

**Investment, Energy
Infrastructure and
Job Creation in
Central Africa**

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Editorial Note

Investment, Energy Infrastructure and Job Creation in Central Africa
Dr. Julienne Stephanie Mesumbe

Economic Affairs Features



More Than Megawatts: Why Local Content Is Key to Job-Creating Energy Investments in Central Africa
Dr. Stephane Mbiankeu Nguea

Energy investments in Central Africa must deliver more than electricity; they should also create jobs, build local industries, and strengthen economic resilience. Embedding local content policies into energy projects can increase workforce participation, support domestic businesses, and ensure that the region captures greater long-term value from its natural resources. By prioritizing skills development, local procurement, and inclusive partnerships, governments can transform energy investments into engines of sustainable and inclusive growth.



Energy Investment as a Catalyst for Tourism-Led Job Creation in Central Africa Larissa Ntoubia

Reliable energy infrastructure is a strategic investment in economic transformation. By powering tourism, Central African countries will attract investment, expand employment opportunities, and build a more competitive and diversified regional economy.



Powering Gender Equality: Energy Access as a Driver of Women's Empowerment in Central Africa
Dr. Salim Ahmed Vessah

Expanding access to reliable and affordable energy is a powerful driver of women's empowerment and inclusive development in Central Africa. Modern energy reduces the burdens of unpaid domestic work, improves health and education outcomes, and creates opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic participation. By adopting gender-responsive energy policies and investing in clean energy infrastructure, governments and partners can advance gender equality while accelerating sustainable and inclusive economic growth.



Africa's Refined Fuel Paradox: Why Fuel Import Dependence Continues to Undermine Industrial Employment and Labour Productivity Dr. Wirajing Muhamadu Awal Kindzeka

Despite being a major producer of crude oil, Africa continues to import a large share of the refined petroleum products that power its industries, transport systems, and productive sectors. This dependence reflects a deeper structural challenge: the continent exports raw resources while higher-value industrial activities, skilled jobs, and technological capabilities are created elsewhere. As a result, the continent forfeits opportunities for value addition, industrial upgrading, and long-term economic transformation.

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Peace and Security Features

Leveraging Decent Job Creation to Advance Peace and Stability in Central Africa Muriel Kinkoh and Dr. Salim Ahmed Vessah

Central Africa's persistent peace and security challenges are closely linked to limited economic opportunities, high youth unemployment, informality, and widening socioeconomic inequalities. In fragile and conflict-affected settings, the absence of decent and sustainable employment can deepen grievances, increase vulnerability to recruitment into armed groups and criminal networks, and reinforce cycles of poverty and instability. Conversely, job-rich and inclusive economic growth can strengthen social cohesion, improve household resilience, and provide young people with viable alternatives to violence and illicit activities.



Post-Conflict Reconstruction as a Strategic Investment: Transforming Peace into Sustainable Development in Central Africa Anthony Antem

Post-conflict reconstruction should be viewed not only as a peacebuilding imperative but also as a strategic investment in Central Africa's long-term development. By rebuilding institutions, infrastructure, and livelihoods while fostering inclusive governance and private sector growth, reconstruction efforts can transform fragile peace into sustainable economic resilience. Prioritizing coordinated, locally driven investments will be critical to securing lasting stability and inclusive prosperity across the region.



Governance and Democracy Features

DANGOTE VERSUS THE IMF AND WORLD BANK: African Oil Megaprojects between Strategic Autonomy and Economic Concentration Risks Guy Beaudry Jengu Jengu

African oil megaprojects, exemplified by the Dangote Refinery, are reshaping debates on industrialization, strategic autonomy, and the role of international financial institutions. While such investments can strengthen energy security, reduce import dependence, and drive economic transformation, they also raise concerns about market concentration, governance, and equitable distribution of benefits. Achieving sustainable outcomes will require policies that balance national industrial ambitions with competition, transparency, and inclusive economic development.



Closing Insight

Policy Takeaways Across the Issue



“The challenge now is to ensure that investments do more than finance infrastructure. They must create opportunities, expand inclusion, and lay the foundations for lasting prosperity.”

Dr. Julienne Stéphanie Mesumbe

Investment, Energy Infrastructure and Job Creation in Central Africa

By Dr. Julienne Stéphanie Mesumbe

Central Africa stands at an important crossroads in its development journey. The region possesses abundant natural resources, significant energy potential, a rapidly growing population, and increasing opportunities for regional integration. Yet, despite decades of investment in extractive industries, infrastructure projects, and energy development, many countries continue to face persistent challenges of unemployment, underemployment, limited industrialization, and fragile economic diversification.

This gap between investment and broad-based development raises an important question: **how can Central Africa ensure that investments generate meaningful economic opportunities and sustainable jobs for its people?**

This edition of On Policy Africa Magazine explores this question through the interconnected lenses of energy

infrastructure, industrial development, governance, peacebuilding, and employment creation. Across the contributions, a common message emerges. Investment alone is not enough. Its developmental impact depends on how well it is linked to local value creation, skills development, productive employment, and inclusive institutions.

Energy infrastructure sits at the center of this conversation. Reliable and affordable energy remains one of the most important foundations of economic transformation. It powers industries, strengthens agricultural value chains, supports digital innovation, enables tourism development, improves healthcare and education services, and creates the conditions necessary for private sector growth. Yet, as several contributors highlight, expanding generating capacity alone does not guarantee development outcomes. Energy investments must be designed to create local jobs, build domestic capabilities, and strengthen

regional value chains if they are to contribute meaningfully to long-term prosperity.

The issue also highlights the importance of inclusion. Economic transformation cannot be sustainable if large segments of the population remain excluded from its benefits. Women, youth, rural communities, and conflict-affected populations must be active participants in development processes. Access to energy, employment opportunities, skills development, and entrepreneurship support can help unlock their productive potential while contributing to greater social cohesion and resilience.

Another important theme emerging from this edition is the relationship between economic opportunity and stability. Across Central Africa, persistent unemployment, informality, and limited livelihood opportunities continue to create vulnerabilities that can undermine peace and development gains. Conversely, productive investment, decent work creation, and inclusive growth can strengthen communities, reinforce trust in institutions, and provide alternatives to instability and violence. Development and peace should not be viewed as separate agendas. They are mutually reinforcing objectives.

The articles in this issue also remind us that governance matters. The quality of institutions often determines whether investment becomes a driver of prosperity or a source of inequality and frustration. Transparent regulation, accountable management of natural resources, strong public institutions, and effective regional cooperation are critical for attracting investment and ensuring that its benefits are widely shared. Good governance is not simply a political objective; it is an economic necessity.

Regional integration is equally important. No single country can fully unlock the region's energy, industrial, and employment potential in isolation. Central Africa's future competitiveness will depend increasingly on cross-border

infrastructure, integrated markets, regional value chains, and coordinated development strategies. Frameworks such as ECCAS, CEMAC, the Central African Power Pool, and the African Continental Free Trade Area offer important opportunities to transform fragmented national markets into a stronger and more resilient regional economic space.

Ultimately, this edition argues that the future of Central Africa will not be determined solely by the volume of investment it attracts. Rather, it will be determined by the quality of that investment and its ability to create jobs, build industries, strengthen institutions, and improve the lives of citizens. Energy infrastructure, industrial development, governance reform, and peacebuilding must therefore be understood not as separate policy areas, but as interconnected pillars of a broader development strategy.

At On Policy Africa Magazine, we remain committed to contributing to evidence-based policy discussions that support sustainable and inclusive development across Africa. The contributions in this edition offer practical insights and policy recommendations for governments, development partners, businesses, and civil society actors seeking to harness investment as a catalyst for transformation.

Central Africa possesses the resources, human capital, and strategic position needed to become a more dynamic and competitive region. The challenge now is to ensure that investments do more than finance infrastructure. They must create opportunities, expand inclusion, and lay the foundations for lasting prosperity.

The future of the region will depend not simply on attracting investment, but on transforming investment into development.

More Than Megawatts: Why Local Content is Key to Job-Creating Energy Investments in Central Africa

Energy investments in Central Africa must deliver more than electricity; they should also create jobs, build local industries, and strengthen economic resilience. Embedding local content policies into energy projects can increase workforce participation, support domestic businesses, and ensure that the region captures greater long-term value from its natural resources. By prioritizing skills development, local procurement, and inclusive partnerships, governments can transform energy investments into engines of sustainable and inclusive growth.

By Dr. Stephane Mbiankeu Ngueta

Introduction

Central Africa is awash with energy projects. Hydroelectric dams, gas-fired power plants, solar parks and regional interconnections multiply in inauguration speeches and national master plans, carried by public financing, bilateral partnerships and, more recently, blended finance instruments. Yet, once the turbines are installed and the transmission lines strung, an

elementary question almost always remains without a convincing answer: how many women and men of the region have, thanks to these works, found stable, skilled and sustainable employment beyond the temporary construction phase? Empirical observation, whether of the Memve'ele dam in Cameroon, the floating thermal power plants installed in emergency in the DRC or the rural electrification projects scattered across Chad, suggests that the record is desperately thin. The question is not whether energy is indispensable to



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industrialisation and job creation—it undoubtedly is—but rather why the billions of dollars poured into energy infrastructure in Central Africa produce so few structural direct and indirect jobs, and, above all, what states could do differently right now.

Why Energy Fails to Create Jobs

The first fundamental explanation lies in the dissociation between energy investment and industrial development. Large projects are conceived by ministries of Energy that seek above all to fill a deficit in installed capacity and to balance a financial equation between debt, subsidy and tariff revenue. The ministries of Industry, Employment and Vocational Training are rarely associated in the design of tender specifications, so that local content clauses, when they exist, are limited to vague obligations of national preference for unskilled labour during civil engineering

works. Once the construction site is finished, the power plant operates with a handful of foreign or expatriate technicians, and the electricity produced powers an unchanged economic fabric, made up of small informal units and a few large extractive companies that would have produced their own energy anyway. The link that would transform an injection of electrical power into an expansion of productive employment—namely the emergence of new manufacturing companies, agro-food processing centres or energy-intensive digital services—does not materialise spontaneously. As a report by the [African Development Bank](#) on Central African industrialisation highlights, the absence of explicit strategies linking energy to identified industrial corridors is one of the main reasons why infrastructure investment does not translate into productive diversification.

The second explanation is the deficit of local

technical skills, which is by no means inevitable but results from chronic under-investment in technical education and vocational training for energy trades. Energy projects require certified welders, industrial electricians, automation maintenance technicians and engineers capable of managing smart grids. Yet, in most countries of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the corresponding technical streams are either non-existent, under-equipped, or disconnected from the standards required by international contracting authorities. The successful bidders, whether Chinese, European or Turkish, then invoke the absence of qualified local labour to justify importing their own personnel, and the vicious circle perpetuates itself: energy projects do not create local jobs because the local workforce is not trained, and the local workforce is not trained because energy projects are not structured to finance its training. The literature on local content in extractive and infrastructure industries, notably the work of the [Natural Resource Governance Institute](#) (NRGI), shows that without a contractual training obligation accompanied by financial penalties and independent monitoring, promises of skills transfer remain a dead letter.

The third explanation is the fragmentation of national energy markets, which prevents the massification of demand and thus the emergence of a regional value chain for energy manufacturing and services.

Each country plans its investments in isolation, without regional coordination of technical standards, tariff policies or commissioning schedules. The result is that even relatively simple equipment—transformers, cables, poles, meters—is massively imported from Asia or Europe, whereas regional production, even modest, would have considerable spin-offs in terms of industrial employment. The [Central Africa Power Pool](#) (CAPP) initiative, although useful for harmonising cross-border exchanges, has not yet led to a common industrial policy for equipment manufacturing, and interconnection

projects remain too slow to materialise. The [2022 report of the International Renewable Energy Agency](#) (IRENA) stresses that regional value chains in solar and wind energy are embryonic in Central Africa, precisely because national orders are too dispersed to justify private investment in production units.

Policy recommendations

Faced with these three blockages, the public policy responses must be both pragmatic and sequenced.

- ◆ Integrate into any call for tender for an energy project of more than 10 megawatts an enforceable local content clause that goes beyond a simple quota of unskilled labour during construction. This clause must include a training component, financed by a mandatory levy on the project budget (for example, 0.5% of the total



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cost), managed by a joint public-private fund and steered in liaison with national technical institutes. The obligation to certify the skills acquired, according to standards recognised by the profession, would progressively build up a pool of local technicians and engineers who could be mobilised on subsequent projects, thus reducing dependence on imported labour. The mechanism is not theoretical: the [World Bank's technical education scholarship programme](#) in West Africa has shown that a contractual link between a large project and vocational training centres can significantly improve the transition of young graduates into formal employment.

- ◆ Create within ECCAS a regional coordination office for energy equipment demand, tasked with aggregating the needs of member states on a multi-year basis, standardising technical specifications and launching grouped calls for tender that are sufficiently large to attract regional or international manufacturers willing to set up local assembly units. Such

mutualisation, already successfully trialled in the pharmaceutical sector in East Africa, would reduce unit costs, create a predictable regional market and generate manufacturing jobs around the energy hubs of Douala, Pointe-Noire or Kinshasa.

- ◆ Make technical education and vocational training a real budgetary priority, and not a government communication slogan. The ministries of Education and Vocational Training must be associated with national energy planning from the feasibility study phase, in order to identify future skills needs and orient curricula accordingly. The private sector, through chambers of commerce and professional associations, should be a stakeholder in the governance of training centres, with a say over programmes and certification. Without this continuum between the energy project, the training institution and the enterprise, megawatts will continue to be installed without young Central Africans perceiving the benefits in terms of career opportunities.

Conclusion

Central Africa does not merely need more energy; it needs the energy produced to effectively serve as a foundation for industrial development that creates jobs. This requires breaking with the narrow vision that makes the energy project an end in itself and restoring its place within a broader strategy of productive transformation. The instruments exist, successful experiences on the continent are documented, and demographic pressure makes inaction increasingly untenable. What remains is political will, that is, the decision to condition access to public energy markets on measurable results in terms of local employment and skills transfer. As long as this decision is not taken, the ribbons cut at the foot of dams will remain the symbol of a development that bypasses its youth.

Energy Investment as a Catalyst for Tourism-Led Job Creation in Central Africa

Reliable energy infrastructure is a strategic investment in economic transformation. By powering tourism, Central African countries will attract investment, expand employment opportunities, and build a more competitive and diversified regional economy.

By Larissa Ntoubia

Central Africa is endowed with some of Africa's most remarkable tourism assets, including the [Sangha Trinational Landscape](#) spanning Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and the Republic of the Congo, and the Loango National Park in Gabon. Yet despite this potential, tourism remains one of the region's weakest sectors, contributing [less than 3% to GDP](#) and employment. Inadequate transport, limited marketing, and regulatory constraints are often cited as barriers, but one overlooked constraint is [access to reliable energy](#). Frequent outages, high electricity costs, and limited rural electrification raise operating expenses, discourage investment, and reduce visitor experience, all of which limit job creation.

As Central African governments seek to diversify beyond oil, mining, and timber, reliable and sustainable energy infrastructure should be treated as investment in a productive sector capable of generating inclusive growth. Tourism is one such sector. Expanding reliable energy to tourism destinations can attract private investment, stimulate entrepreneurship, and create decent jobs, particularly for women and young people. This paper examines how investment in energy infrastructure can catalyze tourism-led job creation in Central Africa, why that potential remains largely unrealized despite past infrastructure spending, and what policies would translate it into employment at scale.

Reliable Energy: Powering Tourism Competitiveness in Central Africa

Central Africa's tourism sector underperforms not due to lack of assets, but because structural bottlenecks raise costs and weaken competitiveness. Unreliable electricity is especially damaging: in the Central African Republic, access to electricity was [only 17.6%](#) in 2023. Firms that depend on diesel generators face rising costs, more pollution, and lower investor returns, making the region less attractive than destinations with stronger energy systems. The problem is worse in rural and protected areas, where many of the best tourism sites are located but grid access is weakest; parks and reserves need power for visitor centers, refrigeration, and digital payments, yet high upfront costs often make projects less feasible.

Cameroon and Gabon show the same pattern: rich tourism assets, but weak supporting infrastructure that prevents those assets from becoming competitive tourism products. Cameroon has [about 930 recognized tourist sites](#), yet tourism contributes only 4.1% of GDP and less than 15% of jobs, while site development costs can reach CFA500 million for a local site and CFA1.5 billion for a national one, showing how infrastructure and financing gaps slow the conversion of potential into revenue. Resorts in Kribi, lodges near Waza reserve, and conference facilities near Yaoundé and Douala often face outages that force them onto diesel generators, raising costs, reducing service quality, and discouraging both investors and visitors. Electricity is not just a utility input but an economic enabler that lowers business costs and makes destinations investable. Gabon's protected areas, including Loango National Park, similarly need reliable and sustainable electricity to strengthen visitor services and attract greater private investment.

From Energy Infrastructure to Employment

Tourism is one of the most labour-intensive

sectors of the economy, generating employment across hospitality, transport, agriculture, creative services, and local supply chains. South Africa's tourism sector directly employed [953,981 people in 2024](#), equal to 5.7% of total jobs, demonstrating tourism's employment potential when supported by adequate infrastructure. In Central Africa, if reliable electricity lowers operating costs and attracts investment into hotels, eco-lodges, restaurants, and conference facilities, each project generates not only direct jobs but also demand for local suppliers and contractors, from electricians and builders to farmers and transport operators. This produces a wider employment multiplier than in many capital-intensive sectors, with benefits especially important for women and young people working in hospitality, food services, cultural enterprises, guiding, and small-scale trade. A single lodge near a national park can create demand for local vegetables, meat, laundry, transport, and handicrafts well beyond the jobs it hires directly, making energy investment a productive input into tourism-led development rather than a purely utility-sector concern.

Beyond Infrastructure: Why Tourism Remains Underdeveloped

Energy is necessary but not sufficient. Tourism often stays underdeveloped even where power improves, because of constraints beyond the grid. The investment climate is difficult: Cameroon, CEMAC's highest-ranked economy, sits at 167th of 190 countries on the World Bank's ease-of-doing-business index, and a 2025 UNCTAD review found [investor experience marked by administrative complexity](#) around business creation. Connectivity is weak: regional flight links are thin, and a CEMAC-wide regional airline and visa-free travel regime have circulated for over a decade without full implementation, making cross-border itineraries hard to build. Destination management is fragmented: few flagship sites have dedicated organizations for visitor data, service standards, or marketing, so sites like Waza reserve struggle to



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convert assets into bookable experiences. Skills are scarce: [hospitality and destination-management training lag demand](#), limiting service quality even where hotels and lodges are powered. Promotion is underfunded: Central African destinations remain largely absent from international marketing and distribution channels. Together, these gaps mean cheaper electricity alone will not generate the visitor growth needed for jobs at scale.

Targeting Energy Investment for Maximum Employment Impact

Tourism jobs run through visitor spending, therefore the type of energy investment matters as much as its volume. Four categories offer the strongest

employment returns.

- ◆ *Protected areas and ecotourism sites.* Off-grid solar for visitor centers and ranger stations creates guide and lodge jobs and demand for local suppliers, while strengthening conservation financing.
- ◆ *Hospitality infrastructure.* Reliable power for hotels and resorts in hubs like Kribi and Douala cuts diesel dependence and supports construction, housekeeping, and food-service jobs.
- ◆ *Conference and business tourism.* Powered convention centers let capitals compete for

regional events, driving catering, logistics, and event-management jobs.

- ◆ *Digital tourism services.* Stable power and connectivity for booking and payment platforms allows small operators to reach international travelers directly, creating IT and digital-marketing jobs, especially for youth.

Sequencing investment toward these uses enables governments concentrate limited finance where employment returns are highest.

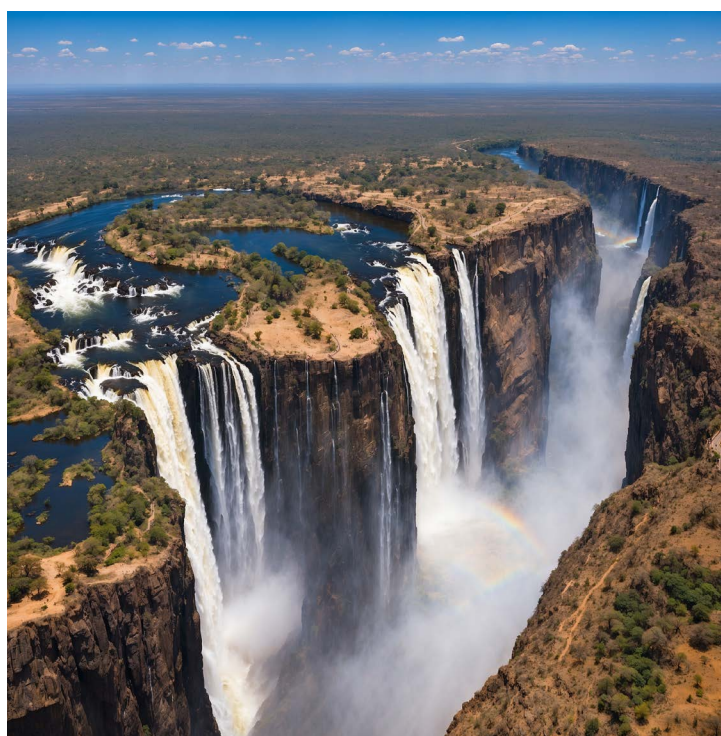
Policy Recommendations

- ◆ *Prioritize tourism zones in energy planning, sequenced by employment potential.* Governments should integrate tourism priorities into national energy investment plans, prioritizing reliable electricity first for protected areas and ecotourism sites, hospitality hubs, and conference venues, the categories identified above as delivering the largest direct and indirect job creation per investment.
- ◆ *Expand renewable and decentralized energy solutions, backed by fiscal incentives.* Governments should promote solar mini-grids and hybrid systems for protected areas and rural tourism sites where grid expansion is financially or technically unviable, and pair this with tax and financing incentives for tourism enterprises that adopt renewable and energy-efficient infrastructure.
- ◆ *Invest in digital enablement alongside electrification.* Energy investment plans for tourism destinations should include reliable connectivity for booking, payment, and marketing platforms, allowing small and community-based operators to capture direct bookings and creating digital-economy jobs for young people.

- ◆ *Strengthen regional cooperation on energy, tourism, and connectivity.* ECCAS and CEMAC should coordinate cross-border investment in energy and transport infrastructure, and accelerate stalled initiatives such as visa-free travel and a regional airline, to link national tourism assets into integrated, marketable regional circuits.

Conclusion

Central Africa does not need more isolated tourism projects; it needs an environment that makes tourism investable at scale. Reliable energy is the foundation, but on its own it cannot deliver jobs. If governments connect energy policy to tourism development, and pair it with reforms to the investment climate, connectivity, destination management, skills, and promotion, they can lower business costs, attract private capital, create jobs for women and youth, and turn Central Africa's natural and cultural assets into a durable source of employment and inclusive economic growth.



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“Energy poverty
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expands them.”

Dr. Salim Ahmed Vesah



Powering Gender Equality: Energy Access as a Driver of Women's Empowerment in Central Africa

Expanding access to reliable and affordable energy is a powerful driver of women's empowerment and inclusive development in Central Africa. Modern energy reduces the burdens of unpaid domestic work, improves health and education outcomes, and creates opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic participation. By adopting gender-responsive energy policies and investing in clean energy infrastructure, governments and partners can advance gender equality while accelerating sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

By Dr. Salim Ahmed Vessah

The Hidden Gender Cost of Energy Poverty

Energy poverty is often discussed as an infrastructure challenge, but it is also one of the most significant barriers to women's empowerment across Central Africa. As night falls in many urban and rural communities, economic activity slows, health centers struggle to provide services, and students face limited opportunities to study. For millions of women, however, the work continues. Meals must be

prepared, water collected, children cared for, and household responsibilities fulfilled, often without reliable electricity or clean cooking solutions. While discussions on gender equality frequently focus on education, finance, political participation, or legal reforms, access to modern energy is rarely recognized as a foundational enabler of all these opportunities.

This challenge is particularly acute in Central Africa. Despite vast hydropower resources and



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significant renewable energy potential, the [Economic Community of Central African States \(ECCAS\)](#) remains one of Africa's least electrified regions. In 2023, electricity access averaged only [56.7% across the sub-region](#), with stark disparities between urban and rural areas. While approximately 65% of urban residents have access to electricity, access rates in many rural communities remain between [20% and 30%](#). These inequalities matter because women are disproportionately represented in rural areas, subsistence agriculture, and informal economic activities. As a result, they bear a disproportionate share of the social and economic costs associated with inadequate energy services. The region's energy deficit is therefore not merely an infrastructure

gap; it is a structural obstacle to gender equality, economic inclusion, and sustainable development.

The Rural-Urban Energy Divide and Why Women Pay the Highest Price

The most significant energy inequality in Central Africa lies between urban and rural communities. While major cities have benefited from investments in power generation and distribution networks, many rural areas remain underserved. Cameroon exemplifies this challenge: although national electricity access has reached approximately [71%](#), [about 75%](#) of the rural population still lacks access. Similar patterns are observed across much

of the ECCAS region, where progress in national electrification rates often masks persistent territorial disparities.

For women, the consequences extend well beyond the absence of lighting. Limited energy access contributes directly to what development practitioners describe as [time poverty](#). Across Africa, women and girls can spend up to [50 hours per week](#) collecting fuelwood, preparing meals using traditional methods, and fetching water. Time devoted to these activities reduces opportunities for education, paid work, entrepreneurship, skills development, and participation in community decision-making. Studies consistently show that access to [modern energy can reduce household labour burdens and improve educational outcomes](#), particularly for girls.

[Healthcare services face similar constraints.](#)

Rural health facilities operating without reliable electricity struggle to refrigerate vaccines, power medical equipment, or provide quality maternal and reproductive healthcare. These limitations affect entire communities, but women often bear the greatest burden as both caregivers and primary users of health services. The rural-urban energy divide is therefore not simply a matter of infrastructure access; it is a determinant of productivity, human capital development, and overall well-being.

Energy Access as a Catalyst for Women's Empowerment

[Energy poverty limits opportunities](#); modern energy expands them. Reliable electricity is productive infrastructure that transforms livelihoods and economies. Many women entrepreneurs in Central Africa, operating in agriculture, food processing, retail, and services, face severe energy constraints. Without electricity, they cannot efficiently process products, preserve goods, access digital platforms, or extend business hours. Electrification improves

productivity, increases incomes, and enables participation in higher-value economic activities. The Democratic Republic of Congo exemplifies this opportunity. Despite vast hydropower resources, [85 million people lack electricity](#). Closing this gap would generate substantial economic benefits and improve millions of women's livelihoods. Gender-responsive energy investments yield returns beyond social welfare, contributing to productivity growth, local employment, and economic diversification.

Clean cooking is another critical, often overlooked, dimension of empowerment. Across Africa, [900 million women and girls lack clean cooking solutions](#), relying on traditional fuels like firewood and charcoal. Indoor air pollution from these practices causes respiratory diseases and other adverse health outcomes, disproportionately affecting women and children. Beyond medical costs, time spent gathering fuel limits economic participation and reinforces unpaid labour. Expanding access to clean cooking technologies offers multiple benefits: improved health, increased productivity, environmental sustainability, and stronger gender equality. As economies digitize, energy access determines participation in mobile banking, online education, e-commerce, and information services. Without reliable electricity, [women risk exclusion from Africa's economic future](#). A gender-responsive energy transition must ensure women are not only beneficiaries but active participants in the emerging energy economy.

From Energy Access to Gender Equality

Energy access alone will not automatically empower women. While infrastructure creates opportunities, policies determine who benefits from them.

- ◆ **First**, governments should prioritize rural electrification as a core component of their gender equality strategies. Closing the rural-urban electricity gap would directly benefit millions of women whose livelihoods

depend on agriculture and informal economic activities.

- ◆ **Second**, greater investments are needed in decentralized renewable energy solutions. Mini-grids and standalone solar systems can provide cost-effective alternatives for remote communities that remain beyond the reach of national grids, while also strengthening climate resilience.

- ◆ **Third**, women should be supported not only as energy consumers but also as entrepreneurs, technicians, engineers, and decision-makers within the energy sector. Expanding access to finance, technical training, and business support services can enable women to seize opportunities created by the clean energy transition.

- ◆ **Fourth**, governments and development partners should adopt gender-sensitive energy policies by collecting sex-disaggregated energy data and integrating gender indicators into national energy planning frameworks.

- ◆ **Finally**, clean cooking must be fully integrated into national energy and gender strategies. Expanding electricity access while neglecting cooking needs leaves one of the largest dimensions of energy poverty unresolved.



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Conclusion: Energy as a Foundation for Equality

Central Africa's energy transition presents a unique opportunity for economic development and gender equality. However, this requires policies that explicitly address barriers women face in accessing modern energy. The region's electricity deficit, particularly the rural-urban divide, continues to hinder women's productivity, health, education, and economic participation. Expanding access to electricity and clean cooking solutions can reduce time poverty, strengthen entrepreneurship, improve healthcare, and unlock new paths to prosperity. Therefore, energy policy should be seen as both an infrastructure and a gender equality agenda. Success will be measured not by power plants or transmission lines, but by women gaining greater access to opportunity, income, health, and choice. For inclusive and sustainable growth, universal energy access is a powerful investment in women's

empowerment and Central Africa's future.

A conceptual image showing a hand holding a green fuel nozzle with a black hose. The hose is inserted into a hole in the Earth, which is shown as a globe with blue oceans and brown landmasses. The background is black, suggesting space. This visual metaphor represents the extraction of oil from the planet.

“Africa possesses nearly 8% of global proven oil reserves and remains a major exporter of crude petroleum.”

Dr. Wirajing Muhamadu Awal Kindzeka

Africa's Refined Fuel Paradox: Why Fuel Import Dependence Continues to Undermine Industrial Employment and Labour Productivity

Despite being a major producer of crude oil, Africa continues to import a large share of the refined petroleum products that power its industries, transport systems, and productive sectors. This dependence reflects a deeper structural challenge: the continent exports raw resources while higher-value industrial activities, skilled jobs, and technological capabilities are created elsewhere. As a result, the continent forfeits opportunities for value addition, industrial upgrading, and long-term economic transformation.

By Dr. Wirajing Muhamadu Awal Kindzeka

Reclaiming Value Chains for Structural Transformation

Africa possesses [nearly 8% of global proven oil reserves](#) and remains a major exporter of crude petroleum. Yet despite this resource abundance, the continent imports a substantial share of the refined petroleum products

that power its industries, transport systems, and agricultural machinery. This contradiction represents one of the most significant yet underappreciated structural weaknesses in Africa's development model. While crude oil leaves African shores as a primary commodity, refined fuels return at considerably higher prices. [This imbalance costs the continent up to \\$90 billion annually in fuel imports](#), draining

foreign exchange reserves, increasing external shocks and weakening fiscal stability. The challenge extends far beyond trade deficits or energy dependence. The continent's reliance on imported petroleum products reflects a broader pattern of value-chain exclusion in which African economies participate in global markets primarily as suppliers of raw materials while higher-value industrial activities occur elsewhere. The result is a persistent loss of productive capabilities, industrial learning opportunities, and skilled employment. In effect, Africa exports crude oil but imports the jobs, technologies, and industrial ecosystems associated with refining and downstream petroleum industries. This refined fuel paradox raises an important policy question: can Africa achieve meaningful industrialization and labour market transformation while remaining dependent on imported fuels that are critical to production itself?

When Energy Dependence Becomes Industrial Dependence

The dominant narrative surrounding fuel imports often focuses on energy security. However, the larger challenge lies in how imported fuel dependence affects productive sectors throughout the economy. Manufacturing firms, agro-processing industries, mining operations, transport companies, and small enterprises all depend heavily on petroleum products. When international fuel prices rise or supply chains

are disrupted, production costs increase rapidly across multiple sectors. These cost pressures reduce profitability, discourage investment, and weaken the competitiveness of domestic industries. The



Manufacturing contributes less than 11% of GDP in many Sub-Saharan African economies, significantly below levels observed in emerging Asian economies...

consequences became particularly visible following the COVID-19 recovery period and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Global fuel price volatility generated inflationary pressures across African economies. Despite a total [refining capacity of 3.5–4 million barrels/day](#), [utilization rates remain below 50%](#), leaving Africa exposed to global price shocks, raising transportation costs, increasing production expenses, and reducing industrial output. Energy costs [can account for up to 50% of total production costs in heavy, energy-intensive industries](#), making profit margins highly sensitive to price fluctuations and efficiency gains. For many firms already operating under challenging business conditions, higher fuel costs translated directly

into reduced hiring, delayed expansion plans, and lower productivity growth. The problem is especially acute because Africa's industrial sector remains relatively small. [Manufacturing contributes less than 11% of GDP in many Sub-Saharan African economies](#), significantly below levels observed in emerging Asian economies during their industrial take-off phases. Dependence on imported refined fuels further weakens the competitiveness of these already fragile industrial sectors. The result is a vicious cycle: limited refining capacity increases fuel import dependence; fuel import dependence raises production costs;



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higher production costs weaken industrial expansion; and weak industrialization limits employment creation and economic diversification.

Exporting Crude Oil, Importing Jobs

Perhaps the most overlooked consequence of Africa's fuel import dependence is its impact on employment. Oil extraction is highly capital-intensive and creates relatively few direct jobs. By contrast, refining and downstream petroleum industries generate wider employment opportunities through engineering services, petrochemicals, logistics, equipment maintenance, transport infrastructure, research and development, and industrial manufacturing. Countries that successfully integrated refining into broader industrial strategies have generated significant employment spillovers beyond the energy sector itself. Refining activities stimulate demand for

skilled technicians, engineers, construction workers, chemical specialists, maintenance professionals, and transport operators. They also support downstream industries such as plastics, fertilizers, lubricants, packaging materials, pharmaceuticals, and industrial chemicals. For example, [the Dangote Refinery alone is projected to generate about 100,000 direct and indirect jobs](#), underscoring the employment potential of integrated refining and petrochemical industries. By exporting crude oil and importing refined products, many African economies effectively surrender these employment opportunities to foreign production centers. This represents not only a loss of jobs but also a missed opportunity for technological upgrading and industrial capability development. The labour market implications are particularly significant given Africa's demographic dynamics, with the continent projected to see [a net increase of roughly 740 million working age-people by 2050](#).

Beyond Refineries: Building Energy-Based Industrial Ecosystems

The policy debate is often framed as a simple choice between building more refineries or continuing fuel imports. Such a perspective is too narrow. The central issue is not merely refining capacity but the development of broader industrial ecosystems around energy resources. Successful industrial transformation requires moving beyond crude extraction toward integrated value chains that connect energy production with manufacturing, petrochemicals, logistics, transport infrastructure, and industrial services. The emergence of major refining investments such as the Dangote Refinery demonstrates the scale of opportunities available when downstream energy activities are developed domestically. Beyond fuel production itself, such investments stimulate industrial demand for engineering services, maintenance operations, transportation networks, storage facilities, and industrial inputs. However, isolated national projects are not sufficient as many African countries individually lack the market size, financing capacity, and infrastructure required to sustain large-scale refining industries. This makes regional approaches increasingly important. Continental frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area provide an opportunity to develop integrated regional energy markets, coordinated refining strategies, and cross-border industrial value chains capable of achieving economies of scale.

Turning Fuel Security into Employment Security

Addressing Africa's refined fuel paradox requires a shift in policy thinking. Energy policy can no longer be treated separately from industrial and labour market policy.

- ◆ First, governments should prioritize downstream value addition within national industrialization strategies. Resource governance frameworks should encourage investments that strengthen domestic processing and industrial linkages rather than focusing exclusively on crude export revenues.

- ◆ Second, regional economic communities should coordinate refining investments and energy infrastructure development to improve efficiency. Fragmented national approaches often result in underutilized facilities and limited competitiveness.
- ◆ Third, industrial policies should promote stronger linkages between refining activities and downstream manufacturing sectors, including petrochemicals, industrial chemicals, plastics, and logistics services.
- ◆ Fourth, investments in technical and vocational skills development must accompany industrial expansion. Building refining and petrochemical capacity requires engineers, industrial operators, and maintenance specialists capable of supporting long-term industrial growth.

From Fuel Import Dependence to Industrial Employment

Africa's refined fuel paradox reveals a deeper development challenge. The continent's vulnerability does not stem from a lack of natural resources but from limited participation in the higher-value segments of energy value chains. As long as crude oil continues to be exported while refined products are imported, Africa will remain dependent on external production systems for goods that are essential to its own industrial development. The real cost of fuel import dependence therefore extends beyond energy bills and trade deficits. It includes forgone industrial capabilities, weaker labour productivity, reduced competitiveness, and the loss of thousands of potential skilled jobs. The future of Africa's energy sector should not be measured solely by the volume of crude exported or fuel imported. It should be measured by the extent to which energy resources support industrial transformation, productive employment, and long-term economic resilience. The challenge is no longer simply securing fuel supplies; it is ensuring that Africa captures the industrial value, technological learning, and employment.

Leveraging decent job creation to advance peace and stability in Central Africa

Central Africa's persistent peace and security challenges are closely linked to limited economic opportunities, high youth unemployment, informality, and widening socioeconomic inequalities.

In fragile and conflict-affected settings, the absence of decent and sustainable employment can deepen grievances, increase vulnerability to recruitment into armed groups and criminal networks, and reinforce cycles of poverty and instability. Conversely, job-rich and inclusive economic growth can strengthen social cohesion, improve household resilience, and provide young people with viable alternatives to violence and illicit activities.

By Muriel Kinkoh & Dr. Salim Ahmed Vessah

Introduction

Central Africa, rich in resources, grapples with a complex web of challenges, including poverty, weak institutions, demographic pressures and insecurity. Conflict, cross-border instability, displacement, and limited economic diversification impede growth and sustainable livelihoods, necessitating development strategies that address both economic vulnerability and structural instability. The region's [burgeoning youth population](#) exacerbates these challenges, requiring millions of new jobs to absorb this rapidly expanding labour force. While this demographic trend presents potential for growth, a failure to

provide meaningful employment could transform a demographic dividend into widespread frustration, exclusion, and instability.

Despite declining official unemployment rates, vulnerable and informal employment remains pervasive. In 2025, vulnerable employment, according to [World Bank data](#), constituted 68% of total employment in Cameroon, 79% in the Central African Republic, 90% in Chad, 82% in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 30% in Gabon, and 23% in Equatorial Guinea. Millions of workers, especially young people, are trapped in low-productivity, low-paying, insecure jobs characterized by informal arrangements, inadequate

social protection, limited labour rights, and unstable incomes. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, [persistent economic exclusion](#) fuels frustration, erodes trust in institutions, and increases susceptibility to recruitment by armed and criminal groups, thereby contributing to cycles of violence and instability.

The [ILO defines decent work](#) as “productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity”, usually characterized by stable incomes, social protection and economic advancement. This policy brief argues that expanding access to decent employment is a strategic peacebuilding priority in Central Africa. It examines the link between vulnerable employment and insecurity, proposing policies to promote decent job creation as a pathway to peace, resilience, and long-term stability.

The decent work deficit in Central Africa: Why employment growth is not enough

The persistence of vulnerable employment in Central Africa reflects the limited capacity of the region’s economies to generate productive and inclusive employment despite abundant natural resources and economic growth. Decades of economic expansion have not translated into sufficient decent jobs for a rapidly expanding labour force. The core issue, therefore, is not the absence of growth but the inability of existing growth models to generate broad-based employment opportunities. A major factor underlying this challenge is the region’s [dependence on extractive industries](#). Countries such as Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo derive a substantial share of export earnings and public revenues from oil, minerals, and forestry. However, these sectors are highly capital-intensive, creating relatively few jobs compared to their economic contribution. Moreover,



weak linkages between extractive industries and local economies limit opportunities for domestic value addition and employment creation. Consequently, periods of economic growth have often coexisted with widespread underemployment, informality, and working poverty, producing what many analysts describe as [job-poor growth](#).

[Governance challenges compound these structural weaknesses](#). In many countries across Central Africa, weak institutional capacities, inadequate infrastructure, regulatory uncertainty, and persistent corruption have constrained private-sector development and discouraged investment in labour-intensive sectors. Public resources generated from natural wealth have not always been channeled into productive investments capable of stimulating employment-rich growth. As a result, sectors with significant job-creation potential, including agribusiness, manufacturing, tourism, and digital services remain underdeveloped. The consequence is a labour market in which millions of workers rely on informal activities characterized by low productivity, unstable incomes, and limited social protection.



In many countries across Central Africa, weak institutional capacities, inadequate infrastructure, regulatory uncertainty, and persistent corruption have constrained private-sector development and discouraged investment in labour-intensive sectors.

[Shortcomings in employment policy](#) have further contributed to this situation. Although most countries have adopted national employment and youth development strategies, implementation often remains fragmented and under-resourced. Too frequently, employment policies focus on increasing the number of jobs rather than improving job quality, productivity, and formalization. At the same time, education and vocational training systems struggle to respond to labour market demands, resulting in a mismatch between the skills possessed by young people and those required by employers. This disconnect limits economic opportunities and contributes to growing frustration among educated youth who face increasingly narrow prospects for social mobility.

Yet, experiences from within Africa demonstrate that these challenges are not insurmountable. [Rwanda](#) has successfully reduced labour market vulnerability through investments in entrepreneurship, skills development, business reforms, and agricultural modernization. [Gabon's](#) efforts to promote local

timber processing rather than raw log exports have supported value addition and employment creation in manufacturing. Similarly, initiatives supporting cocoa and agro-processing value chains in [Cameroon](#) have generated opportunities for youth entrepreneurship and rural employment. While these examples are not without limitations, they illustrate the importance of coherent policies that align economic transformation, governance reforms, and employment creation.

How decent job creation supports peace and stability

Investing in the creation of decent jobs is both an economic necessity and a peacebuilding imperative for Central Africa, where millions of young people join the labour force annually despite the lack of formal work opportunities.

The [International Labour Organization](#) notes that when employment interventions concurrently target three interrelated conflict drivers, limited economic possibilities, weak social cohesion, and perceptions of injustice, they are most effective in promoting peace. Conversely, access to stable, productive and fairly remunerated employment increases the opportunity cost of participating in violence and strengthens incentives for individuals to invest in peaceful livelihoods. Beyond providing income, decent labour fosters inclusion, dignity, and equitable opportunity, all of which contribute to social cohesion. Moreover, increasing the number of decent jobs is essential to bolstering state legitimacy. If Central African states are able to create an environment that encourages productive businesses, facilitate the shift from the informal to the formal sector, and extend labour protections, this will demonstrate their capacity to provide citizens with actual socioeconomic benefits. Such interventions enhance public confidence in state institutions and reduce the governance gaps that armed groups and criminal organizations often exploit. Following this recognition, the [ILO's Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation](#) urges

states to incorporate social protection, enterprise development, employment creation, and social dialogue into more comprehensive peacebuilding and recovery plans.

Moreover, decent job creation can serve as a tool for addressing the grievances that arise from marginalization and unequal access to economic opportunities in conflict-affected communities. Apart from addressing grievances, the creation of decent jobs can ease the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process in post-conflict settings. This is because after being disarmed, decent employment can facilitate the re-integration of ex-combatants, giving them a legitimate alternative source of income, thereby reducing the likelihood of returning to violence or engaging in criminal activities. Incorporating decent work as a fundamental pillar of peacebuilding will therefore enable governments and regional institutions to move beyond short-term employment targets towards labour market reforms that foster resilience, strengthen social cohesion and support sustainable peace across the region.

Policy recommendations

To harness the peacebuilding potential of decent job creation, governments, regional institutions, development partners, and the private sector should prioritize the following:

- ◆ ***Economic Diversification and Employment-Rich Growth:*** Central African countries should diversify beyond extractive industries by investing in high-employment sectors such as agribusiness, manufacturing, tourism, digital services, and renewable energy. Incentives should encourage domestic value addition and local content to create jobs and link natural resources to local economies.
- ◆ ***Youth Skills Development and Labour Market Alignment:*** Governments should modernize education and vocational



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training to meet labour market demands. Strengthening technical and vocational education and training (TVET), digital skills, entrepreneurship education, and apprenticeships can bridge the skills gap.

- ◆ ***Support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs):*** Given that SMEs create most regional jobs, governments should improve their access to finance, business development services, infrastructure, and markets. Special support should target youth-led and women-led enterprises, particularly in fragile areas.
- ◆ ***Formalization and Social Protection:*** Policies should facilitate the transition to the

formal economy through simplified business registration, tax incentives, and stronger labour governance. Governments should also expand social protection programs (e.g., health insurance, unemployment benefits, pensions) to reduce vulnerability.

- ◆ ***Integration of Employment Creation into Peacebuilding:*** National peacebuilding, stabilization, and recovery programs should integrate employment and livelihoods initiatives. Public works, local enterprise development, and skills training should target vulnerable youth, displaced populations, ex-combatants, and conflict-affected communities to reduce recruitment risks and strengthen social cohesion.
- ◆ ***Strengthened Governance and Improved Business Environment:*** Governments should tackle corruption, enhance transparency in natural resource management, strengthen regulations, and invest in infrastructure. A predictable business environment is crucial for attracting investment, fostering private-sector growth, and ensuring sustainable employment.

Conclusion

Persistent vulnerable employment in Central Africa reflects structural weaknesses hindering inclusive prosperity. While the region's young population offers significant opportunities, the current job shortage risks intensifying poverty, exclusion, and instability. Decent work is, therefore, a strategic instrument for peacebuilding and conflict prevention. By promoting economic diversification, strengthening skills, supporting enterprise growth, expanding social protection, and integrating employment into peacebuilding efforts, Central African governments can transform labour markets into engines of resilience and stability.

**“Persistent
vulnerable
employment
in Central
Africa reflects
structural
weaknesses
hindering
inclusive
prosperity.”**

Muriel Kinkoh & Dr. Salim Ahmed Vesah



Post-Conflict Reconstruction as a Strategic Investment: Transforming Peace into Sustainable Development in Central Africa

Post-conflict reconstruction should be viewed not only as a peacebuilding imperative but also as a strategic investment in Central Africa's long-term development. By rebuilding institutions, infrastructure, and livelihoods while fostering inclusive governance and private sector growth, reconstruction efforts can transform fragile peace into sustainable economic resilience. Prioritizing coordinated, locally driven investments will be critical to securing lasting stability and inclusive prosperity across the region.

By Anthony Antem

Introduction

The security landscape in Central Africa has evolved considerably over the past two decades, shifting from large-scale civil wars to more complex and protracted challenges characterized by localized armed violence, transnational criminal networks, violent extremism, communal conflicts, and governance deficits. Although countries such as the Central African Republic have

advanced political dialogue through successive [peace agreements](#), while others like Chad and Cameroon continue to pursue [stabilization efforts](#) amid regional insecurity, the recurrence of violence across the region demonstrates that the cessation of hostilities alone is insufficient to secure lasting peace. Experience has shown that peace agreements can silence the guns but often fail to address the structural drivers of conflict. Consequently, post-conflict reconstruction has emerged as a strategic imperative that extends

beyond humanitarian recovery to strengthening national resilience through investments in effective governance, resilient infrastructure, human capital development, and inclusive economic growth. Only by embedding reconstruction within broader national development strategies can Central African countries break recurrent cycles of violence and lay the foundation for sustainable peace.

Current State of Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Central Africa

The Central African Republic (CAR) has made significant strides in restoring state authority following the 2019 Peace Agreement, supported by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and international development partners. The Government unveiled [a new initiative](#) in June 2026 geared towards rebuilding institutions, restoring basic services, and reviving local economies. Nevertheless, insecurity in peripheral regions and limited state capacity continue to hinder long-term recovery, underscoring the importance of strengthening governance alongside security.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains one of the region's [most challenging post-conflict environments](#). Although substantial investments have been made in reconstruction since the end of the Second Congo War, recurring violence in the eastern provinces driven by armed groups such as the March


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23 Movement, competition over natural resources, and cross-border insecurity continues to undermine development. The DRC illustrates that durable reconstruction depends on effective governance, security sector reform, and equitable management of natural resources.

In Chad, post-conflict reconstruction has become closely linked to political transition and regional security. Following the 2021 political transition, the country has pursued institutional reforms while responding to insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin and managing the humanitarian impact of refugees fleeing the conflict in Sudan. These challenges have broadened reconstruction priorities to include resilience-building, climate adaptation, and economic diversification alongside traditional peacebuilding initiatives.

Cameroon presents a multidimensional reconstruction context. In the North-West and South-West Regions, the Anglophone crisis has devastated infrastructure, disrupted education, and displaced thousands of people, while the Far North continues to recover

from years of attacks by Boko Haram. [Government initiatives](#), notably the Presidential Plan for the Reconstruction and Development of the North-West and South-West Regions, have sought to restore livelihoods and public services, but lasting recovery will require stronger local ownership, political dialogue, and private sector investment.

The Republic of the Congo has enjoyed relative

stability since its civil conflicts ended in the late 1990s, enabling investments in infrastructure and institutional development. However, economic dependence on oil, governance weaknesses, and regional inequalities continue to constrain inclusive growth. Its experience demonstrates that sustaining peace requires continuous investment in accountable institutions and diversified economic development, even in relatively stable post-conflict settings.

Taken together, these country experiences demonstrate that while Central Africa has achieved important security gains, sustainable peace depends on transforming those gains into resilient institutions, inclusive economic opportunities, and accountable governance.

Why Post-Conflict Reconstruction Is a Strategic Investment

Post-conflict reconstruction is often perceived as a humanitarian or development response to the aftermath of war. However, for Central Africa, it should be viewed as a strategic investment that generates long-term security, economic, and governance dividends. Countries that invest early in rebuilding institutions, infrastructure, and human capital are better positioned to prevent conflict relapse, attract private investment, restore public confidence, and accelerate sustainable development. Rather than representing a financial burden, reconstruction creates the enabling conditions for resilient states capable of withstanding future political, economic, and security shocks.

Investing in Security

Sustainable peace begins with secure communities and professional, accountable security institutions. Investments in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) can reduce the influence of armed groups while supporting former combatants to transition into productive civilian life. Community policing can further strengthen trust between citizens and security forces, improve intelligence gathering, and enhance crime



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prevention. Given the transnational nature of insecurity in Central Africa, stronger border management and regional security cooperation are equally important to curb illicit arms flows, trafficking networks, and the movement of extremist groups.

Investing in Institutions

Strong, accountable institutions are essential to sustaining peace and rebuilding public confidence. Post-conflict societies need capable public administrations that can deliver services, implement development policies, and respond effectively to citizens' needs. Justice systems must likewise be strengthened to uphold the rule of law, promote accountability, and support reconciliation. Decentralization and empowered local governments can make reconstruction more responsive to local priorities while encouraging citizen participation.

Investing in Human Capital

Reconstruction must rebuild people and communities

alongside physical and institutional assets. Expanding access to quality education, healthcare, skills development, and vocational training strengthens individual resilience and creates pathways into productive employment. These investments are particularly important for young people and former combatants who may otherwise remain vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and criminal networks. Promoting women's economic participation is equally important, given their central role in household recovery, peacebuilding, and community resilience.

Investing in Infrastructure

Infrastructure provides the physical foundation for recovery and economic integration. Rehabilitating roads reconnects communities, facilitates trade, and improves access to markets and public services, while reliable electricity and water systems support agriculture, industry, healthcare, and household welfare. Digital connectivity can further expand access to education, financial services, e-governance, and regional markets, particularly in underserved areas. Rebuilding schools, health facilities, and other essential infrastructure therefore serves both immediate humanitarian needs and longer-term state-building objectives.

Reintegration as an Investment in Stability

DDR should be treated as a long-term investment in stability rather than simply a security expenditure. Reintegration programs need to go beyond disarmament by providing former combatants with marketable skills, access to finance, employment opportunities, and pathways to sustainable livelihoods. Successful reintegration must also address the relationship between returnees and affected communities. Community reconciliation, social cohesion initiatives, local peacebuilding, and the rehabilitation of shared infrastructure can help rebuild trust and reduce tensions. When combined with youth employment and community-based recovery, these measures allow reintegration to generate broader development benefits. Former combatants and conflict-

affected communities can become contributors to local economies and peacebuilding rather than remaining dependent on humanitarian assistance or vulnerable to renewed mobilization.

Financing Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Financing post-conflict reconstruction requires drawing on multiple, complementary sources of capital, beginning with domestic financing through national budgets, strengthened public financial management, and tax reforms that build long-term fiscal sustainability and ownership. This is complemented by regional financing mechanisms, including regional development banks and regional economic cooperation, which can pool resources and expertise across borders, as well as international financing from multilateral institutions, bilateral partners, climate finance, and dedicated peacebuilding funds that provide critical support where domestic and regional capacity falls short. Finally, private sector investment mobilized through public-private partnerships, blended finance structures, risk guarantees, and impact investing helps close remaining financing gaps and channels commercial capital toward reconstruction priorities, together forming a diversified financing architecture capable of sustaining recovery over the long term.

Conclusion

The policy imperative for Central Africa is clear. Reconstruction must generate a peace dividend that is economically visible and broadly shared. Treating reconstruction as an investment rather than a cost can help transform fragile post-conflict environments into more stable, productive, and investment-ready economies. This requires governments, regional institutions, development partners, communities, and private investors to align reconstruction with national and regional development priorities. Investments in resilient institutions, infrastructure, human capital, productive sectors, and inclusive livelihoods can reduce conflict risks while expanding markets, creating jobs, strengthening domestic revenues, and improving the investment climate.

Strengthening Governance and Peace through Inclusive Energy Development in the Central African Region

Inclusive energy development can serve as a catalyst for stronger governance, social cohesion, and lasting peace in Central Africa. By expanding equitable access to energy, promoting transparent resource management, and ensuring local participation in energy investments, governments can reduce inequalities, strengthen public trust, and foster sustainable development. Positioning energy policy as a tool for both economic transformation and peacebuilding will be critical to the region's long-term stability and resilience.

By Enowbachem Agbortanyi

Why Energy Investment Matters for Governance and Stability

The issue of energy infrastructure is one of the key determinants of economic competitiveness and political stability in the 21st century. In the developing world, the availability of affordable energy is crucial for the provision of services, attracting investment from both domestic and international sources, as well as expanding industrial production and generating jobs. In the context of fragile countries, insufficient energy infrastructure contributes to widening the inequality gap, poor state legitimacy, and socio-economic grievances that cause conflict.

In the Central African region, several states have substantial natural resources but continue to suffer from development challenges. While rich in hydropower potential and oil deposits, the region has not succeeded in translating these abundant resources into economic development. Power shortages are common, industries are underdeveloped due to costly energy sources, and large parts of rural areas are still not connected to the national energy grid systems. [581 million of the 666 million people](#) without access to electricity live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Central Africa is one of the most poorly electrified regions of the continent.

According to the [International Energy Agency \(IEA\)](#),

there are hundreds of millions of people in Africa without access to electricity, and [Central Africa](#) continues to be one of the most under-electrified areas in the region. As the global demand for clean energy technologies intensifies, Central Africa gains more strategic importance in international energy markets. Policymakers are not just confronted with questions about the availability of investment opportunities but also with how to use investments to foster economic growth and consolidate democratic governance and peace.

The Governance-Energy-Peace Nexus

There is growing awareness of the connection between energy infrastructure, governance, and peace in the international development discourse. The impact of energy infrastructure goes beyond just the production of energy, but includes the establishment of governance practices and relations of inclusion in the region. If governments deliver

efficient energy services, it improves their legitimacy through the realization that they can satisfy citizens' needs and contribute to the economy. Disparities in infrastructure development have led to feelings of political exclusion and state neglect in many areas. Villages without access to electricity tend to suffer worse in terms of education levels, healthcare quality, and job prospects in comparison to urban centers. This situation fuels social discontent in areas where people feel that the resources are being used for the personal benefit of politicians.

Energy infrastructure becomes an extremely effective peacebuilding tool if developed under an inclusive governance approach. Development that increases electricity availability, generates jobs locally, improves the quality of public services, and engages the community in decision-making builds social harmony and minimizes the economic factors of instability. Badly managed projects that include murky contracts, pollution of the environment,



or unfair sharing of gains could increase social tensions even with high investments of money. The governance aspect applies equally to regional cooperation as well. Cooperation through joint energy markets, transmission facilities, and harmonized regulatory frameworks will help achieve interdependency between neighboring countries. This will lower risk levels, enhance energy security, and ensure that there are common interests in ensuring political stability. In this case, energy infrastructure is more than an economic resource; it is a strategic tool for achieving sustainable peace in Central Africa.

Inclusive energy governance can also strengthen state legitimacy by demonstrating the capacity of governments to deliver tangible public goods. In fragile environments, reliable electricity is often one of the most visible indicators of state presence and effectiveness. When communities perceive that infrastructure investments are fairly distributed and that local populations benefit from employment and development opportunities, levels of trust in public institutions tend to increase. Conversely, perceptions of exclusion or unequal distribution of benefits can generate grievances and undermine social cohesion.

Regional Energy Integration as a Strategy for Peace and Economic Transformation

None of the Central African states has enough [financial capability](#) or market size to develop its energy sources on its own. Hence, cooperation at the regional level becomes one of the key approaches that can be used to enhance energy security, bring investments, and achieve peace.

Electricity trading between the states enables the provision of additional electric power by those states that have extra generating capacity to those states experiencing a shortage of energy. Such an approach allows lowering costs and increasing reliability. The [Pool Énergétique de l'Afrique Centrale](#) (PEAC) is the organization that promotes regional cooperation in the field of electricity, interconnection of electricity



None of the Central African states has enough financial capability or market size to develop its energy sources on its own. Hence, cooperation at the regional level becomes one of the key approaches that can be used to enhance energy security, bring investments, and achieve peace.

systems, and the optimization of energy resources in the region.

Regional integration is another way in which regional cooperation can help in peace-building, as it brings about mutual economic dependence between

neighboring countries. Countries that are linked together through integrated electricity networks become increasingly dependent on good relations and coordination of the network infrastructure. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has maintained that integrated regulatory systems and infrastructural systems are crucial for the growth of Africa and its economic stability.

The establishment of the AfCFTA makes a stronger case for regional energy cooperation, as manufacturing competition, regional production chains, and trade across borders require dependable electricity supply. If the energy infrastructure in the region does not improve considerably, the Central African economies will fail to benefit from continental market integration.

Policy recommendations

- ◆ Governments should strengthen regulatory institutions by ensuring transparency in the procurement process, independence in energy regulation, predictable license schemes, and an effective judicial system of contract enforcement. It would mitigate risks associated with investment, increase accountability, and build trust in government institutions.
- ◆ Central African countries need to adopt local content policies that will create opportunities for employment and vocational education, and also technology transfer. Infrastructure investments should not be measured based on profits alone but also through their capacity to create employment and local businesses.
- ◆ The regional bodies such as ECCAS, CEMAC, and the PEAC need to fast-track the interconnection of electricity and harmonization of regulations to foster a regional electricity market.
- ◆ Governments should enhance community involvement in the project life cycle through formalizing public consultation, environmental impact assessments, benefit-sharing arrangements, and grievance redress systems. This not only reduces the potential for conflict but also increases the social acceptability of infrastructure projects.
- ◆ Lastly, development partners should enhance their support for the generation of renewable energy, climate-resilient infrastructure, and technical skills programs that will prepare the youth for employment in new green sectors.

Conclusion

The vast potential for hydropower, hydrocarbon development, renewable energy, and mining makes Central Africa poised for an economic turnaround. Clearly, resource abundance is not synonymous with prosperity. Unless there is proper governance, good management and inclusive structures, energy wealth can exacerbate existing inequalities, erode confidence in government and lead to conflict and unrest.

Indeed, the development of energy systems goes well beyond engineering. It is a strategic move for developing proper governance structures, building economic stability, and promoting peace. Energy allows greater industrial efficiency, encourages private sector investments, improves health and education outcomes, increases connectivity, and provides the foundations necessary for job creation. Just as critically, inclusive energy governance builds the state's legitimacy through its ability to provide basic public services and make sure local populations participate in development gains.





DANGOTE VERSUS THE IMF AND WORLD BANK:

African Oil Megaprojects between Strategic Autonomy and Economic Concentration Risks

African oil megaprojects, exemplified by the Dangote Refinery, are reshaping debates on industrialization, strategic autonomy, and the role of international financial institutions. While such investments can strengthen energy security, reduce import dependence, and drive economic transformation, they also raise concerns about market concentration, governance, and equitable distribution of benefits. Achieving sustainable outcomes will require policies that balance national industrial ambitions with competition, transparency, and inclusive economic development.

By Guy Beaudry JENGU JENGU

Introduction

The African oil paradox fits in a single sentence: Africa exports crude oil, yet pays top dollar for the refined fuels made from its own resources. The explanation boils down to two words: refining gap. This term captures the structural mismatch between the continent's abundant resource base and its technical inability to process crude oil into finished products locally. [According to the African Energy Commission](#), Africa holds 7.2% of the world's proven oil reserves. In 2019, the continent produced

9.2% of global crude output, but only 2.4% of refined petroleum products, including fuels, bitumen, and butane. Put simply, Africa refines less than one quarter of its own crude production.

Against that backdrop, the arrival of the Dangote mega-refinery in Nigeria has done much to narrow the gap, with a rated capacity of 650,000 barrels per day. That development took on urgent geopolitical relevance on February 28, 2026, when a [military escalation in the Persian Gulf](#) disrupted global supply chains by closing the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint on which [nine of](#)

[the thirteen most dependent countries are African](#). It was precisely in that light that the [World Bank first challenged Dangote's operations in Nigeria](#), then joined the [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\) in opposing his plan to build another mega-refinery in East Africa](#). Both Bretton Woods institutions cited [the risk of a regional "private monopoly"](#) as the basis for their opposition.

Supporters of the IMF and World Bank position argue that excessive concentration of refining capacity within a single private entity could create market distortions, reduce competition, and potentially expose consumers to pricing risks in the long term. From this perspective, industrial development must be accompanied by competition safeguards capable of balancing strategic autonomy with market efficiency and consumer protection. The challenge for African policymakers is therefore not simply to increase refining capacity, but to ensure that market expansion occurs within an appropriate regulatory framework.

Beyond that immediate geopolitical episode, the Strait's closure exposed just how vulnerable African economies are to supply shocks, making it urgent to examine what durable continental strategic autonomy would actually require. The central question this paper addresses is: how can African states build sufficient regional refining capacity to reduce their energy vulnerability, while avoiding private monopolies and keeping regional markets integrated? To answer it, the article first evaluates the track record of African-capital-backed regional mega-refining projects, then analyzes the regulatory tools that can balance the transitional protectionism these capital-intensive industries need against the gradual market opening required for long-term sustainability in the face of competition from foreign refined products.

Africa's Efforts to Close the Refining Gap: Taking Stock

In a [special report](#) released in June 2022, the African Energy Commission found that African refineries were running, on average, at below 55% of installed capacity. Output consisted mainly of diesel (33% of total production), fuel oil (20%), gasoline (20%), kerosene (7%), liquefied petroleum gas (2%), and

other kerosene derivatives (2%). While most African oil producers have some refining operations, the continent's capacity was overwhelmingly concentrated in North Africa (57%) and Southern Africa (24%); West, Central, and East Africa together accounted for less than 20% of total output. At the time of that report, just four countries; Egypt (24%), Algeria (20%), South Africa (16%), and Nigeria (14%), held three quarters of Africa's total installed refining capacity.

The Dangote Refinery's commissioning in January 2024 set off [a major reshaping of the oil sector](#) across West Africa. Situated in the Lekki Free Trade Zone outside Lagos, [Dangote Refinery](#) is the world's largest single-train refinery, designed to process up to 650,000 barrels per day, a figure pushed to 700,000 barrels per day during performance testing. It produces unleaded gasoline, diesel, kerosene (jet fuel), and polypropylene. The refinery has allowed Nigeria to flip from a net fuel importer to a net exporter, [supplying several regional economies](#) including Cameroon.

Since the outbreak of fighting in the Middle East, Dangote's public messaging has focused squarely on preventing fuel shortages across the continent. In the company's own words: ["By supplying neighboring economies and other countries, the Dangote Refinery should help strengthen energy security across West, East, and Central Africa"](#). On a technical level, the refinery doesn't just address the refining gap, it also solves a persistent problem faced by African refiners: the inability to produce low-sulfur fuels that meet international standards such as the Euro-5 specification. The refinery has already [signaled a planned shift to Euro-6 fuel production](#). It supplies domestic markets and exports to countries in Africa and Europe, including [the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands, as well as to the United States and Saudi Arabia](#).

This state of affairs creates a paradox for Africa: the Dangote Refinery is simultaneously a major industrial breakthrough and a potential new source of energy dependence. If it comes to hold an absolute monopoly, who besides Aliko Dangote would have the power to set fuel prices across the continent?

Regulating Africa's Oil Market: From Transitional Protectionism to the Post-oil Era

The core challenge the Dangote case raises is market concentration. A refinery that can supply multiple countries wields enormous market power, enough to set both prices and supply terms. That is exactly the danger the [World Bank](#) flagged in April 2026. So how do you build sufficient regional refining capacity without locking in dominant-position players?

The answer isn't to block big industrial actors from emerging; Africa needs them. The goal should be to put in place a regulatory framework for the African petroleum market that can attract competitive industrial capacity to the continent while guarding against rent-seeking and monopoly power that would hurt African consumers and economies. This is about more than adding refining capacity. It's about building an African energy market that can withstand global geopolitical shocks without creating new internal dependencies. The right approach is to give refining industries temporary protection so they can reach critical scale, while simultaneously building strong competition, transparency, and regional integration mechanisms. This article proposes three concrete policy measures to achieve that.

Implement Time-Limited Industrial Protectionism at the National Level

One of the biggest structural hurdles for African refining is competition from fully depreciated foreign refineries, especially in the Middle East and Asia. In a new African refinery's early years, governments may legitimately use local sourcing requirements and temporary tariffs on refined products that are already available domestically. However, this support must be strictly time-limited, five to ten years, and tied to clear performance milestones: refinery utilization rates above 75%, steady growth in regional exports, and a requirement to produce Euro-5 or better fuels.

Build an Integrated African Petroleum Products Market at the Regional Level

Africa's challenge with petroleum products isn't just a shortage of refineries; it's also the severe fragmentation of its markets. Building an integrated regional petroleum products market is therefore a categorical imperative. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers the right institutional framework for this, which means developing an African competition policy that positions the continent to compete against global refiners. Within that framework, national and regional competition authorities should have the power to monitor prices, sanction abuses of dominance, and ensure non-discriminatory access to infrastructure. Over the longer term, establishing a continental competition authority under the AfCFTA umbrella would be a game-changer.

Prepare the Continent for Its Energy Transition

African petroleum policy can no longer be designed without regard to the global energy transition. Regulatory frameworks should direct a share of refining revenues toward financing hydroelectric projects, renewables, and transportation infrastructure. The goal is to use today's oil revenues to build tomorrow's post-petroleum economy.

Conclusion

Africa's refining capacity remains unequally distributed and chronically underutilized. The Dangote Refinery represents a step-change in scale that could substantially reduce the continent's dependence on imported fuels. Yet that industrial success also creates a new risk: over-reliance on a single private actor. The challenge for African policymakers is no longer just about producing more; it's about governing the regional energy market. Developing heavy industries does require temporary support, but those protections must be time-limited and benchmarked against clear performance targets. Three strategic directions stand out: transitional industrial protectionism at the national level; building an integrated African petroleum products market through the AfCFTA; and getting ahead of the continent's energy transition.

“Africa’s refining capacity remains unequally distributed and chronically underutilized. The Dangote Refinery represents a step-change in scale that could substantially reduce the continent’s dependence on imported fuels.”

Guy Beaudry JENGU JENGU

Policy Takeaways Across the Issue

1. Energy Infrastructure Must Become a Job Creation Strategy

Energy investments should no longer be assessed solely by installed capacity or electricity generation. Governments should measure success by their ability to create decent jobs, strengthen local industries, develop technical skills, and stimulate value addition across regional economies.

2. Industrialization Requires Moving Up Regional Value Chains

Central Africa must shift from exporting raw resources and importing finished products to building competitive regional value chains in refining, manufacturing, renewable energy technologies, and industrial services. Regional integration under ECCAS, CEMAC, and the AfCFTA is essential to achieving economies of scale.

3. Good Governance Is the Foundation of Sustainable Investment

Investment thrives where institutions are transparent, accountable, and predictable. Strengthening procurement systems, regulatory agencies, contract enforcement, community participation, and anti-corruption mechanisms will reduce investment risks while ensuring that development benefits are broadly shared.

4. Inclusive Development Strengthens Both Prosperity and Peace

The region's development agenda must intentionally include women, youth, rural communities, and conflict-affected populations. Expanding equitable access to energy, education, finance, and productive employment not only promotes social inclusion but also reduces the structural drivers of instability.

5. Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Are Long-Term Economic Investments

Post-conflict reconstruction should be understood as an investment in resilient institutions, infrastructure, human capital, and private-sector growth rather than simply a humanitarian response. Durable peace depends on linking reconstruction to sustainable economic transformation and employment creation.

6. Central Africa's Competitiveness Depends on Regional Cooperation

No single country can unlock the region's energy and industrial potential alone. Coordinated investments in cross-border infrastructure, harmonized regulations, integrated electricity markets, and common industrial strategies will strengthen resilience, attract investment, and position Central Africa as a more competitive regional economic bloc.

Closing Insight

The articles featured in this edition collectively demonstrate that energy infrastructure is no longer merely an engineering or public utility concern it is the foundation upon which industrialization, peacebuilding, social inclusion, and economic competitiveness will be built. Reliable electricity determines whether factories operate competitively, whether hospitals preserve life-saving medicines, whether schools can leverage digital learning, whether tourism destinations attract investors, and whether entrepreneurs can create productive businesses. In this regard, investment in energy should be viewed as investment in productivity itself rather than simply expanding generating capacity. The challenge for policymakers is therefore to ensure that every dollar invested in energy produces measurable improvements in employment, industrial growth, technological capability, and human development.

The experiences highlighted throughout this issue also illustrate that successful development is rarely driven by isolated infrastructure projects. Countries that have successfully transformed their economies have consistently linked infrastructure investment with industrial policy, skills development, innovation, and private-sector expansion. Ethiopia's

industrial parks were accompanied by targeted workforce development programmes; Morocco's renewable energy strategy has been integrated with industrial manufacturing and export ambitions; and Rwanda has demonstrated how investments in governance and digital infrastructure can significantly improve the investment climate despite limited natural resources. These examples suggest that Central Africa's challenge is not simply attracting larger investments but ensuring that investments generate stronger economic linkages across agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, logistics, and digital services.

Within Africa itself, the emergence of the Dangote Refinery provides an important lesson. Beyond reducing Nigeria's dependence on imported refined petroleum products, the project demonstrates how downstream industrial investment can generate thousands of direct and indirect jobs, stimulate engineering services, logistics, petrochemicals, and manufacturing. At the same time, as highlighted in this issue, it also reminds policymakers that industrial transformation must be accompanied by strong competition policies and regional regulatory frameworks to prevent excessive market concentration while encouraging innovation and investment.

OPA 33rd edition



The 33rd edition of On Policy Africa Magazine titled “Perspectives on the WTO Ministerial Conference in Cameroon” examines the outcomes of the 14th World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, and its implications for Africa’s economic future.

Through expert analysis, this edition explores the challenges of African trade diplomacy, regional economic integration, industrialization, investment facilitation, and digital transformation. It highlights the urgent need for African economies to move beyond raw material exports toward value addition, stronger productive capacities, and more inclusive trade systems.

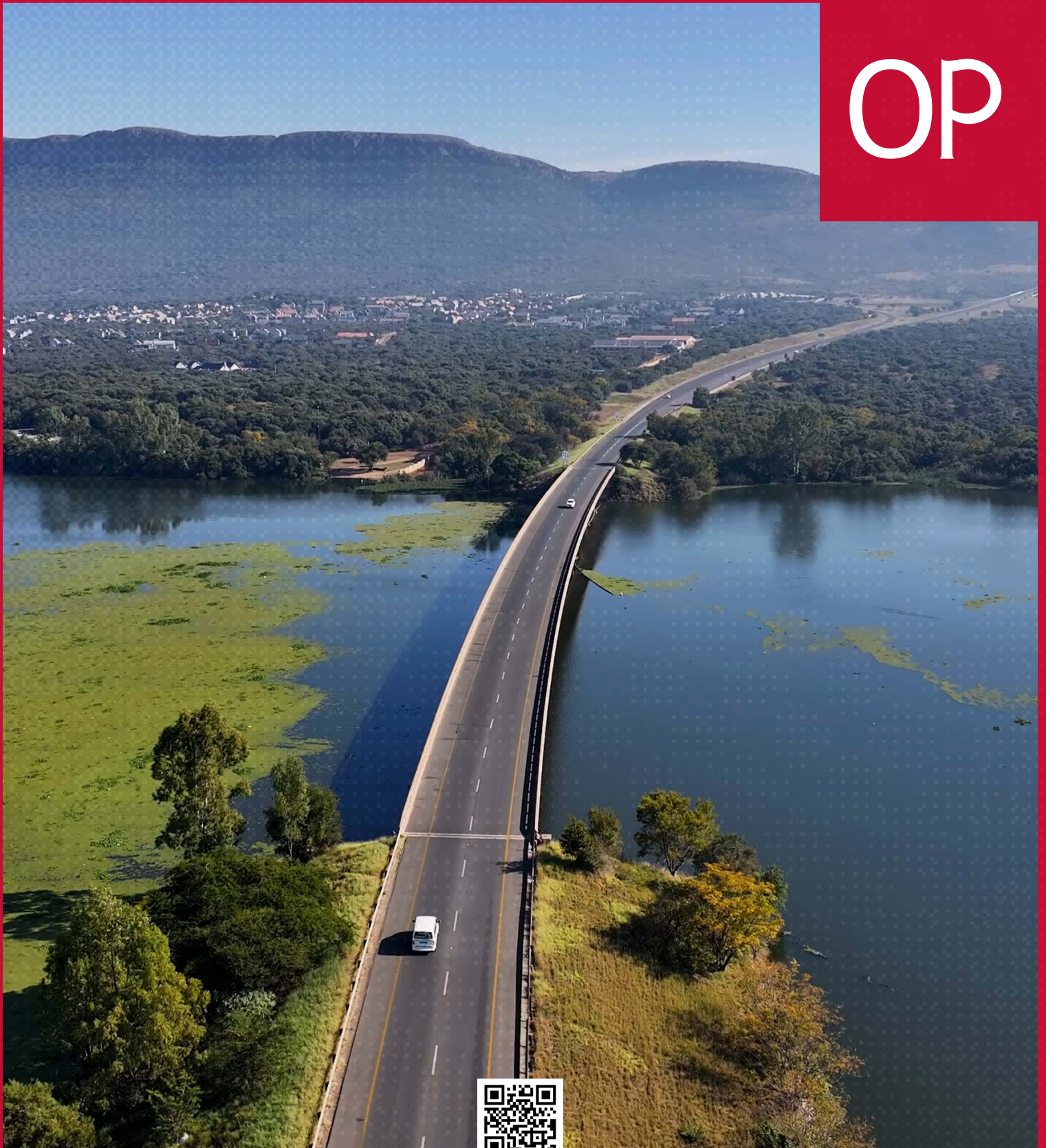
At its core, this edition delivers a powerful message: Africa must move beyond participating in global trade to actively shaping its rules, strengthening its competitiveness, and transforming trade opportunities into sustainable economic development.

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