ama Agyemang Asante and Sylvia Bawa have lamented the lack of competence and knowledge about the complexities and dynamics of oppression in the country held by Otiko Afisa Djaba, minister from January 2017 to August 2018. They believe this lack of competence has been detrimental to the welfare of disenfranchised groups in Ghana. Djaba's departure, she was re-assigned as Ghana's ambassador to Italy but declined the offer and announced her retirement from active politics, has not improved things. Cynthia Morrison, appointed to replace Djaba, was recently quoted as saying "I like to bring boys together; so the men, we are going to work together and make sure that you get your due, not to separate you even though you are stronger than us, we will make it work". Morrison has publicly denounced feminism while pledging to centre men in her work, an approach which appears in conflict with the goals and mandate of the ministry. A ministry that has struggled to make NPP manifesto promises towards northern women a reality after almost two years in office.



*Otiko Afisa Djaba*  
**Declined offer as Ghana's Ambassador to Italy and retired from active politics in 2018**



*Cynthia Morrison*  
**Replaced Djaba as Head of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.**

## A LEAP FORWARD?

The LEAP programme, addressed in the campaign manifesto of the current government as in need of improvement, aims to reduce poverty and improve the lives of women, the elderly, and people living with disabilities. It provides cash to identified disenfranchised groups to support their households. As of April 2018, the programme covered all districts in the country with 213,044 beneficiary households, about 937,904 individuals. With a one-member household, two-member household, three-member household and four or more-member household receiving GHc64 (US\$13), GHc76 (US\$16), GHc88 (US\$18) and GHc106 (US\$22) in cash transfers respectively, on a bi-monthly basis. Although these cash payments may be useful for supporting households, particularly in marginalised communities, it is important to find more sustainable solutions to the problems that people living in poverty face by easing their access to quality healthcare, education and by providing affordable access to social amenities.



**To improve the LEAP programme, the Akufo-Addo led government promised to restructure the programme to identify female-headed households, allowing more marginalised women to benefit**

To improve the LEAP programme, the Akufo-Addo led government promised to restructure the programme to identify female-headed households, allowing more marginalised women to benefit. The launch of the Ghana Gender Statistics Assessment Report in June 2018 contains data that, if used effectively, will improve the targeting of female-headed households. But it is not yet clear whether the ministry will do so. In April 2018, it organised sensitisation workshops in Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions - the regions with high poverty and inequality levels - to educate Metropolitan, Municipal and District chief executives and their coordinating directors on the key roles they can play to ensure LEAP's growth and sustainability. However limited progress has been made on expanding the scope of beneficiaries and improving the punctuality of payments. Following flooding in 2017, the gender ministry began emergency LEAP payments

**LEAP** covered all the districts in Ghana, with **213,044** households and **937,904** individuals benefitting from Cash payments ranging from **GHc64 (US\$13) to GHc106 (US\$22)** depending on number of people in the household

## CARRYING THE WEIGHT OF EXPECTATION

to 1,142 people who were affected in Tamale Metropolis and Sagnarigu and Nanumba North municipalities; all in the Northern Region. It was estimated that 2,188 people would benefit nationwide from these emergency LEAP payments. But it remains unclear how the flooding victims were selected or how much they were paid.

The extent to which the government intends to widen the reach of the programme and what criteria it will use to determine eligibility has not been outlined. Dangana, an 87-year-old visually impaired woman in the Zabzugu district of the Northern Region is one of many yet to benefit from the programme.

“I have never benefited from the [LEAP] cash payment. A few months ago, they said they were coming to register us for the programme, but they never showed up. Recently, we were asked to take passport photos for the registration process and we went to do the registration. They told us to tell them what we were going to use the money for. I told them to write down livestock so that I can use it to buy them and rear. We registered this year... but all they do is write our names and take photos. They have not told us how much they will give us. Others have already been paid. Those who registered earlier have begun receiving payments. Since this government came into power my life has not changed. I don't sell anything, I don't have a source of livelihood. But we are waiting to see if we will get something since they took down our names.”

Although many women have benefited from LEAP, many more, like Dangana, who qualify for the cash payment have fallen through the cracks. In addition to limited financial resources and poor mechanisms for targeting, delays in LEAP payments are caused by bureaucratic red tape and inefficient administrative processes. An academic study also raised questions about whether the amount being disbursed is sufficient to have a transformative impact. A concern that was shared by UN's Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Philip Alston, during a recent visit to the country. Not only was he concerned that the cash payment was insufficient to last the eight week cycle, but that many qualifying people continue to miss out of the programme.

Another key tenet of the NPP manifesto that targeted women was its promise to address the rural-urban migration of young women to engage in kayayo. Women engaged in kayayo can make twice the daily national minimum wage of GHc8.80 (\$2). However, high rates of homelessness among these disenfranchised women - many sleep in markets and on the streets - puts them at high risk of physical and sexual abuse. Although former minister, Otiko Afisa Djaba initiated programmes in Accra and Kumasi to address the needs of young migrant women by providing free health insurance to about 2,000 young women engaged in kayayo in the Ashanti Region, a more fundamental rebalancing of economic opportunity between the regions is needed to eradicate the kayayo phenomenon.



**Women engaged in kayayo can make twice the daily national minimum wage of GHc8.80 (\$2).**

In an attempt to understand the issues affecting many young women engaged in kayayo, Djaba met with the leadership of these groups as part of the process to find sustainable ways to address the phenomenon. It was her belief that government programmes such as the Planting for Food and Jobs programme and the 1 village 1 dam; 1 district 1 factory would be useful for curbing the rural-urban migration of young women. The NPP



flagship 1 village 1 dam; 1 district 1 factory project focuses on constructing dams and factories across Ghana's 212 districts to facilitate local production, boost the local economy and create rural jobs. However, many villages and districts in the Northern Region have yet to see the promised dams or factories. While the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection has taken steps to engage kayayo communities in Accra and Kumasi, it has so far done little to engage with opinion leaders, traditional leaders and women in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions in an effort to find more sustainable solutions.

## CHANGING THE SYSTEM

**T**he government can work more effectively towards addressing inequality and marginalisation by taking the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection more seriously. Appointees for the ministry should have the requisite knowledge, skills and experience. Working closely with institutions such as the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy at the University of Ghana, can better equip the ministry with the knowledge to push for change.

Ensuring that funds raised for tackling poverty are spent on projects and initiatives that work closely with local communities to devise local solutions to the problems they face is vital. A close, and collaborative, working relationship with marginalised communities means that they are not just agentive actors in improving their own lives but that they are highly invested in the success of the solutions implemented to improve their lives. Dialogue with women groups, community opinion leaders and traditional authorities can bridge the growing gap between the north and south. The Third Trimester Field Practical Programme, which posts students

from the University for Development Studies to marginalised communities in the three regions of the north to work alongside communities to identify problems and assist in developing solutions, can be invaluable to government in developing policies that address persistent inequality. In terms of policy development, a special allocation of funds from the national budget to address inequality in northern Ghana, would be a clear commitment to redressing the balance. Further, the government should focus on equality when tackling issues of poverty nationwide and on tracking the commitments it makes. Although these recommendations can significantly close the gap between the north and the south, the current government, like previous administrations, is unlikely to address this systemic problem, preferring instead to focus predominantly on party rather than national interests.

A systemic approach to social change rather than an individualised, interpersonal approach to addressing oppression and marginalisation is needed in Ghana to facilitate the long-term improvement of the lives of women. While programmes such as LEAP may alleviate poverty at an individual level, examining marginalisation from a holistic and systemic approach is needed if issues of inequality are to be fully addressed. In Ghana a critical look at the way institutions like the courts, the education system and the economy work in tandem with oppressive patriarchal systems to keep women marginalised would be a good starting point. Economic empowerment for women is important but that must happen alongside a change in the role for marginalised actors, particularly women, in the function of the state, if that individual empowerment is to have transformative generational impacts.

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**FLUCTUATING FORTUNES:**

# **BUHARI AND NIGERIA'S ECONOMY**

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**Cheta Nwanze**



## FLUCTUATING FORTUNES: BUHARI AND NIGERIA'S ECONOMY

President Muhammadu Buhari was sworn in as the President of Nigeria on 29 May 2015, the first person in Nigeria's history to complete a take over of power from an opposition leader via the ballot box. On assumption of office, Buhari identified three areas that his administration would focus on; the war against corruption, insecurity and the economy. With presidential elections scheduled for February 2019, Buhari's record has come under increasing scrutiny but how has he fared in addressing the area that arguably has the biggest impact on the everyday reality of ordinary Nigerians, the economy?

The All Progressive Congress (APC) government was dealt a bad hand. The outgoing regime of the People's Democratic Party left crude oil production at a low point with militant attacks on the up. But President Buhari's announcement that he was cancelling the Presidential Amnesty Programme only made things worse. With the Excess Crude Account virtually empty at US\$2 billion, the APC government had a very thin buffer for manoeuvre. GDP growth which peaked at over 8% in 2011, had slowed to 5.4% at the start of 2015. The economy slumped further, going into recession in August 2016, for the first time in more than two decades, and only climbing out of it in September 2017. GDP growth remains weak, averaging just 1.73% in the first half of 2018 according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

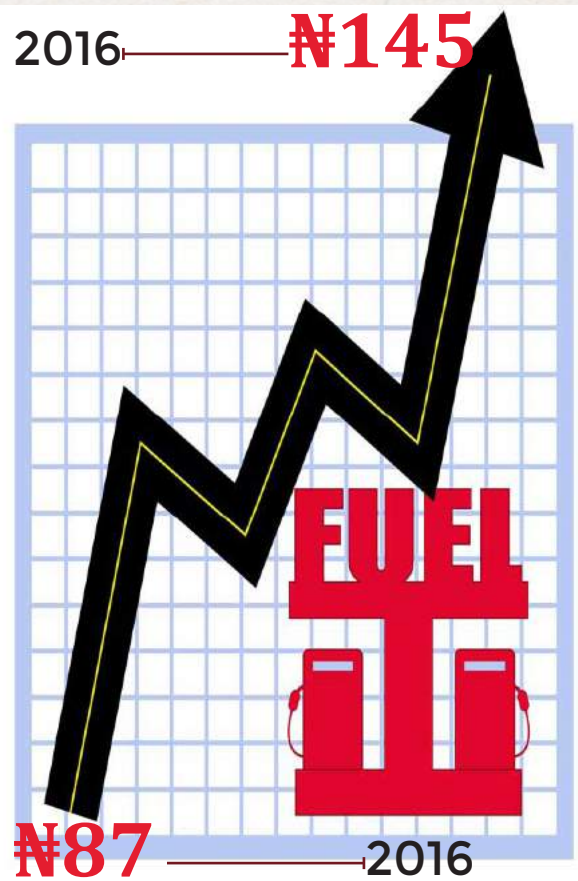
## PARTIAL PROGRESS

The government deserves credit for its timely bail out of states in the country beginning in July 2015. Over ₦1.75 trillion (\$4.89 billion) has been provided under the current administration. Had this not been done, there would have been a near collapse of most of the states in the country. Unfortunately, the use of the bail out funds was not properly monitored, and many states are right back to where they were at the beginning of the life of the Buhari administration; bankrupt and unable to meet their basic needs.

Initiatives such as the ₦100 billion (US\$279 million) Sukuk bond proceeds, issued in the third quarter of 2017, which were spent on the reconstruction and rehabilitation of 25 key roads and rail projects, have helped in narrowing the infrastructure deficit. ₦1.2 trillion was released in 2017 for capital expenditure from the 2016 budget, with a further ₦1.5 trillion outlaid this year, from the 2017 budget, making a total of ₦2.7 trillion (US\$9 billion) in two years. This investment has enabled the resumption of work on several stalled, but much needed, road projects such as the Okene Bypass and the Kaduna Eastern Bypass.

The Buhari administration also took the bold

step of increasing petrol prices by 66.7% from ₦87 to ₦145 per litre in May 2016. That cut down petrol subsidy bills which were draining more than ₦1 trillion (\$2.79 billion) per year from the public purse. Unfortunately, this good step has since been rolled back. Since Nigeria still imports the bulk of its refined petrol and the landing costs of petrol is priced in US dollars, the costs change with changes in global oil prices. With rising global oil prices the administration has sought to keep the cost of petrol constant at ₦145 per litre. Fearing a backlash if what many Nigerians see as one of their only benefits from the government is taken away, they are now making up the difference, estimated at 25% per litre by a SBM Intelligence report in February, in an effective return to subsidy. Regrettably, the price modulation introduced by the Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Ibe Kachikwu, never took place. Where incremental increases in the prices of petrol would have paid off in helping wean Nigerians off unsustainable cheap petrol, the next administration will have no choice but to hike up prices again or foot a hefty bill for subsidies.



## CONTROLLING CURRENCY

Whilst the government inherited a set of challenges, they took missteps that accentuated the problems. For example, rather than take the smart economic choice and float the Naira, or at least devalue it to a more realistic peg against the US dollar, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) took its cue from the President's known hostility to the idea, and chose to implement demand control measures. These measures had the unintended effect of keeping foreign investors on the sidelines as many were worried about their ability to repatriate their earnings. Foreign airlines - Iberia, Emirates and Lufthansa - who had more than US\$600 million of foreign exchange trapped in Nigeria for months served as cautionary tale, and ensured that many investors stayed away.

A second unintended consequence of the CBN's capital control measures was the creation of multiple artificial exchange rates. This created opportunities for arbitrage and had the effect of asphyxiating productive businesses. A story which



**A Premium Times report in April 2018 labelled the Anchor Borrowers Programme, set up to provide loans to farmers at low interest rates, 'a farce'.**

made the rounds among members of the business community at the time about an electronics importer who got the opportunity of getting US dollars at ₦191 through a politically connected friend illustrates this. Rather than using the foreign currency to continue his import business, he simply exchanged his naira for dollars at that rate, then took the dollars and sold on the black market at ₦400 per dollar. He did this round-tripping a number of times, making a healthy profit while his main business suffered. Although categories of industry, such as palm oil producers, benefited from the capital control measures in late 2015 and early 2016, they were, on the whole, counterproductive. Belatedly, reason prevailed, and foreign investors have since returned with the introduction of a 'managed float' of the naira that has brought the number of parallel rates down to three.

The way and manner which both the CBN and Office of the Attorney General of the Federation have gone after MTN Nigeria and the banks involved in the repatriation of funds amounting to US\$8.1 billion and so called back taxes of US\$2 billion has given investors something else to think about. Though the CBN has since backtracked by announcing that talks are ongoing, the damage has been done. MTN has put on hold its plans to list on the Nigerian Stock Exchange in what would have been one of the biggest listings in recent times.

## GREASING THE WHEELS

The drop in Nigeria's crude oil production, and global crude oil prices at the same time, was a key factor that pushed the country into recession. The rebound in both indices has supported the economic recovery. Crude oil prices and production volumes could hit US\$50 billion before the end of 2018. However, the government's failure to get the Petroleum Industry Governance Bill passed will stifle much needed investment in the sector. President Buhari had hinged his refusal on the provision of the Bill permitting the Petroleum Regulatory Commission to retain as much as 10% of the revenue generated, believing that it could affect the Federal Allocations Account Committee. The President also claimed that there were legislative drafting concerns which, if he assented to the Bill in the form presented, would create ambiguity and conflict in its interpretation. However, the Presidency has made no efforts to dialogue with the National Assembly and with the next general elections looming, ongoing politicking means the Bill is unlikely to be passed during this administration. A missed opportunity.

Diversifying the economy away from oil has been a major tenant of Buhari's administration with

agriculture seen as a key sector, but little has been done despite a lot of chest thumping. A Premium Times report in April 2018 labelled the Anchor Borrowers Programme, set up to provide loans to farmers at low interest rates, 'a farce'. The big challenge for agriculture is linked to high levels of insecurity across the country and insufficient infrastructure. Nigeria still suffers from too many post-harvest losses; the lack of power meaning that large scale storage remains a distant dream.

Arguably even more pertinent than petroleum is Nigeria's energy crisis. Electricity tariffs need to go up to prevent the entire privatisation scheme from collapsing. Numerous meetings with distribution companies over tariffs have not led to an agreement or greater clarity. Some electricity distribution company owners have pointedly asked the government to take the companies back. The ₦701 billion (US\$1.95 billion) payment assurance scheme for gas suppliers is billed to end in December 2018 with no replacement in sight. Factors on which the Multi Year Tariff Order were based, such as inflation and the naira-dollar exchange rate, have changed drastically.

## LOOKING FORWARD

A review of key economic metrics highlights the ongoing challenges. Debt service ratios remain quite high. About a third of the government's revenues are spent on debt servicing. Interest payments accounted for 61% of government revenues in 2016 and 71.9% in 2017 according to the International Monetary Fund. Tax revenues in the country have not moved significantly. Despite the initial buzz around the Voluntary Assets and Income Declaration Scheme introduced by previous minister of finance Kemi Adeosun, only 214 Nigerians pay more than ₦20 million (US\$56,000) in tax. Recurrent expenditure remains the elephant in the room. 2017 had recurrent expenditure at 68.27%, while 2018 is at 68.50%. Simply put, 68 kobo of ev-

## FURTHER READING

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ery naira earned is spent on keeping the government running.

While GDP moved back into positive territory in 2017, it remains fragile and the country is unlikely to hit the 2.7% it attained in 2015 anytime soon. A recent World Bank report stepped down growth projections to 1.9% for 2018 on the back of slowing oil production and falling agricultural output. The latter because of the ongoing conflict between herders and farmers in the Middle Belt of the country. With the continued growth of the country's population this is a concern. Even more worrisome is the growth remaining poor despite crude oil trading above US\$80 and production volumes relatively stable. As the elections approach, there will be less attention paid to governance and more to politics, so even weaker growth is to be expected.



**DISMANTLING AUTOCRACY:**

**GAMBIA'S TRANSITION TO  
DEMOCRACY**

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**Ismaila Ceesay**



## **DISMANTLING AUTOCRACY: GAMBIA'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY**

**O**n 1 December 2016, The Gambia experienced a political earthquake when the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) announced the victory of an unassuming businessman, Adama Barrow, over the incumbent strongman Yahya Jammeh. Jammeh, who was a brutal and eccentric dictator, had promised to rule the small West African nation for a billion years. However, the election victory abruptly ended Jammeh's 22 years of dominance, ushering a new era of hope and democracy.

After initially calling president-elect Barrow to concede defeat and promising to peacefully transfer power, Yaya Jammeh, to the surprise of both Gambians and the international community, announced seven days later that he was rejecting the election result in its totality. He branded the results fraudulent and characterised by unacceptable errors on the part of the electoral authorities, declared them null and void and refused to step down. Promising to hold fresh elections. Jammeh announced on national television that:

“in the same way that I accepted the results faithfully believing that the Independent Electoral Commission was independent and honest and reliable, I hereby reject the results in totality. I will not accept the results based on what has happened. This is the most dubious election we ever had in the history of this country. We will go

back to the polls because I want to make sure every Gambian votes under an electoral commission that is impartial, independent, neutral and free from foreign influence.”

This was in response to an IEC press release on 5

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**In the same way that I accepted the results faithfully believing that the Independent Electoral Commission was independent and honest and reliable, I hereby reject the results in totality. I will not accept the results based on what has happened.**

**Yahya Jammeh**

President of Gambia (1996–2017)

December that confirmed they had discovered errors in the election result totals where figures had been inadvertently transposed. However the accounting errors, as identified by the IEC, were inconsequential as Adama Barrow and the coalition would have still been awarded victory, albeit with a



slimmer margin than initially announced. Jammeh's rejection of the election results and refusal to step down almost plunged the country into turmoil, sparking a political impasse that lasted for almost six weeks. Eventually under regional and international diplomatic pressure and with the threat of military intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the defeated Jammeh negotiated his exit from office. His demands included an amnesty deal to avoid facing charges of human rights abuses, the right to travel to and from The Gambia and continued recognition of his political party. What exactly, if anything, was agreed remains unclear.

On 21 January 2017 Jammeh waved to his supporters as he boarded his private jet and left the country, together with his family, for Equatorial Guinea. The legacy he left behind was one of a collapsed economy, weak institutions and a nation divided along ethno-political lines.

## THE COALITION: A HOUSE DIVIDED

On 18 February amidst a celebratory atmosphere Adama Barrow was, for the second time, sworn-in as president, this time on home soil, becoming The Gambia's third president. His initial swearing in having taken place in The Gambia's embassy in Senegal prior to Jammeh's departure. The event, which coincided with the country's 52nd independence anniversary, was attended by thousands of citizens and several African heads of states. Barrow told the gathered crowd that his victory was "a victory for democracy...a victory belonging to all Gambians".

Barrow stood in the December 2016 election, not as the leader of his own political party, but as the head of a coalition of opposition groups. After failing in previous elections to present a united front seven political parties plus one independent candidate eventually agreed to work together and they elected Adama Barrow from the United Democratic Party (UDP) as their presidential candidate at a national convention that brought together 490 party delegates from all administrative regions of the country. Barrow won 308 votes. However, cracks in



Jammeh's rejection of the election results almost plunged the Gambia into turmoil.



Barrow was head of a coalition of seven political parties plus one independent candidate.

the newly elected coalition government became apparent from the onset. Despite making promises in their coalition election manifesto that they would unite "to put all differences aside to put a transitional government in place that would initiate constitutional, electoral, institutional, administrative and managerial reforms that would

make justice guide our action towards the common good”, the coalition has struggled to contain diverse political agendas in office.

The first issue that divided the coalition revolved around how to contest the April 2017 National Assembly elections. Two competing positions emerged. One camp, headed by Lawyer Ousainou Darboe the leader of the UDP party, who was serving a prison sentence for violating the public order act at the time of the coalition building process and subsequent elections, wanted a tactical alliance approach. This involved political parties sponsoring candidates in constituencies based on their individual party’s perceived electoral strength. Where they clearly had the largest support base no other coalition member would contest that particular seat. Rather the coalition members would all come together to support and campaign for that candidate. A different approach, spearheaded by the leader of the People’s Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS), Halifa Sallah, argued for the coalition to back candidates who would stand as independents. After a fractious debate the tactical alliance approach was opted for.

The elections took place on 6 April 2017 and the UDP won 31 out of the 53 contested seats, falling just short of a two-thirds majority but six times as many as the second placed party. UDP dominance in the National Assembly increased its influence over the direction of the coalition but widened cracks between members. Barrow’s decision to reshuffle his cabinet on 29 June 2017 proved to be the final death knell. The coalition agreement stipulated that “all presidential appointments and removals will be done in consultation with coalition stakeholders”. However, according to a prominent minister and a key coalition partner, who was relieved of his position in the shake-up, this consultation never happened.

The cabinet reconfigurations, which came as a surprise to many political observers in The Gambia, saw President Barrow assert more control of the executive by bringing in people whose loyalty he could rely on. He redeployed vice-president Fatoumata Jallow Tambajang, a key coalition figurehead and Barrow ally, to the foreign service - a position

she declined - and replaced her with his ‘political father’ and long-time opponent of Jammeh, Ousainou Darboe, who had unsuccessfully stood against Jammeh on four consecutive elections. The changes not only saw key coalition partners like OJ Jallow of the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) leave government but even brought in former ministers of the previous administration. Momodou Tangara and Mambury Njie, both of whom had fallen out with Jammeh before he left power, were given the important portfolios of minister of foreign affairs and finance minister.

Gainako, a leading online newspaper in The Gambia, argued that the “president’s cabinet reshuffle may have come largely as a political stunt to save his poor performance by bringing in his own people rather than affecting personnel change that could help him bring the reform that Gambians were expecting”. In addition, political observers were quick to recall a promise the president made during his first press conference that “no former Jammeh minister will be needed in the new government as the coalition has more than enough manpower”. This has not been the only promise that President Barrow appears to have rowed back on.

Having promised to lead the coalition government for three years before stepping aside, an agreement set out in the memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by all coalition members prior to the 2016 election, recent pronouncements by the president suggest that he is not willing to honour this promise and will stay for a full five year term. In an interview with a local newspaper, The Standard, in August 2018, President Barrow gave his strongest indication yet, “we are in a transition period. We have things that we need to fix and I do not think we should hold elections just for the sake of holding elections... We have to complete these processes first and ensure there is a level playing field before we organise elections so that we will have credible elections. I think this is what is important. Three years or five years is not important”. Although the coalition partners are yet to take an official position on the issue, OJ Jallow is of the view that “President Barrow should not be allowed to govern beyond the

An investigation uncovered that a sum of **33 Million dalasis (\$750,000)** was paid into the **Fatoumata Bah Barrow Foundation**, a philanthropic venture of the president's wife



three year agreed period”, which ends in 2019. Should President Barrow fail to honor the MOU and step down after three years, the coalition, already in disarray behind the scenes, will formally collapse.

## ENTER THE ANONYMOUS DONORS

Despite the political infighting within the coalition, President Barrow continued to enjoy high approval ratings during his first year in office. However as the halfway point of his five year term approaches, support is fast eroding due to allegations of corruption, incompetence and political indecisiveness. Having promised that the fight against corruption would be his government's number one priority, President Barrow has failed to deliver on that commitment in office. After making a commitment that all cabinet ministers were going to be forced to publicly declare their assets, the presidency subsequently announced that asset declarations would not be released to the public.

The financial source of 57 pick-up trucks donated to lawmakers, in September 2017, by the president and the 11 million dalasis (US\$250,000) he gave to Gambian pilgrims during the 2018 Hajj programme was “an anonymous donor” according to Barrow. An indictment of his inexperience and potential corruptibility. In August 2018, a corruption scandal rocked the Fatoumata Bah Barrow Foundation - a philanthropic venture of the president's wife - after

an investigation uncovered that a sum of 33 Million dalasis (\$750,000) was paid into the foundations account in December 2017 apparently without its knowledge. An internal investigation has been promised but the scandal has precipitated an online and grassroots campaign - kodolay (where is the money) - spearheaded by Gambian activists. In assessing the Barrow government so far, Madi Jobarteh, a leading human rights activists and political commentator argues that “the government is completely off-track...there is a blatant lack of accountability, abuse of office and power and a lot of political patronage. President Barrow is not serious in fighting corruption and holding government officials to account”.

In addition to allegations of corruption, the Barrow presidency has also been accused of incompetence and indecisiveness due to the manner in which the government responded to the occupy Westfield protests, land disputes in Busumbala and environmental disasters in the Kombo coastal areas caused by industrial activities. The fatal confrontation between residents of Faraba, a village outside of the capital Banjul, and the Police Intervention Unit (PIU) raised further questions the ability of the new government to ensure the right of ordinary Gambians to protest.

In 2018, the government awarded a contract to Julakey Company to conduct sand mining operations in Faraba. However, residents complained

that the contract had been awarded without consulting the local village council. When, on 18 June 2018, a number of angry local residents took to the streets to protest against the mining company, the protest turned violent and five trucks that were loading sand in the mining area were set ablaze. In response a detachment of the PIU was dispatched to the village but they failed to de-escalate the situation and three civilians were killed. A commission of inquiry was set up, a promising commitment to accountability, but the preliminary report has yet to be made public despite being handed over to the president on 17 September 2018.

National Development Plan (NDP). Adopted by Barrow in January 2018, the plan seeks to restore the rule of law, deepen democracy, advance transitional justice and transform the security sector. At an international donor conference in Brussels organised by the European Union, donors pledged €1.45 billion (US\$1.7 billion) in support of the government's NDP.

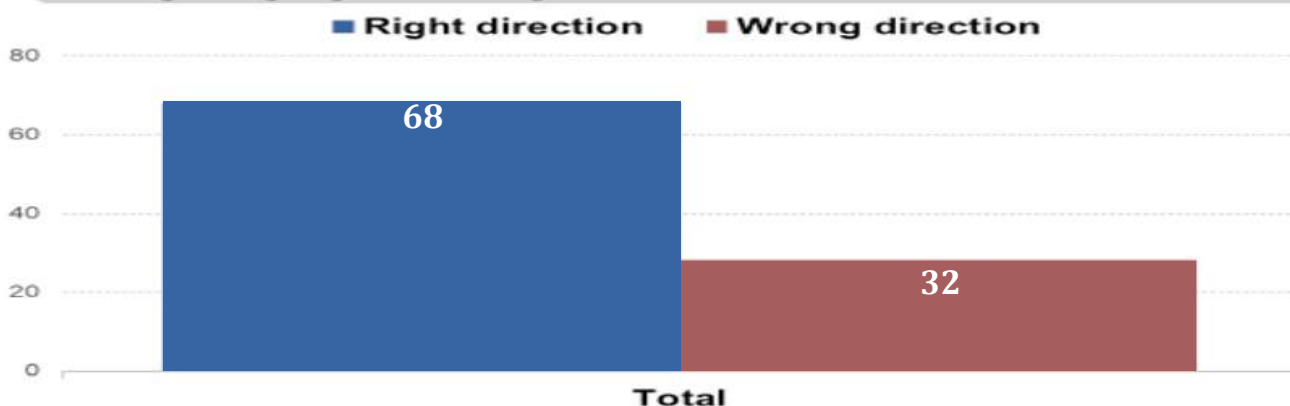
A commission of inquiry set up to investigate the financial dealings of Jammeh and his close associates is ongoing. To address rights abuses and violations of the previous regime and to ensure justice for the victims, the government has established a Truth, Reparations and Reconciliation Commission (TRRC). It aims to shed light on past human rights abuses committed under Jammeh, combat impunity and advance reconciliation. The specific mandate of TRRC is to inves-

## REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

**D**espite allegations of corruption and political missteps a July 2018 study by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) found that 68% of

### Progress has strong majority saying Country Going in right direction

*Do you think that things in The Gambia are going in the right direction, or do you feel things are going in the wrong direction?*



### A July 2018 study by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) found that 68% of Gambians think the country is heading in the right direction

Gambians think the country is heading in the right direction. On major democratic principles such as the freedom of expression, human rights, freedom of assembly and the freedom of movement there have been notable improvements when compared to the reality under Jammeh. Moreover, President Barrow's willingness to undertake and support the promised and necessary reforms crucial for the consolidation of democratic rule in the Gambia are a cause for further optimism. The pillars of that reform programme are outlined in the 2018–2021

investigate human rights abuses and violations, promote healing and reconciliation, provide victims an opportunity to relate their own accounts of abuses suffered, and, in appropriate cases, grant reparations to victims. The 11 TRRC commissioners are to be appointed by the president in consultation with key stakeholders and will take into consideration the geographical, religious, cultural and gender diversity of The Gambia. After the official launch of the TRRC on 15 October 2018, the Executive Director of the Commission,

Baba Galleh Jallow, stated his confidence that it will achieve its goal of delivering justice to the victims of the previous government.

The National Assembly has also passed a bill to create a National Human Rights Commission. Judicial reforms have started, with the appointment of Gambian judges to replace foreign ones that had been selected by Jammeh. The former leader had long used the courts as a tool to consolidate his power and judges from abroad were hired and fired with alarming frequency, often on the basis of failing to rule the way Jammeh wanted them to. Through an act of parliament, a Constitutional Review Commission was established in June 2018 to review and analyse the 1997 constitution and draft a new one for the country. The members of the CRC were appointed on 1 June 2018 and should present its findings by the end of 2019. The review process aims to be inclusive, designed to ensure that every Gambian, including those in the diaspora, has the opportunity to fully participate in the process. A likely addition is the introduction of presidential term limits. According to the NDI report 85% support a two-term presidential limit, reflecting a desire to limit the ability of future presidents to gain too strong a foothold in the institutions of government.

Perhaps, the most significant of all the reforms underway is an overhaul of the security services. The Security Sector Reform (SSR) programme, launched in September 2017, aims to establish an effective, professional and accountable security sector. The SSR programme places the reform of security institutions within the larger framework of restoring the rule of law and deepening democracy. Mainly funded with donor support, the first phase of the process, which involves an in-depth security sector assessment to identify the threats and challenges confronting the state and the people of The Gambia has already been undertaken. The government's ambivalence about whether to downsize the security forces is creating uncertainty among the army according to Sait Matty Jaw of the University of the Gambia.

Support for the reform process amongst Gambians is high even if low levels of awareness as to what exactly they constitute continue to be prevalent. The July 2018 NDI public opinion survey indicates that

80% approve of compensating families of victims that were killed during the Jammeh government. Reforms that improve personal freedoms are the most popular amongst Gambians (82%), followed by judicial reforms (79%), media reforms (73%) and electoral reforms (70%).

## THE TRANSITION CHALLENGE

Reforms aimed at changing the function of government are underway but President Barrow and his government are grappling with a plethora of short-term challenges as well. The most urgent of these is ensuring post-dictatorship security and stability. President Barrow appears to lack confidence in the Gambian Army and has outsourced the security of the country to ECOWAS Military Intervention in the Gambia (ECOMIG). ECOMIG was dispatched as a short term stabilisation force to resolve the political impasse that ensued when Jammeh refused to peacefully hand over power. However, it has had its mandate reviewed and extended for one year from its initial expiration date of 21 May 2017. Recently, President Barrow requested that the mission be extended until 2021 to cover the entire transition period. This is a request that security analysts, believe risks further alienating the Gambian Army.

Moreover, a growing youth population and high levels of unemployment pose a serious and pressing challenge. The median age of the country is 17 years old, with 64% of the population under the age of 25. A 2017 International Labour Organisation report estimated youth unemployment to be 38%; a potential source of future unrest and protest. To avert such a scenario, the Barrow government should invest further in human capital, education and creating employment opportunities for young people in the agricultural, fisheries and sand mining sectors. In the long term, The Gambia needs to overhaul the education system to put greater focus on skills and entrepreneurship training.

If President Barrow can harness the good will and support that still exists he can deliver a successful transition and leave a positive legacy. But in order to do so he must be ready to make difficult decisions. Otherwise, the transition and its concomitant reform processes will be like steering a large cargo ship, slow, tedious and time consuming. Barrow must be ready to take a strong stance against corruption and introduce financial discipline both in terms of fiscal policy and public spending. The process of tabling before the National Assembly an anti-corruption commission bill, which seeks to establish the anti-corruption commission, and to provide effective measures for eradication, suppression and prevention of corrupt practices in both private and public life in The Gambia, must be expedited.

Progress in key areas such as the fight against impunity, thereby ensuring that victims of the Jammeh regime receive justice, reparations or reconciliation will be an important and symbolic step forward. The repeal of repressive media laws and enacting of a Freedom of Information Act would mark a further clear break with the past. The Gambia has made significant strides since 2016. However, dismantling an autocratic state that was built and entrenched over 22 years cannot happen overnight. Whilst reform processes are in place for long term systemic change, immediate issues and concerns for ordinary Gambians such as unemployment, corruption, stable electricity supply and access to quality health care cannot be ignored. Finding the balance will define whether Barrow is seen as facilitator of a transition back to democracy or a roadblock that stymied its restoration.

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**SIERRA LEONE'S**

**NEW DIRECTION?**

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**Andrew Lavali**

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**Hassan Kallon**



## SIERRA LEONE'S NEW DIRECTION

The 31 March 2018 presidential run-off between Retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) and Dr Samura Kamara of the All Peoples Congress Party (APC) was a hotly contested and divisive election. After a decade in power the APC's promise of continuity, despite a change in leadership, failed to sufficiently convince voters to give them back the presidency. Rather, it was Bio's promise of a "new direction" that 51.8% of ballots were cast in favour of.

On 4 April 2018, the former military leader, who briefly ruled the country at the height of the rebel insurgency, was sworn in as president at the Radisson Blu Hotel in the west of Freetown, just hours after the National Electoral Commission announced the final results. Euphoria and scenes of jubilation among SLPP supporters was in stark contrast to the reaction in the APC camp, with some senior officials going as far to accuse the international community of collusion and duplicity in the election outcome. Having campaigned on a platform of change, social inclusion and state accountability, the new president has his work cut out for his administration. However, six months into his term, President Bio's administration has made good progress in its effort to transform his vision into reality.

## MAKING A MARK

The first month of the new government was characterised by a slate of executive orders and the establishment of the government transition team. The transition team was quick to get to work, creating a single treasury account and banning excessive and unnecessary government expenditure; a move welcomed by many. However, while there were good reasons behind many of these initial actions, the vigilante-style approach to operation that was employed raised concerns. In one particularly troubling instance, a judge of the superior court of judicature was made to disembark his official vehicle and immediately turn it over to a group of people claiming to possess the authority to retrieve government vehicles based on an executive order issued within the first month of Bio taking office.

The cabinet, announced in April and May 2018, received a mixed reaction for its composition. Critics highlight that Bio's appointments do little for ethnic and regional integration in the country. 58% of the cabinet is comprised of citizens from the southern and eastern regions, the SLPP's political stronghold. Low levels of female representation led women's advocacy groups to accuse the administration of paying lip service to gender empowerment. Of the 57 cabinet positions



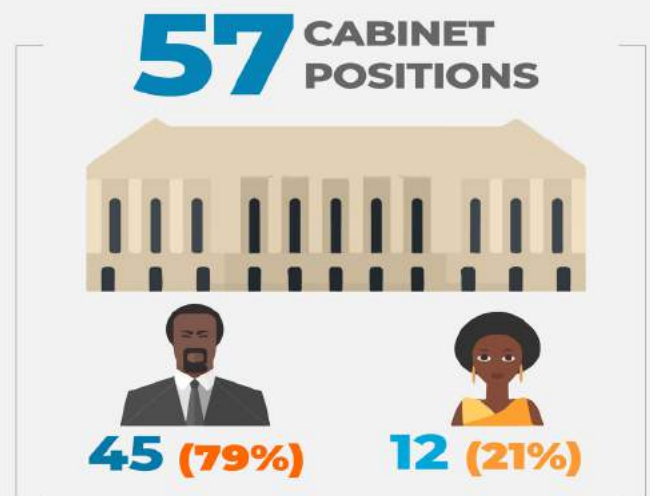
named so far, only 12 are women. However, this is an improvement compared to the gender balance in parliament, where only 13% of seats are held by women. Women's advocacy groups such as the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone have been left frustrated by the lack of opportunities for women's political engagement across the board.

## TRACKING PROGRESS

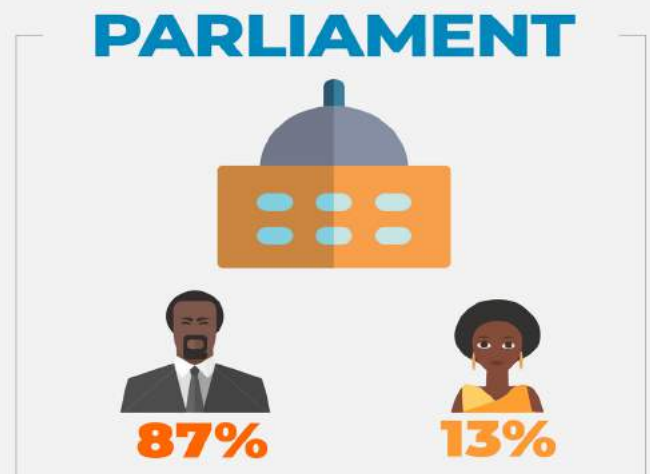
In an effort to keep track of the campaign promises made by Bio now that he is in office an innovative online promise-tracker, designed to allow citizens to hold the government accountable, has been created by a local network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with support from the Open Society Initiative for West Africa. The "Bio-meter" identifies, and subsequently seeks to measure and track, the implementation of promises from the SLPP campaign over the next five years. However due to the structure of some campaign promises, which lack clear timeframes, developing appropriate and fair indicators has not been easy. Despite this challenge, civil society actors led by the Institute for Governance Reform were able to offer an assessment of government performance in its first 100 days. The new administration exceeded expectations in two key sectors; revenue mobilisation and expenditure management.

The establishment of a single treasury account was an important step towards improved fiscal transparency. Measures instituted by the National Revenue Authority to enforce tax compliance resulted in a trebling of daily revenue collection between March and June 2018. The management of expenditure by the new government was also aided by the introduction of directives aimed at reducing expenses on foreign travel, as well as the banning the hosting of government events in hotels. A policy that split the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development into two separate ministries - the Ministry of Finance is now headed by a former World Bank employee, Jacob Safa and Nabeela Tunis is the Minister of Development - was a positive reform in that allows each respective ministry to devote additional resources to tackling pressing issues they face.

The Bio administration's commitment to the rule of law and democratic principles were severely tested in the first 100 days. The election of the new speaker of parliament, was referred to by Dr Kandeh Yumkella, leader of the minority National Grand Coalition, a former presiden-



This is an improvement compared to the gender balance in parliament



**There is a lack of opportunities for women's political engagement in Sierra Leone.**

tial candidate and now a MP representing Kambia district, as a "thoroughly unfortunate affair." Opposition MPs were removed from the chambers by armed police officers following a tense confrontation over who was entitled to sit in parliamentary deliberations. At the end of the standoff Dr Abass Chernor Bundu of the SLPP was chosen as speaker, but was elected without the majority participation of the opposition APC MPs, leading them to dismiss the process as a "rape" of the country's democracy by the



SLPP. The 2018 parliamentary elections produced, for the first time in Sierra Leone's history, a result where the party that controls the executive does not also have the majority in parliament. Fearful that the APC could have undermined their programmes if their candidate was elected parliamentary speaker, the SLPP was uncompromising in ensuring that their chosen candidate was appointed. This event has only served to increase the tension and acrimony in parliament.

Criticism has also followed the dismissal of tenured public officials without regard for the terms and conditions of employment. The removal of the commissioner of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the head of the Immigration Department and Central Bank governor have resulted in threats of legal recourse by the former holders of these positions. The official response from the government has been to state that the public officials in question had become too political or ineffective in their performance. The failure however to substantiate this with proof and a lack of willingness to conduct a transparent investigation into the allegations does not represent a commitment to due process.

## MAKING ENDS MEET

In one of its first official pronouncements, the new administration stressed that the inherited economy "was the worst in living memory". Economic growth dropped from 6% in 2016 to 3.7% in 2017 according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which projects a lower level of growth to remain relatively constant throughout 2018. In addition, inflation, which stood at 17.2% when the new government took office, remains high and debt levels are a major concern. External debt, amounting to US \$1.6 billion, along with domestic debt of Le 4.99 trillion (US\$658 million) were figures cited in the Government Transition Team Report (GTTR) that also noted that government owed vendors for various goods and services, adding a further US\$1.4 billion to the amount owed. The Bio government estimates that servicing these debts alone will amount to annual repayments of US\$262 million. With government revenue projected to be US\$539 million in 2018 the government will struggle to cover recurrent expenditures and make debt repayments, let alone raise the additional capital needed to deliver on its poverty reduction agenda.

The Budget Advocacy Network has also raised fears that government is unlikely to meet its revenue target of a tax revenue to GDP ratio of 20% by 2023, which will have further implications for proposed initiatives. The state of economic affairs has only added to the substantial workload of Finance Minister, Jacob Jusu Saffa, who has travelled frequently since taking office, in a desperate bid to secure new foreign direct investment for the country. The IMF mission to Freetown in September 2018 concluded that government has made significant progress in introducing revenue and expenditure control measures, paving the way for a return of support that was suspended in the run-up to the elections. However, Chinese loans accrued by Bio's predecessor for mining and infrastructure deals may limit the space and ability of government to take on additional debt to finance its poverty reduction programmes.

The recent removal of the fuel subsidy resulted in a 33% pump price increase, from Le6,000 (US\$0.75) to Le8,000 (US\$1) a litre, and widespread protests throughout Freetown and other urban centers. The subsidy removal, a precondition for the resumption of IMF assistance, has failed to bolster the Leone, nor has it helped the local economy or improved conditions for ordinary Sierra Leoneans. The currency has depreciated significantly in value against the US Dollar from Le7,650 in March 2018 to Le8,450 in October, inflation is currently at 18% and prices of essential commodities such as rice and transport fares have increased. Within a week of being appointed Central Bank governor in August 2018 Dr Kel-fala Kallon resorted to auctioning foreign currency to commercial banks in an effort to stabilise the currency; the long-term implications of these actions remain to be seen.



**President Bio's Free Education Programme, a promise that became the central policy initiative of his party's election campaign, was officially launched in September 2018.**

## EDUCATION AND CORRUPTION: THE DEFINING ISSUES

President Bio's ambitious Free Education Programme, a promise that became the central policy initiative of his party's election campaign, and which aims to increase the enrolment and retention rates of children in primary and secondary schools, was officially launched in September 2018. Even though serious doubts remain over several components of the programme - the plan to revert to a single-shift system where all children go to school in the morning and end at noon, instead of two separate classes being held, one in the morning

and one in the afternoon; where will government find the number of trained teachers needed; where new schools will be built in order to best serve local communities; and how the Ministry of Education will provide administrative oversight to ensure the implementation of the initiative - many Sierra Leoneans hold the view that the President's vision, if realised, could create a generation of educated Sierra Leoneans capable of providing sustained growth and prosperity for the country in the coming years ahead. The programme exceeded its target of 1.5 million pupils in the first few weeks demonstrating that enthusiasm for education is shared by parents and children alike, even if teething problems are likely.

On corruption too, there are early signs that point

## EXPLAINING UNEXPLAINED WEALTH

to short-term progress. Having replaced Ade Ma-Cauley as ACC head in June 2018, Francis Ben-Kai-fala took no time in issuing a series of indictments against two senior former government officials - former vice president Victor Bockarie Foh, and Alhaji Minkailu Mansaray, a former Minister of Mines and now the deputy leader of the APC. Foh has agreed to pay over US\$68,000 to the ACC in an effort to have his case settled out of court. He has also stated that his former boss, Ernest Bai Koroma should be invited to answer alleged charges of corruption. The recent moves by the ACC has provided citizens some optimism that President Bio's anti-corruption crusade might result in something more substantive than merely empty rhetoric. Ernest Bai Koroma's zeal for fighting corruption in his early years in office - he granted additional powers of investigation to the ACC in 2008 - soon disappeared from view. Sierra Leoneans will continue to keep a close eye on President Bio and his actions so that he does not follow the same path.

In keeping to one of his campaign promises, President Bio declared his assets to the ACC. However, the failure to make the declaration public or to amend the ACC Act to force public officials to publish their assets is not in keeping in line with the administration's rhetoric for greater transparency and accountability. Despite its pronounced new direction agenda, political appointments have followed a familiar pattern. Senior party officials at national and district levels have been appointed to the current administration, effectively fusing political and national offices, as happened during the APC's decade-long rule. Despite Bio's promises to de-politicise institutions, the SLPP Chairman, Dr. Prince Harding, was appointed chairman of the National Telecommunications Commission; the party's Secretary General, Umar Napoleon Koroma, has been made head of the National Commission for Privatisation; and Lahai Lawrence Leema, the publicity secretary is now the Deputy Internal Affairs Minister. The APC Secretary General, Osman Foday Yansaneh, and other senior party officials have been left unimpressed with the president's "selective appointments" and his crusade to "replace all government officials of a certain inclination with more pliable individuals from his party".

On 4 July 2018, the Government Transition Team (GTT), led by Prof. David Francis, who was also appointed the country's Chief Minister - a new position that supervises all cabinet ministers - released its report. It accused officials within the former administration of engaging in various corrupt practices and political mismanagement, stating that "an astonishing level of fiscal indiscipline and rampant corruption by the former APC government of President Ernest Koroma had led to the near-collapse of Sierra Leone's economy". It recommended "a judge-led Special Commission of Inquiry with a limited timeframe and mandate to recover all stolen or inappropriately converted state funds and other assets, including buildings, quarters, land and the hundreds of vehicles still unaccounted for". It further noted that "the commission should also seek an explanation from former officials, under Section 26 of the Anti-Corruption Act that deals with 'unexplained wealth', if it determines them to have accumulated such wealth during their time in public office".

APC officials were quick to point out various factual inaccuracies in the report as evidence that the GTT had produced a report to serve a political purpose. In a detailed response to the GTTR, APC Secretary General Osman Foday Yansaneh, stated that it was his belief that the "transition team woefully failed in this endeavor and instead delved into a political fishing expedition and derailed the course of its mission into a tribunal of vengeance, recrimination; a method inconsistent with standard transition process between one administration and the other...Instead of a transition process, the government transition team was reduced to a mere tribunal to defame and make specious claims against the APC in the jurisprudence of the Red Queen as in the classic - Alice in Wonderland: first the judgment, then the evidence, later a commission of inquiry."

As political recriminations and accusations continued to be made on both sides, progress was made towards the establishment of a Commission

of Inquiry. Deputy Attorney General and Minister of Justice Abdulhai Bangura put before parliament two proposed constitutional instruments towards its actualisation which were passed on 22 October 2018. Justice Georgewill Biobebe of Nigeria has been named as one of the judges to preside over the hearings, while advanced preparations are underway to select a venue and make arrangements for the commission. Even though APC loyalists have dismissed it as a witch hunt, President Bio has openly stated that the commission will establish standards that his own government and future administrations will have to adhere to. If properly convened, the commission could send a strong signal against impunity and put an end to the corruption that continues to sanction impunity and corrupt practices throughout the country. However, for this to happen the commission will need to be seen as a fair, professional and independent arbitrator. If these minimum conditions are not met the exercise will likely devolve into political theatre with both sides accusing each other of stoking political tensions.

## A NEW, UNITED, DIRECTION?

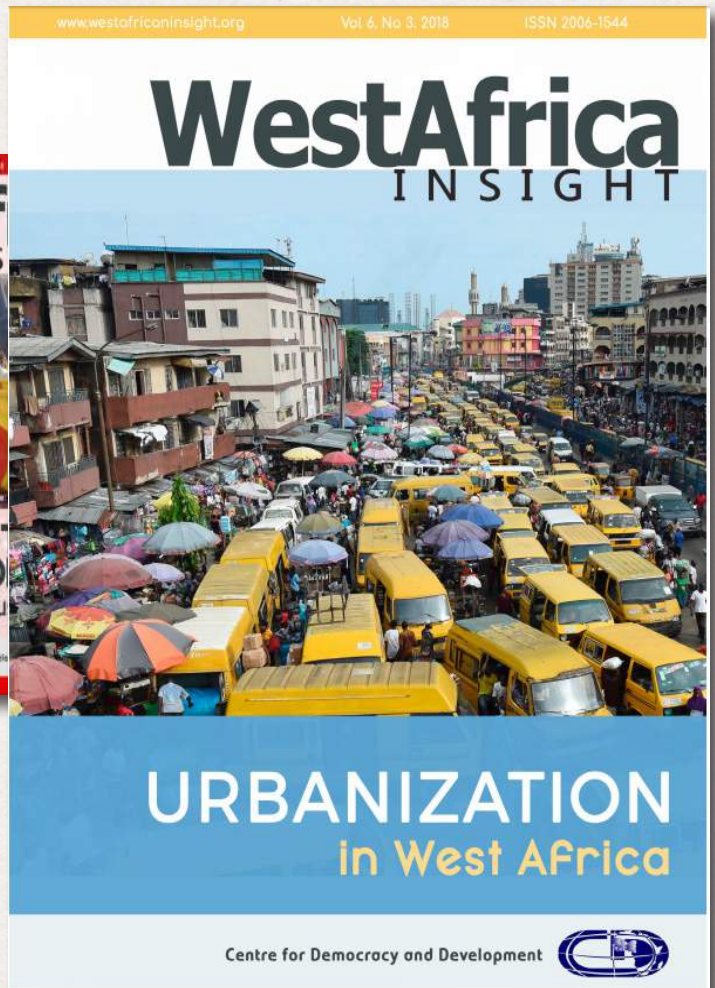
The Bio administration faces an uphill task to resuscitate an ailing economy and better integrate a deeply fragmented society. The challenge has only been made more difficult as a result of inequalities in distribution of the nation's largesse and the actions of self-serving politicians bent on manipulating the country's ethnic diversity as a means to win votes at any cost. The slender margin of victory for President Bio in the presidential race, coupled with the APC winning a majority

of parliamentary seats demonstrates the need for political parties to find common ground on issues of national importance and work together in a more inclusive manner; negotiating and building consensus on the way forward. Ideologically the two main parties are not so far apart.

President Bio has made known his intention to establish a Commission for National Cohesion and Peace. At present, the terms and composition, as well as the vision for what it would achieve are not known. Regardless of whether such a commission is established, President Bio should make national unity a cornerstone of his agenda. The decision taken by Bio and his opponent, Samura Kamara, to attend church together the week after the election results were announced was a symbolic gesture of goodwill. However, more substantive efforts should follow. Sierra Leone remains ethno-regionally polarised. Half of the population feel aggrieved, and believe they are second class citizens in their country when their party is not in power. Uniting Sierra Leone should be seen as the foundation for inclusive growth and all institutional development. To this end, the Bio administration should make national cohesion a priority and commit to working in a bipartisan way to solve the numerous challenges facing the country.

## FURTHER READING

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