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FEATURES

Displaced generating billion-dollar economy

Battling Trump's Third Country Deportation agenda

Empowering displaced and hosts in the Sahel

SUCCEEDING AGAINST THE ODDS

The extraordinary achievements of Africa's displaced

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Produced in partnership with the Amahoro Coalition



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...nesting international standards with African hospitality

By Anver Versi

The extraordinary achievements of Africa's displaced

It gives us at *New African* magazine particular pleasure in collaborating with the Amahoro Coalition to produce this special issue to mark the 4th Africa Private Sector Forum on Displacement (AFD 2026), which takes place from November 16–18, 2026 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The Forum is convened by Amahoro Coalition, Inkomoko and the UNHCR, the Refugee Agency in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.

The event will bring together over 400 delegates, including private sector leaders, policymakers, development finance institutions, philanthropists, and refugee entrepreneurs.

The reason for our enthusiasm for this project is that we very strongly believe in the work that organisations like Amahoro Coalition are doing in one of the most neglected, misunderstood, misrepresented and underestimated areas of Africa's modern history. Yet it is very important.

Currently, there are about 9m refugees, 1.2m asylum seekers and about 35m internally displaced persons, bringing total forced displacement to roughly 46m people. Africa's displaced population is larger than 45 of Africa's 54 nations.

We see manifestations of this practically every day, not only in African countries where people grind out their lives in stark, inhospitable, and virtually hopeless conditions but also in the desperate and often fatal attempts to evade guardians and reach the 'promised lands' of Europe or America.

Even for those who make the deadly crossings, life in the new lands is made as bleak and painful as possible as they waste valuable years in depressing detention camps, not allowed to work or form relationships or even go for a walk from the dismal surroundings.

Many others find themselves trapped in slave-labour situations, working clandestinely for pitiful wages, most of which go to the unscrupulous people smugglers, while the once-hopeful men, women and children wither away, hollowed out by hard work, poor nutrition, barbed lifestyles and the end of their dreams staring them in the face.



When you read the bios of the displaced in this report, what shines through all their endeavours is love - for family, friends, fellow citizens and suffering humanity.

Where once there was a modicum of understanding and sympathy for such forcibly displaced people, today there is naked hostility and even hatred for those who brave treacherous borders and finally reach what they erroneously considered safe havens.

In the UK for example, gangs of masked men, women and even children make the journey to the coast, where they expect the 'small boats' carrying refugees to try and make a landing and hurl threats and abuse at them. They have even taken to attacking the crew of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), whose sworn duty is to save lives at sea, no matter who is involved.

It is going to get worse. In addition to the ongoing violent conflicts in many parts of Africa, we have dysfunctional economies, climate change attrition destroying traditional means of livelihood, and an upsurge in natural disasters, amidst global conflicts skewering economies and raising the cost of living well beyond the means of most people.

In addition, Africa has the youngest average population of any region in the world, which means the continent needs to generate millions of jobs or face even more internal calamities.

Hope springing eternal

On the face of it, it looks like a hopeless scenario. But through the work that is being done by organisations like the Amahoro Coalition, which is a private-sector venture, and the extraordinary resilience of the displaced themselves, we begin to see the situation in a new light – we see resilience, we see hope springing afresh like flowers growing in a devastated field, we see an inflexible will to prevail over the most dire of circumstances, we see steel-like determination to wrest success out of abject failure and above all, we see love.

When you read through the brief bios of the displaced in this special report, what shines through all their endeavours is endless love – love for family, love for friends, love for fellow citizens and above all, love for common, suffering humanity.

We learn how love has led to a billion-dollar economy among the displaced, how a refugee rose to lead the world on agriculture, how an entertainer staged global concerts in refugee camps and many, many more instances.

Every single personality featured says their greatest motivation has been the desire to help their fellow travellers, to find solutions, to treat the sick and heal the wounded, to bring joy where only gloom usually lives and to inspire others not to give up hope but search for that chink of light, grab it and follow it as it inevitably leads to the glory of the sun.

It has not only been a pleasure to work on this report, it has been an education. We have learnt a great deal we did not know before and been inspired by the stories of Africa's displaced. We hope you too find inspiration in these pages. ■

By **Isaac Kwaku Fokuo, Jr.,** founder and curator of the Amahoro Coalition

The inaugural list of African leaders shaped by displacement celebrates 17 people who have turned adversity into impact across business, policy and the creative industries. Their stories challenge perceptions of displacement, revealing the entrepreneurial potential of millions too often overlooked by investors, and redefining what leadership looks like.

Who we build with next

Five years ago, we convened the first *Africa Private Sector Forum on Forced Displacement* in Kigali, Rwanda. On stage stood a tree hung with lanterns, and each was lit as participants pledged to invest in displaced talent. This year, as the Forum returns for its fourth edition, we are publishing, in partnership with *New African* magazine, a first-of-its-kind list recognising African leaders shaped by displacement.

All year, we have kept asking ourselves who we should build with next. In their own distinct ways, the people on this list are a compelling part of that answer so far.

The thinking behind this list reflects what has always set our work apart. From the start, we have treated displacement as an economic problem and answered it with markets, through jobs, capital, trade and investment, rather than relief alone. That has meant constantly questioning our approach, our sources and our own assumptions, often leading us down unconventional paths that proved worth taking. The pages that follow are one of them, chosen deliberately.

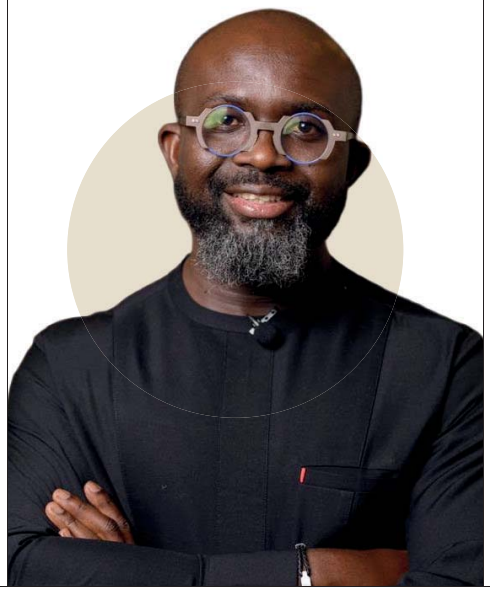
The research draws from across the continent, with every nominee assessed against a three-part definition. It covers people forced from home by conflict or persecution, whether across a border or within their own country. It covers those born into displacement. And it covers allies whose life's work cannot be separated from displaced communities. External validators reviewed every name. Inclusion was by consent, and each honoree shaped how their own story is told.

We assessed leadership by impact in business, policy and the creative world. One honoree, born to refugee parents, led farm reforms credited with lifting more than a million people out of poverty. Two went home to build: one started a factory with $200, the other a resort group that grew to about 3,000 jobs. One, credited with saving more than 50,000 children, was forced to flee and started again across the border. A memoir by another has sold more than 2.6m copies in over 40 languages. These achievements differ in kind and consequence, but share a common thread of displacement.



Above: A group of Rwandan drummers at the first Africa Private Sector Forum on Forced Displacement in Kigali, Rwanda

Below: Isaac Kwaku Fukuo, Jr., founder and curator of the Amahoro Coalition

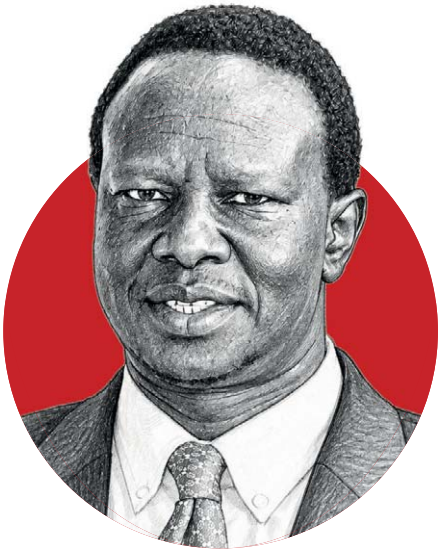


The honorees challenge the narrative that still associates displacement with need before capacity. And their achievements show, at scale, the enterprise and skill common among displaced people. They run businesses, farm, borrow and repay loans, trade across borders and buy goods.

Earlier this year, we published *Hiding in Plain Sight*, a report showing that Africa's more than 43m displaced people generate about $27bn a year. When we started, backing that economy was a conviction. With aid in steep decline, our markets-led approach has become a necessity. Doing this work alongside the honorees, and others like them, energises us.

This is Edition One. We will extend it every year, because many African leaders who belong on it are still hiding in plain sight. In Kigali, business leaders lit a lantern for every pledge. In Addis, this year, they light the next ones alongside leaders who know displacement from the inside and markets from the top. Who better to build the next chapter together? ■

‘Lost Boy of Sudan’ becomes voice of refugees



SOUTH SUDAN–US

JOHN THON MAJOK

“When given opportunities and support, refugees are resilient people who can make positive contributions to world peace and the global economy.”

John Thon Majok is another of the now legendary ‘Lost Boys of Sudan’. He was forced to leave his home, parents and eight siblings in South Sudan to join a group of 20,000 other children escaping the horrors of the 1987 Sudanese Civil War.

They walked barefoot for over 1,000 miles from Sudan to Ethiopia and back to Sudan before settling in refugee camps in Kenya. They endured extreme hardships with scant food and resources and were, at times, chased by wild animals.

In 2001, he was flown by the US State Department to Tucson for resettlement along with 59 other ‘Lost Boys’ – now young men.

In 2003, he was named valedictorian of Pima Community College and gave the commencement address. In 2005 he graduated from the University of Arizona with a BSc in Public Administration and Policy.

Majok holds a Master of Public Administration from George Mason University, where he wrote his honours thesis on globalisation and its impacts on human rights and cultures. His work concerns issues of forced migration, refugee resilience, integration, and refugee diplomacy.

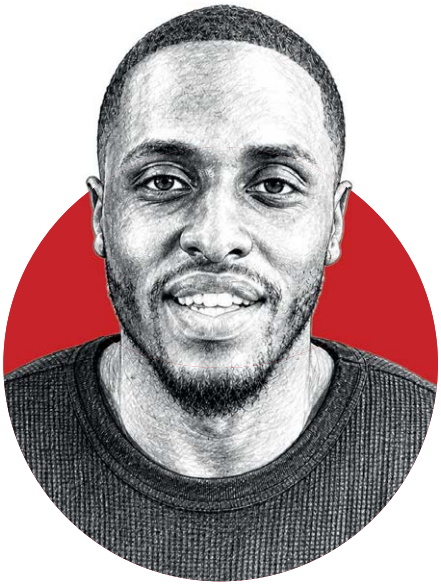
From 2007 to 2009, he was a Program Officer at the Council of American Overseas Research Centres, where he managed a ‘Study abroad’ portfolio of the State Department’s Critical Language Scholarship Program. In 2006–2007, he coordinated the global recruitment of skilled South Sudanese diasporans for the Diaspora Skills Transfer Program, implemented by the Academy for Educational Development. In 2004, Majok served as a congressional intern for Arizona Congressman Jim Kolbe at the US House of Representatives.

From 2010 to 2012, Majok was a contractor at the US Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Here, he developed strategic outreach plans for global alumni of the government exchange programmes, amongst others, the famous Fulbright and International Visitor Leadership Program.

He furthermore earned a Masters Degree at George Mason University and in 2013, he became Program Associate at the Woodrow Wilson Center, where he received an Excellence Award.

He is the former Director of the Refugee and Forced Displacement Initiative (RAFDI) at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where he is also the Deputy Director of Development and Senior Director of Grants Management.

He lives with his wife, Yom, who he met when they were both refugees at Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya.



RWANDA–US

EMMANUEL RUGAMBA

"Where someone starts should never determine how far they are capable of going."

Sports star turned lifestyle guru

A former professional football player, Rugamba is an author and business executive who builds pathways that turn sport into economic opportunity for young people, with a growing focus on Africa. He is also a renowned motivational speaker, inspiring people to look beyond their circumstances and pursue ambitions that might have seemed out of reach.

He was born in a refugee camp in Zambia in 1998, after his family was displaced from Rwanda, and they moved to the United States two years later. Growing up navigating issues of identity and belonging, he found that sport was a place where discipline, relationships and new possibilities could change what was available to a young person. He started playing American football at nine.

His route to professional football took him through college teams at the University of Iowa and Miami University in Ohio, where he completed his degree in sport leadership and management. Undrafted in 2021, he signed with the Cleveland Browns as a free agent, becoming the first Rwandan to sign an NFL contract.

He went on to play four seasons in the Canadian Football League (CFL), three with the BC Lions and one with the Edmonton Elks, and was named a CFL West All-Star in 2023.

He built a second career off the field. He has spoken publicly at more than 120 schools, universities, teams and organisations across North America on identity, resilience, leadership and preparing for life beyond competition.

He co-authored *Next Play: Strategies for What's Next*, which pushes athletes to build their brand, relationships and skills before their playing days end.

He now serves as Chief Business Officer at Next Professional Athlete (NPA), working on visibility, partnerships and commercial opportunities for athletes and businesses across the global sports economy.

Born in a refugee camp, Rugamba was the first Rwandan to sign an NFL contract. He is now building the business of sport for the next generation, with Africa at its centre.

His view is that playing sport is about more than progressing to the next level of competition. It is an entry point into a wider market: education, the media, coaching, technology, entrepreneurship and professional careers.

Africa sits at the centre of his long-term plans. Through his Vision Forward Foundation, he is working to popularise flag football (a variant of American football), in Rwanda and across the continent, as a low-cost way into organised sport. He also sees it as a pipeline into coaching, media, tourism and the wider sports economy. He is building partnerships with universities, governments, sports bodies, brands and investors to connect Africa with global sport.

Dedicated to eradicating food insecurity



SOMALIA–HOLLAND

NURADIN OSMAN

"My life's work is to assist in building an Africa where the next generation has the opportunity to stay, work and prosper at home."

Nuradin Osman's career has been built around the question, 'Why should anyone have to become a refugee?' His answer, developed over three decades in agribusiness, is that productive farming gives people a real opportunity to stay, work and prosper at home.

His own refugee journey began in Somalia in 1991, and by 1992 he had been recognised as a refugee in the Netherlands. He describes the day he applied for asylum as an experience that has never left him. Africa holds vast land and natural resources, yet too many rural communities lack the productivity that makes a secure life at home possible. For Osman, agriculture is an essential part of the answer.

He twice experienced famine as a child, first as a three-year-old living with his mother in a small village, and later as a teenager living in Mogadishu during the civil war. These tragic events gave him first-hand experience of chronic hunger, helping to inspire his interest in food security and improving living standards through adaptive farming.

He joined AGCO, the global agricultural-equipment manufacturer, in May 2005 and spent 15 years there, working across its Africa and Middle East business from 2011 and rising to Vice President and General Manager for Africa. His focus was on widening African farmers' access to modern mechanisation, training and complete farming systems. He helped create AGCO's Future Farm initiatives in Zambia and Switzerland: demonstration and learning facilities built around modern farming technology. He also spent eight years on the operational team supporting the President's Advisory Council on Doing Business in Africa, the US body established under President Obama, with that work continuing into the Trump administration.

In 2020 he left the corporate world to found Grosso Foods, now Grosso.Africa, an African-owned agribusiness that rents and sells conservation-agriculture and precision-farming equipment, with a particular focus on bringing these technologies within reach of smallholder farmers in rural communities, helping them to raise yields, cut post-harvest losses and broaden their market access.

In 2026 the Future Farm experience came full circle with the launch of Grosso Future Farm, a training centre for agriculturalists designed to showcase farming systems adapted to local soil, climate, crops and economics.

The same logic now extends to education. In 2026 he took over and reopened Hope Primary Secondary School, which he says serves about 100 students on a campus built for up to 2,000, with roughly $375,000 invested.

A 2013 Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellow, he was named a top global leader for diversity and inclusion in 2019.



Taking possession of our narratives

SOUTH AFRICA

PROF. ZAKES MDA

"Storification is so powerful, it can make us enemies of our own selves without realising it."

Zakes Mda has spent six decades turning displacement into an argument about who gets to tell Africa's story, and then building the institutions that let more Africans tell it themselves.

In 1963, after his father, the anti-Apartheid activist A.P. Mda, was arrested for his political work, the family crossed into exile in Lesotho. Zakes was 15. Exile carried him on to the UK and the United States, and became the raw material of one of the continent's most celebrated literary careers.

He began in theatre. His protest plays helped define Apartheid-era drama, and his theatre-for-development work took performance out of the auditorium and into communities, as a tool for people to debate their own problems.

As a novelist he broke through with *Ways of Dying* (1995), which won the M-Net Book Prize and has been translated into 21 languages. *The Heart of Redness* won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Africa, the Sunday Times Fiction Prize and the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award.

He has been honoured with the Order of Ikhamanga, and in 2022 Wits University awarded him an honorary doctorate in literature for his contribution to South Africa's and the world's cultural life.

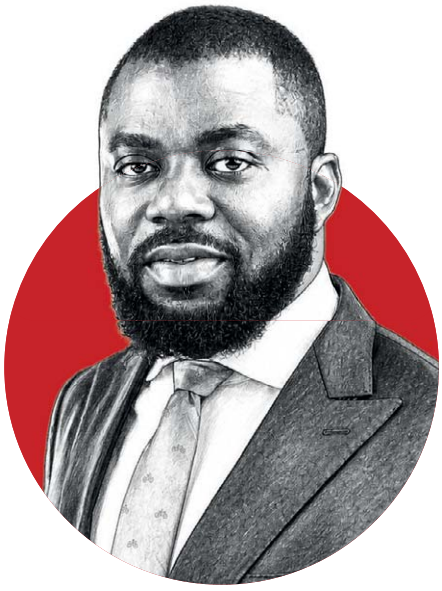
His standing is institutional as well as literary. He is Professor Emeritus of English at Ohio University and an Extraordinary Professor of English at the University of the Western Cape, and has taught a generation of writers on two continents.

Exiled at 15, he turned displacement into fiction read across the world, then built the enterprises that keep African stories, and African livelihoods, rooted at home.

He did not stop at the page. In 2000 he set up a beekeeping project with rural women in the Eastern Cape, turning a writer's attachment to a place into income for the people who live there.

In Johannesburg he runs NeoZane, a publishing house and animation film production company, creating a commercial infrastructure for African stories instead of waiting for publishers and studios elsewhere to choose them. He is also a painter and a composer.

Banker championing the displaced



NIGERIA

AYODEJI 'AYO' SOTINRIN

"The bank should be a catalyst for social change and rural prosperity."

Ayodeji 'Ayo' Sotinrin is an outlier in this list – he is neither a forcibly displaced person nor a refugee – but he makes our Most Influential list due to his outstanding work in making formal banking available to displaced people in Nigeria.

As MD and CEO of Nigeria's Bank of Agriculture (BOA), he is demonstrating how farm-based credit can do what aid has struggled to – keep rural families productive and bring displaced families back to the land.

Where farming holds, people stay: he is a banker putting displaced Nigerians on the loan book, not the aid list.

Appointed to his position by President Bola Tinubu in April 2025, he leads a development finance institution with 110 branches. It is restructuring and recapitalising into a technology-driven institution based on digital banking, data-led credit, value-chain finance and farmer identification through KYC checks and GPS farm mapping.

The bank reached more than 400,000 farmers across over 20 states in the past year and disbursed $190m in finance and inputs. It is funding a mechanisation programme for 2,000 tractors and 9,000 implements in a country with fewer than six tractors per 10,000 hectares. It is also running a $150m Guaranteed Minimum Price scheme under which it acts as a buyer of last resort for grain.

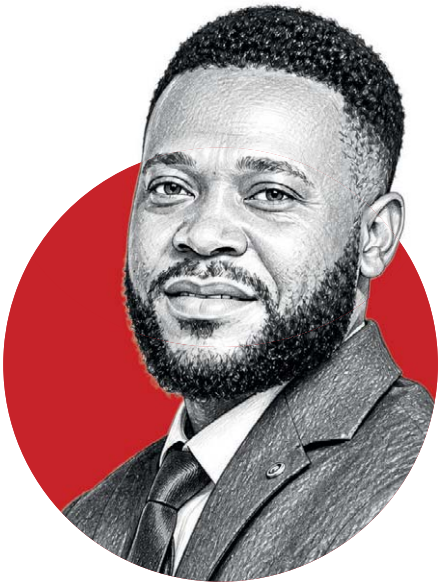
Nigeria has about 3.7m internally displaced people, most in the conflict-affected North, where collapsed rural livelihoods both drive flight and stall returning.

Under Sotinrin, BOA created a $200m Livelihood Support Fund with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in 2025, and agreed to work with the Amahoro Coalition to support the creation of 200,000 jobs for displaced people and host communities.

The partnership also created Nigeria's first banking lending desk dedicated to internally displaced persons. In the 2026 wet season it funded nearly 10,000 displaced persons with almost $6m. Close to 1,000 farmers in its ginger-blight recovery programme are displaced.

Before his current appointment, Sotinrin had carried his zeal for agribusiness into the private sector. As CEO of SAO Group, he oversaw SAO Agro's 20,000-hectare oil-palm plantation and its poultry, aquaculture, maize and cassava operations in Ondo State. SAO Capital mobilised more than $750m in infrastructure and development finance, including for the $200m Akure Water Supply Project.

He had previously been a Special Adviser on Environment and Urban Development in the Federal Capital Territory (2011 to 2015), consulted for the World Bank, AfDB, DfID and USAID, and worked at Royal Bank of Scotland International and Deutsche Bank. He holds an Executive MBA from Oxford's Saïd Business School.



Delivering a four-in-one clean energy solution

DRC–UGANDA

SOLOMON BHAGHABHONERANO

"Refugees should not simply wait for solutions; they can create them."

Although a refugee himself, Solomon Bhaghabhonerano is an entrepreneur building a clean-energy business in Uganda's Kyaka II refugee settlement: turning waste into cooking fuel, manufacturing efficient stoves and creating jobs along the way.

He arrived in Uganda at the age of six, after his family fled conflict in DRC. Growing up in the same camp, in Kyegegwa District in western Uganda, he watched his mother cook over smoky firewood while the trees around the settlement disappeared and the land became increasingly degraded.

Rather than wait for someone else to provide solutions, he decided he would find them himself.

In 2016, he mobilised young people to work on restoring the environment through tree planting. A $10,000 grant in 2017 helped him to expand the tree nursery and formally establish 'Live in Green' as an organisation.

He realised that while the exercise of planting trees was successful, they would not last for any length of time as long as there was a strong need for firewood.

He therefore set out to find an alternative. During the 2021 Covid-19 lockdown, he began turning organic and agricultural waste, such as maize cobs, banana peels and sawdust, into clean-burning briquettes, and the enterprise took its current shape.

Today Live in Green combines clean cooking, waste recovery, environmental restoration and support for livelihoods. Its Energy Resource and Waste Recovery Centre converts organic waste into briquettes that reach thousands of families, creates paid work for settlement residents in waste collection and processing, and assists the local manufacture of improved cooking stoves.

This includes the innovative Moto Core Stove, a forced-air micro-gasification cooker that burns briquettes and pellets and also offers solar-powered USB phone charging and DC lighting facilities. Live in Green reports that the stove achieved Tier 4 for efficiency in testing by Uganda's Centre for Research in Energy and Energy Conservation (CREEC).

He is a Congolese refugee turning settlement waste into clean fuel and efficient stoves; it is a circular-energy business, built in a displacement camp and ready to scale beyond it.

In 2025 Live in Green was one of 18 refugee-led enterprises to receive a $25,000 grant under Ashden's Transforming Humanitarian Energy Access programme, funded with aid from the UK government.

It provides direct funding and support to refugee-led organisations and entrepreneurs in Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia, nurturing access to renewable energy for refugees and displaced people.

Bhaghabhonerano's pitch to investors is to see the enterprise as a growing business, not an aid project. It is a single entity serving four growing markets at once (clean cooking, waste management, renewable energy and green jobs), with the potential to expand its reach across Uganda.



Greatest African activist in civil society?

Kumi Naidoo built one of the most prominent African activist careers in global civil society from a political consciousness first shaped through South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle and further informed by his years in exile.

He was organising against Apartheid from the age of 15. In 1986 he was charged by the government with violating state-of-emergency regulations. He went underground and then fled into exile in the UK, where he studied at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. Exile did not create his commitment to justice, it formed part of, and complemented, a consciousness already forged at home.

From anti-apartheid activism in South Africa, through exile, return and beyond, Kumi Naidoo has carried a lifelong commitment to justice into global human rights and environmental roles.

After returning to South Africa in 1990, he helped with the legalisation and registration of the ANC and later served in senior public-information and electoral roles relating to the country's historic 1994 elections.

He then carried that grounding to the top of global civil society. He was Secretary General of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, the global alliance of civil-society organisations, from 1998 to 2008; then he became the first person from the Global South to lead Greenpeace International, serving as Executive Director from 2009 to 2016; and later, Secretary General of Amnesty International from 2018 to 2020.

Three of the world's most influential civil-society institutions, spanning citizen participation, environmental justice and human rights, each placed him at their head. He currently serves as Global Ambassador for Africans Rising for Justice, Peace and Dignity, a pan-African movement.

Across these roles, his leadership has connected grassroots organising in South Africa with decades of global work in human rights, civil society and environmental justice.

The thread running through that journey is a commitment to justice rooted in the anti-Apartheid struggle and deepened through his experience of exile.

His life and career are proof enough that an activist formed in an African struggle, and tested by exile, can lead the world's most influential civil-society organisations rather than only take part in them.

SOUTH AFRICA

KUMI NAIDOO

"My body was in the UK but my heart and soul were in South Africa."



Born a refugee but changing lives of others

BURUNDI–MALAWI

INNOCENT MAGAMBI

"We recognise that durable protection includes the ability of refugees to support themselves and participate fully in society."

Innocent Magambi spent the first 27 years of his life as a refugee dependent on emergency food handouts, but was then offered a scholarship for a college education.

This was a massive turning point. Based at Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi at the time, he decided to channel his energies into projects designed to improve living standards for people in and around the camp while attending college, which became the basis of his non-profit, There is Hope.

Of Burundian heritage, Magambi was born a refugee and lived in camps across four countries before arriving at Malawi's only official refugee camp, located in Dowa District, about 41km north of the capital, Lilongwe.

Magambi led There is Hope for 15 years, changing the lives of thousands of refugees as well as those of Malawians in host communities, through a mix of educational scholarships, vocational training and job creation.

His exit was as deliberate as his founding of the enterprise. A committed believer in leadership succession, he handed an institution of 53 staff to a team of local professionals, having built something designed to outlast him, which few leaders attempt and fewer still test.

He now leads Inua Advocacy, which he set up to address refugees' complaints, hold service providers to account and campaign for better refugee law.

Since 2021, he has pushed to reform Malawi's 1989 Refugees Act, with the aim of helping to overhaul a system that leaves refugees dependent on aid with one that lets them work, run businesses and contribute to their host country.

Inua is among the organisations whose advocacy has shaped a new Refugee Bill. The Malawi Law Commission completed its review of public feedback in June 2026, and the draft is expected to be released later this year.

In November 2024 the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) granted Inua Advocacy Observer Status. This carries real leverage: attendance at the Commission's public sessions, direct engagement with member states, and the right to submit shadow reports countering official accounts of compliance with the African Charter.

The timing sharpened the point. In the same year that Malawi's refugee department banned Inua's operations, the African Union's human-rights body elevated its cause.

In his book *Refugee For Life*, he recounts not just his refugee journey, but also his efforts to improve the prospects of an entire community.

In addition to his lived experience, both as a recipient of charity and an orchestrator of development, Magambi incorporates lessons learned from fellowship programmes such as the Obama Foundation's *Leaders Africa* and the *African Visionary Fellowship*, run by the Segal Family Foundation.

A refugee rights activist at heart, Magambi enjoys inspiring people to see the bigger picture and to reach for their full potential. He is a regular public speaker and has been featured by international media outlets, such as *The Guardian* (UK), DW and the BBC World Service.

The uneducated boy who rose to save lives during Covid



SOUTH SUDAN–SOUTH AFRICA

DR. EMMANUEL TABAN

"I know what it means for a young person's future to depend on someone opening a door."

Dr Emmanuel Taban is a South African pulmonologist of South Sudanese origin who arrived as a refugee with almost no schooling, became a pioneer in critical Covid-19 care, and now invests in the education and skills that opened his own path.

As a teenager he fled Sudan after being detained by security forces, travelling for about 18 months through six countries, much of it on foot, before reaching South Africa at the age of 17.

He is a refugee who arrived with almost no schooling, pioneered critical Covid-19 care, runs expert seminars, and facilitates educational opportunities for the vulnerable.

There, with the shelter and support of Comboni Catholic missionaries, he began formal schooling. He went on to qualify as a doctor at MEDUNSA (the Medical University of Southern Africa), now called the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), named after Sefako Makgatho, a prominent South African educator and the second president of the African National Congress (ANC).

Following further training through bursaries, he became a pulmonologist – a specialist in respiratory systems – in 2018.

His defining contribution came during Covid-19. Working on the frontline, and contracting the disease himself, he pioneered the use of therapeutic bronchoscopy on critically ill, hypoxaemic Covid-19 patients, identifying fibrinous mucus plugs and developing a technique credited with saving lives and influencing treatment.

He was named among *New African*'s '100 Most Influential Africans' in 2020 and won the *Daily Maverick*'s African Person of the Year award in 2021. He was also a 2022 Aurora Prize nominee. In 2024, Rotary International gave him a Paul Harris award for his humanitarian and medical contributions during the pandemic.

He directs the Immunology, Lung and Heart Institute in Gauteng, oversees ICU services at Midstream Mediclinic, and founded SanoCare Breath of Hope, whose podcast and webinar series brings specialists to colleagues and the public.

In 2022 he founded the Emmanuel Taban Foundation, which pays school fees so children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including refugees, immigrants and orphans, can attend well-resourced schools. About 21 students have been sponsored so far, two of whom are expected to graduate in medicine soon.

In Mamelodi East, the foundation supports mentorship and practical skills alongside the Comboni Sisters. He is an ambassador for the literacy charity Rally to Read, provides pro bono care in rural Mpumalanga, and wrote the memoir *The Boy Who Never Gave Up*.



Love recognises no borders

BURUNDI-RWANDA

MARGUERITE BARANKITSE

"Love made me an inventor."

From the start, Marguerite Barankitse seems to have dedicated her life to the care and protection of children, both when she was home in Burundi, and later in exile, in Rwanda.

Her first encounter with horror came in 1993, when during the Burundi Civil War she tried to hide 72 Hutu neighbours. They were discovered and killed in front of her. She was spared because of her ethnicity, as a Tutsi, and she managed to protect 25 children.

She responded to the hate with acts of courage and love. First of all, she founded Maison Shalom, which over three decades grew into a network of schools, health services and social programmes.

Its REMA Hospital has treated more than 80,000 patients and was deliberately designed to reject the ethnic divisions behind the massacre she witnessed. The University of Notre Dame credits her with saving more than 50,000 children, and her institution now reaches vulnerable communities across Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC through education, job training, microfinance and medical care.

In 2015, after opposing President Pierre Nkurunziza's third term, she was placed on a death list and fled into exile in Rwanda as a refugee.

There she opened École Sainte-Anne de Kigali, an International Baccalaureate school that welcomes children from all backgrounds, and the Oasis of Peace community centre, alongside a social enterprise that helps fund her humanitarian work while creating employment for refugee youths. They come from Mahama camp and the surrounding communities. It was established in 2015 to house refugees fleeing political instability and violence in Burundi, later also accommodating refugees from DRC.

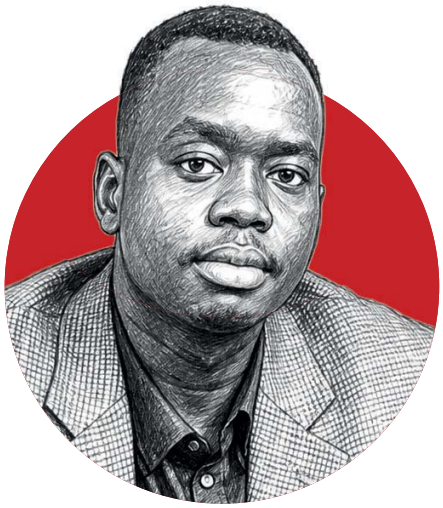
Beyond Rwanda, the Maggy Barankitse Foundation in Belgium and Love's Invention in the US connect international support to the work on the ground.

She is a refugee and massacre survivor who has saved tens of thousands of children, working across borders.

Barankitse has been globally honoured. She received UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award in 2005 and in 2016 became the inaugural laureate of the $1.1m Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity. She has also received the Four Freedoms Award and the Opus Prize, and holds eight honorary degrees.

She speaks openly about the massacre and about her own refugee status, and sums up the whole arc in a single line: love made her an inventor.

From the Lost Boys to coffee king



SOUTH SUDAN–US

MANYANG REATH KHER

"Just because you are a refugee doesn't mean you lost your marketable skills."

A former refugee turned coffee entrepreneur, Manyang Reath Kher is working to put South Sudan on the map as a source of specialty-coffee, using trade rather than aid to raise incomes in communities shaped by displacement and conflict.

Displaced at the age of three during Sudan's civil war, he became one of the children known as the 'Lost Boys of Sudan', fleeing with thousands of others across East Africa towards Ethiopia. He subsequently spent 13 years in refugee camps along the Ethiopian border.

In 1987, government-backed militias and northern forces raided southern Sudanese villages, burning homes and killing families. Young boys who were tending cattle away from their homes fled into the wilderness. They walked over 1,000 miles across East Africa toward Ethiopia, facing starvation, dehydration, wild animals, and military attacks. Their epic adventure is recounted in the non-fiction book, *The Journey of the Lost Boys* by Joan Hecht.

At 17, he was resettled in the US, where he began a new life. He earned a degree at the University of Richmond and founded the Humanity Helping Sudan project while still a student, building an organisation before he had finished his own education.

What sets his work apart is the financing model. Rather than depend on grant cycles, he launched 734 Coffee, a for-profit social enterprise named after the coordinates of the main camp where he grew up.

According to the Refugee Investment Network, 734 Coffee commits 80% of its profits to refugee scholarships and education. It sources coffee from growers in Gambela, Ethiopia, including cooperatives employing South Sudanese refugees, as well as from small-scale farmers in Yei and Buma in South Sudan.

Alongside the coffee business, Humanity Helping Sudan Project runs wider livelihood and community-support programmes. The organisation reports having reached more than 40,000 displaced people in the Gambela region through agricultural and fishing support, community gardens and education initiatives.

His newest work scales the same logic from a company to a country. He is spearheading a $10m South Sudan coffee development initiative designed to establish South Sudan as a recognised origin in the global specialty-coffee market. This includes advancing a South Sudan Coffee Auction in Nairobi and building international market links for South Sudanese producers.

The ambition is to attract investment, strengthen the coffee supply chain, improve market access for farmers and create jobs, as well a bring together producers, investors, government and international partners around a longer-term vision for South Sudan's agricultural economy.

He also serves as an Adjunct Professor at George Mason University, where he has lectured on human rights since 2017.



SIERRA LEONE–US

ISHMAEL BEAH

Voice of the child-soldiers

"Former child soldiers are not a lost generation, as most people would like to believe."

Ishmael Beah is a Sierra Leonean author and children's rights advocate whose memoirs of being a child soldier became the definitive first-person account of what war does to children.

Separated from his family and forced to flee during Sierra Leone's civil war, which displaced more than two million people, he was conscripted as a child soldier before rehabilitation and resettlement in the US. He published his first memoir when he was only 26.

What sets his book apart is its reach. *A Long Way Gone* became an instant international bestseller, reaching number one on the *New York Times* list, and was named by *Time* magazine among the top 10 nonfiction books of 2007. It has been translated into more than 40 languages, with sales reported at over 2.6m copies.

Widely cited as the most-read first-person testimony of child soldiering, it is credited with elevating African voices in the global media. Before Beah, the narrative on child soldiers was largely a product of NGO reports. After him, the narrative gained agency – the point of view of a child impacted by war was centred, with a name, a voice and a bestseller, and the terms of the policy conversation were significantly reshaped.

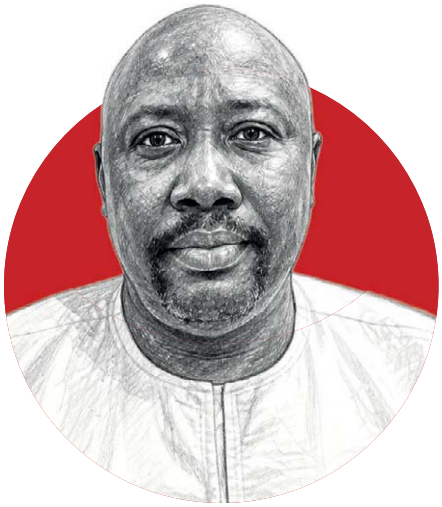
He has since built on that foundation through sustained international advocacy work involving children affected by war, reframing conflict-affected youth as leaders and contributors rather than permanent victims needing saving.

Beah is the author of the child-soldier testimony, *A Long Way Gone*, which changed how the media and the public view war's youngest victims.

Now an established author, he has published two novels, *Radiance of Tomorrow* and *Little Family*, which extend his literary standing well beyond a single testimony.

His own path, from family separation and conscription to rehabilitation and resettlement, is the foundation of a public life spent ensuring that war's youngest victims are understood as recoverable human beings with futures.

From a petty trader to an industrialist



Fomba Trawally is a former refugee who returned to post-war Liberia with $200 and built the country's first paper and toiletries factory, thereby laying many myths to rest, including about the capabilities of displaced people as well as the claim that manufacturing cannot take root in fragile economies.

He seems to have inherited his business acumen from his mother, Kumba Bendu, who sold peppers to keep her children fed and in school. When she died, her eldest son Kumna left school and sold flip-flops from a wheelbarrow to support his siblings.

He made the transition from a refugee with $200 to Liberia's first paper and toiletries manufacturer.

In 1990 he fled Liberia with its civil war to The Gambia, where he lived as a refugee for about two years, trading and taking odd jobs to get by. He came home to Monrovia with $200 in his pocket, money that he says came from a UNHCR resettlement programme for returning refugees, and put it to work.

What sets him apart is the leap he made from trader to manufacturer. Spotting a gap in a war-stripped market, he began importing the rubber sandals Liberians urgently needed, and in 1993 established Kumba Bendu & Son, named after his mother, and expanded into cosmetics, paper and household goods.

In 2010 he made the move few post-war traders attempt, founding National Toiletries Inc., Liberia's first paper and toiletries manufacturing company. Producing at home directly substitutes for imports and keeps value and jobs inside the country.

The company reports supplying more than 1,500 businesses and exporting to four markets, including Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

His contribution has been recognised at the highest levels. In 2008 President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf honoured him for creating thousands of jobs for Liberians, and in 2018 he was recognised at the Africa Economy Builders awards in Abidjan for his contribution to Liberia's economic growth.

His story demonstrates that a returning refugee with almost nothing can build not just a trading operation but a factory, producing goods at home in a post-conflict economy and selling them across the sub-region.

COTE D'IVOIRE–THE GAMBIA

FOMBA TRAWALLY

"This recognition [referring to his honours] is not just for me; it's for Liberia and Liberians."



Turning a refugee camp into a global culture stage

DRC–MALAWI

TRÉSOR NZENGU MPAUNI

"From desperation to hope and celebration, that's the whole spirit behind Tumaini."

Trésor Nzengu Mpauni, the hip-hop artist, slam poet and social entrepreneur known as Menes la Plume, turned a refugee camp into a global stage, proof-positive that displaced communities can be artistic and produce box-office culture.

A rising artist in Lubumbashi, he was forced to flee the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2008 due to political pressure and his use of art to raise awareness. He arrived at Malawi's Dzaleka refugee camp, where refugees were known by a dismissive label.

In 2012, he founded Tumaini Letu (*Our Hope* in Kiswahili) – a non-profit organisation which uses arts and culture to promote cultural exchange and peace between refugees and host communities.

In 2014, he crowdfunded the first Tumaini Festival, explicitly to flip the refugee narrative from passive neediness to creativity and economic agency. The annual event is the world's first international festival taking place in a refugee camp.

Rather than culture being regarded as a form of relief provided to refugees, the displaced in this case produce a form of culture that the world shares in. The festival generates income for camp businesses, bridges refugees and host communities, and draws national and international attention into Dzaleka on the refugees' own terms.

The 2020 Sharjah award citation put the event's contribution to the camp economy at about $150,000 a year. Tumaini Letu reports that over its first decade the festival has drawn more than 230,000 attendees and featured 615 performing acts from more than 25 countries, with an estimated global media reach of 40-61m people.

He turned a refugee camp into a global festival stage, proof-positive that displaced communities can produce culture, commerce and dignity.

Awards have followed. Chosen from some 700 applicants, Mpauni was named the World Bank Africa Region's Social Inclusion Hero in 2018; Tumaini Letu won the $136,000 2020 Sharjah International Award for Refugee Advocacy and Support; and Mpauni served as a refugee co-sponsor of the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019.

His work is proof of the concept that displacement need not extinguish creative and economic capacity, and a refugee-founded festival can command a global audience while building livelihoods inside the camp that hosts it.

From scratching a living to global agric expert



RWANDA–UGANDA

DR AGNES KALIBATA

"I learnt that it's actually possible to use agriculture to fight poverty."

Dr Agnes Kalibata turned a refugee childhood spent farming to survive into an agricultural transformation agenda, first for Rwanda, then for the continent, then for the world.

She takes no credit for it. Her mantra is simple: it takes a village to raise a child, and it takes the whole of government to deliver the transformation of a people.

Born to Rwandan refugee parents who had fled the post-independence violence of the early 1960s, she was raised among displaced Rwandans in a Ugandan refugee settlement where the family farmed out of necessity.

To whom a lot has been given, a lot is expected. Dr Kalibata sees her life through this lens, and feels she owes a great deal to the people who work hard every day to build a livelihood out of very little.

That childhood expertise, and later years in agricultural research, formed her conviction that agriculture, properly invested in, is the fastest route out of poverty for rural and poor communities.

What sets her apart is treating the smallholder farm as a business, not simply as a subsistence source. As Rwanda's Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources from 2008 to 2014, she drove the Crop Intensification and Land Use Consolidation programmes, credited with helping lift more than a million Rwandans out of poverty and moving the country to food security within about half a decade.

Rather than treating small farmers as aid recipients, she led efforts to treat their work as commercial operations, professionalising input supply, extension and cooperatives so that private capital had something to underwrite.

She carried that idea to AGRA, which she led as President from 2014 to 2025, backing a market-driven push to put agriculture at the centre of government priorities across 11 countries.

In December 2019, the UN Secretary-General appointed her Special Envoy for the 2021 Food Systems Summit. For over two years, 148 countries convened national food systems dialogues with more than 100,000 participants.

Her honours include the Yara Prize (now the Africa Food Prize) in 2012 and the US National Academy of Sciences' Public Welfare Medal in 2019.

Now in early retirement, she is focused on policy reform for innovation and Africa's off-farm economy, which she argues is the only way agriculture will reduce poverty and create jobs at scale.



Turning a 10 birr slave wage into a pan-African resort brand

ETHIOPIA–US

TADIWOS GETACHEW BELETE

"We want to show the world that an African brand can be as good as or even better than any other brand."

Former refugee turned entrepreneur Tadiwos Getachew Belete created Kuriftu, Ethiopia's leading homegrown resort brand, thus proving that domestic leisure tourism can be big business, and creating thousands of jobs along the way.

Forced to leave Ethiopia at the age of 16 amid famine and political upheaval in the early 1970s, he ended up in a refugee camp in Sudan, working as a household servant for a 10-birr wage.

He resettled in the US with the help of the Catholic Church and rebuilt his life in Boston, working as a hairstylist for 19 years. In 2002, he returned home with a plan to invest in his country's largely untapped commercial potential. He opened the Boston Day Spa in Addis Ababa in 2002, backed by a client who invested after he produced a feasibility study, then founded Kuriftu Resort & Spa in Bishoftu.

Through parent company Boston Partners PLC he grew Kuriftu into a chain, spanning Adama, Langano, Semera, Awash Falls and Entoto Park, covering luxury resorts, wellness, adventure tourism and family entertainment, alongside the travel-technology arm, Amadeus Ethiopia.

By 2019, Kuriftu ran 11 businesses employing about 3,000 people, all trained in hospitality. That year, he opened Ethiopia's first water park, a 70m birr project financed by the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia.

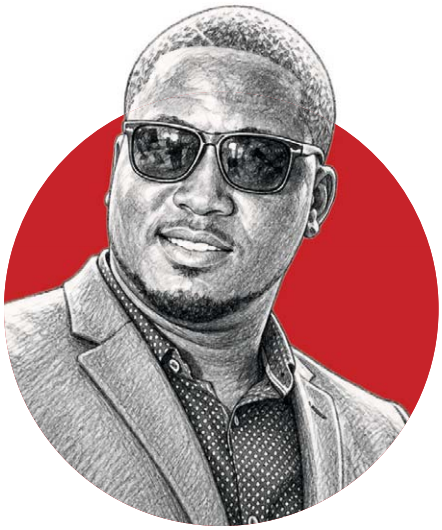
His newest work takes the brand across the continent. In 2025 he inaugurated the Kuriftu Resort and African Village in Addis Ababa, billed as the country's largest resort, with 163 rooms and 54 villas, each designed around an African nation.

He went from a Sudanese refugee camp to creating Ethiopia's leading homegrown resort brand, employing thousands and building a pan-African hospitality chain.

The Village embodies his pan-African vision of connecting African cultures, businesses and communities through hospitality. The project is projected to create 800 jobs.

Beyond Ethiopia, he has opened a seaside restaurant in Djibouti and taken a 50-year lease on Moucha Island, positioning Kuriftu as a pan-African chain rather than an Ethiopian one, and showing how African-led investment can transform an industry and create institutions that last.

The hip-hop king



SIERRA LEONE–US

KAO DENERO

"I am a Sierra Leonean who lived through the civil war and was even a refugee in Guinea."

Kao Denero is a former refugee turned rapper, label founder and government envoy who gave post-war Sierra Leone's youth a voice and a music industry, and now represents the country's creative economy abroad.

Born Amara Dennis Turay in Lungi, he came of age dodging rebel bullets in wartime Freetown. By his own account, he lived as a refugee in Guinea during the civil war before moving to the US as a refugee.

The experience, he writes in his biography, provided the genesis of the 'Kao Denero' persona. He later told the story of the war on his album *Da Blood Diamond Kid Story.*

He is a refugee who returned to give post-war Sierra Leone a music industry, and now promotes its creative economy to the world.

He was passionate about music from his childhood days and loved rap music and drawing inspiration from artists such as Tupac Shakur and Bob Marley.

His special ability has been in institution-building. Through his Black Leo label and production company, based in Sierra Leone, he helped provide infrastructure for hip-hop and its youth culture, which had no organised industry to sustain it, mentoring a generation of artists in the process.

He released his first album *Black Leo 4 Life* in 2003 but he came into the limelight after his second album, called *Stories From Freetown.* In 2009, he won an SLMTV Music Award in Maryland, US. He was also nominated in the 'African Rapper of the Year' category by the 256 HipHop Awards in 2020. Kao Denero won the African entertainment award as the best hip-hop artist of the year in 2021.

His 2005 album *King of Africa* inspired his moniker 'King of Freetown'. His performances filled the National Stadium repeatedly for more than a decade, even drawing about 40,000 people to a single launch in 2009.

He has employed that reach to public causes: he wrote and performed *Mama en Pikin* for the MamaYe maternal and newborn health campaign, served as a Peace Ambassador, campaigned against corruption, and pressed the government to create skills centres for unemployed youth.

In March 2021 President Julius Maada Bio appointed him Special Envoy and Ambassador for Entertainment and Investment, which he describes as the first time a sitting President had created an office for the entertainment industry.

The role is to promote Sierra Leone's business and entertainment interests abroad, and identify investment opportunities – which he has pursued with investors in Dubai and the US.

Inside the country, he has set up an industry board and a peace committee to settle disputes between artists, and he has championed a local-content playlist policy for radio, clubs and hotels, a national studio, and the Back to My Roots Festival, which links the diaspora and African Americans to Sierra Leone.

His twelfth album, *Heroes* (2024), features artists from across Africa, and in 2025 he was named Best Male Hip-Hop/Rap Artist at the Africa Golden Awards in Nairobi.

The number of displaced persons in Africa is around 50m but this population, far from being passively dependent, has used various innovations to generate production, trade and wealth. Report by **Isaac Kwaku Fokuo**, Curator and Founder – Amahoro Coalition and **Tito Mbathi**, Senior Strategy Innovator – Amahoro Coalition.

How Africa's displaced are generating billions

On a crowded street in Mogadishu, Fatima, a livestock trader, doesn't deal in cash. Instead, she coordinates a sophisticated export network to the Gulf entirely on her phone. She's not an outlier; she's a pioneer in one of the world's most innovative and overlooked markets.

For too long, the world outside the continent has viewed Africa's more than 50m displaced persons through a narrow humanitarian lens. We see tents and aid trucks, not consumers and innovators. Institutional capital has followed suit, ignoring a massive, concentrated, and underserved market generating billions in annual economic activity.

This perspective is a profound misjudgement of one of the 21st century's most significant opportunities for market transformation.

For better or worse, the old model is collapsing. Traditional funding sources have retreated from providing support, including a 44% drop in G7 aid commitments alone. While challenging, this is a potential turning point. There is now a funding vacuum, presenting a major opportunity for market-based solutions that can deliver development outcomes alongside sustainable commercial returns.

This shift from aid dependency to market-driven approaches is already happening. An example of this can be seen in mobile money. Many fragile countries (e.g. Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali) have mobile money adoption rates which far exceed regional and continental averages. This isn't a coincidence. When traditional systems fail, communities rapidly adopt new economic models.

Somalia exemplifies this transformation. Telecommunications companies filled the void left by a collapsed banking sector, creating one of the world's most advanced mobile money ecosystems. Today, 82% of Somalis use mobile money compared to just 9% with traditional bank accounts.

The country's innovation extends beyond payments, as many large businesses operate through multi-hub models – maintaining formal registration in stable countries while conducting informal operations in fragile areas.

Displacement brings large populations together, creating a critical mass of consumers and labour that wasn't previously achievable in diffuse, rural settings.

Combining this with clan-based trust mechanisms and technology integration has allowed many firms to scale. One example of this can be seen in the livestock trade, which operates through sophisticated mobile-based ordering systems and WhatsApp coordination networks cutting across borders.

The logistics sector in fragile contexts is also bridging the informality gap. Modern logistics infrastructure serves humanitarian needs across the continent, dwarfing many commercial operations in scale and complexity.

The World Food Programme alone manages over 600 warehouses globally, coordinating multi-modal transport across challenging terrains using centralised coordination systems and diversified delivery mechanisms.

These networks represent ready-made infrastructure that private partners can leverage, transforming humanitarian supply chains into commercial pathways for market access.

The concentration factor

The diverse opportunities for investment in areas of fragility are interconnected through economic concentration. Displacement brings large populations together, creating a critical mass of consumers and labour that wasn't previously achievable in diffuse, rural settings.

These displacement areas function as de facto Special Economic Zones (SEZs), sharing the fundamental characteristics of concentrated demand, available labour, and the potential for streamlined regulatory frameworks, making them ripe for investment.

Jordan's refugee integration model demonstrates this potential. The country established 11 SEZs near major refugee populations, creating a direct link between displacement and economic opportunity. Companies operating in these zones and meeting a refugee employment threshold of 15% gain preferential EU market access.

This simple but powerful policy demonstrates the commercial viability of displacement-focused economic zones, generating over 90,000 work permits and contributing to manufactured export growth.

This concentration effect plays out across the continent. Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp demonstrates how displacement-driven concentration can generate substantial economic activity without established policy frameworks.

With over 200,000 refugees and host community members, population densities exceed 1,000 people per square kilometre. This concentration of refugees creates $56m in annual economic activity, and has permanently increased



the regional GDP by 3.4%. These figures illustrate how concentrated populations drive economic growth, regardless of legal status.

To succeed in catalysing private sector investment in fragile contexts, we must move beyond a project-by-project mentality and adopt an ecosystem development approach. This means creating symbiotic relationships where improving consumer welfare increases spending power, driving demand for private sector partners while advancing development outcomes.

This approach requires three core elements: Value chains that connect displaced people as both producers and consumers, leveraging their skills while accessing host-region markets; blended finance mechanisms that de-risk initial investments with patient capital, building a bridge to commercial viability; and regulatory innovation that enables, rather than constrains, economic participation.

This ecosystem-based approach has borne fruit in the financial sector. MyBucks Banking Corporation, for example, established the world's first branch in a refugee camp in Malawi, achieving profitability in its first year by simply accepting UNHCR registration cards as valid identification. By removing a major access barrier, MyBucks integrated itself into the local economic ecosystem, generating a sustainable business model.

This success has been replicated at scale: Equity Bank, one of the continent's premier financial institutions, has partnered with major international organisations such as the IFC and FSD Africa to provide banking services to displaced populations. Such collaborations demonstrate how private finance can leverage partnerships to de-risk investments and create a larger, more impactful financial ecosystem.

Similarly, Inkomoko, Africa's largest lender to displaced populations, has disbursed $7.7m with a 95%+ repayment rate, creating over 40,000 jobs. Inkomoko's approach highlights the power of blended finance, using patient capital to build a bridge to commercial viability while connecting displaced people as both producers and consumers in a functioning value chain.

The next frontier

As traditional funding shrinks, private sector creativity becomes essential for developing sustainable market opportunities that support livelihoods and economic integration.

This represents a fundamental shift from dependency-based aid models towards market-driven approaches that create lasting economic value for both displaced populations and host communities.

Organisations like the Amahoro Coalition are pioneering this transformation by acting as a trust bridge, strategically connecting the private sector with displaced communities. By providing private businesses with access to curated networks of skilled individuals and helping them see the talent and business opportunities within these populations, Amahoro Coalition facilitates market access.

The coalition also ensures a symbiotic relationship by engaging community leaders to co-create opportunities and advocate for the economic rights of displaced people through forums and intensive training, creating sustainable economic ecosystems.

Through such partnerships, displaced populations gain access to economic opportunities as both consumers and producers, while private sector partners discover new markets and talent pools. Supporting the economic participation of displaced populations is not just moral, but a commercially viable and scalable solution for Africa's growth. By turning aid dependency into economic opportunity, we can unlock a new frontier of prosperity for all. ■



Goat traders at a busy market in Garissa, Kenya

While we celebrate the achievements of Africa's forcibly displaced people, we must not lose sight of the continuing battle that thousands of Africans face in the current anti-migrant climate in many Western countries and the narrowing possibilities of finding safe refuge. One of the most contentious developments is the increasing use of third countries to deport migrants, often to the very places they initially fled from. Donald Trump's administration is striking deals with African governments to accept migrants expelled from the US. These 'third-country deportations' raise questions over diplomatic incentives, legal protections and the fate of those caught in the middle. Now, the process is being questioned in the Supreme Court. **Jamila Versi** reports.

That was never home: Trump's third-country deportations to Africa



Rabbiatu Kuyateh, a Sierra Leonean woman, had spent three decades living in the US. She worked as a nurse in Maryland for more than 20 years, raising an American-born son and regularly reporting to US immigration authorities. An immigration judge had granted her protection against deportation to Sierra Leone, on the basis that she had fled the country in fear of persecution.

But in November 2025, her life changed in an instant. After being detained during a regular US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) check-in in July, she was unexpectedly deported to Accra, Ghana.

Stark footage published by the investigative journalism consortium *Forbidden Stories* shows her struggling as she is dragged by officials across the lobby of a hotel in the Ghanaian capital.

From Ghana, she was forcibly repatriated – back to Sierra Leone, the very country she had fled.

Kuyateh is one of 536 identified people deported from the US to African countries between January 2025 and August 2026, according to a Human Rights Watch report published in October 2026, based on ICE data.

Under Trump's immigration crackdown, at least 25,000 people have been deported to third countries through an extensive network of so-called 'third-country deportation agreements'. These allow the US to remove migrants to countries other than their own, including individuals whom American courts have found would face persecution or torture if returned home.

> **"It is the first time in US history that the State Department has made deportation its top priority."**

Africa has become an important focus of this diplomatic operation. According to internal US State Department documents obtained by the *Forbidden Stories* investigation, Washington had approached 49 of the continent's 54 countries about receiving deportees by March 2026.

The situation raises significant questions about African sovereignty, diplomatic bargaining – and who is responsible for protecting people once they arrive.

A complex network

For Édouard Perrin, editor-in-chief at *Forbidden Stories*, investigating the agreements has revealed a vast diplomatic operation stretching far beyond immigration enforcement inside the United States.

Their investigation began with the arrest of Salvadoran journalist Mario Guevara who, while covering a protest against immigration enforcement in Atlanta (US), was taken into custody by ICE. Guevara was subsequently held in custody for 100 days, before being deported to El Salvador, whereupon he was released by the authorities.

Forbidden Stories, whose mission is to continue investigations when journalists are threatened or silenced, began examining the wider treatment of journalists reporting on immigration, which led them to a complicated case in Cameroon.

Four journalists attempting to investigate a facility holding US deportees in Yaoundé were themselves detained. *Forbidden Stories* and its partners subsequently continued the reporters' work, tracking down two women who had been interviewed by the journalists before their detention, and published their accounts, which provided evidence of

what the US third-country deportation policy means in practice.

"We saw the potential for a collaboration nearly instantly, because we are talking about a global policy with multiple countries that are taking part of this," Perrin tells me.

The Deportation Project, as they call it, became an investigation involving 72 journalists from 26 different global news organisations.

Journalists examined diplomatic documents and memoranda of understanding, tracked flights, and worked with data-collecting NGOs and local reporters to establish what happened to deportees after they reached their destinations.

Some arrangements with third countries were publicly acknowledged; others remained secret. Even where documents were available, they frequently offered little detail about their implementation, making the system difficult to understand and scrutinise.

"Some of them were never made public. Some of them were not acknowledged. For instance, in the case of Mexico, which is where the largest number of people were expelled to, the government adamantly denies having been in any kind of agreement with the US."

The investigation identified agreements with at least 35 countries, predominantly in Africa and the Americas, but also extending to Europe and Asia.

Deportation as foreign policy

The investigation identified that the US government "flagged and dedicated" at least $410m to the third-country deportation project, including direct payments to governments and funding for international organisations.

Perrin emphasises the distinction between money earmarked and money spent. Not all planned expenditure could be verified as having been disbursed.

The State Department's new Office of Remigration, which oversees negotiations with foreign governments, is playing a substantial role. The office forms part of a striking transformation within a department historically responsible for refugee assistance and resettlement.

The term *remigration* has strong associations with Europe's far-right movements, where it has been used to advocate the mass removal of migrants, including people with citizenship rights.

The adoption of such terminology within an official US government office marks a significant departure from the State Department's previous emphasis on refugee protection.

Yael Schacher, director for the Americas and Europe at Refugees International, argues that understanding the third-country deportation policy requires looking at it through precisely that lens.

"The Trump administration is very clear about this. It's a purge. An ethnic purge. There were a lot of African asylum seekers that came to the US during the Biden administration, same thing with the Latin Americans, and those people are being targeted for sure.

"The Trump administration really wants to portray what it's doing as fixing all the wrong things that the Biden administration did."

Although a State Department policy, it

Below: A protester (l) and security guard confront each other outside Delaney Hall, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centre, in Newark, New Jersey on 6 June 2026



is immigration enforcement that must be thought of as "the element really driving it. It's the first time in US history that the State Department has made deportation its top priority," argues Schacher.

"It's a department that used to provide humanitarian support for refugees in third countries; the purpose of that money has been flipped on its head."

Schacher helped establish Third Country Deportation Watch, a joint project with Human Rights First that monitors the agreements, deportations and associated legal challenges.

She identifies two overlapping dimensions of the policy: immigration enforcement and foreign policy. Beyond physically removing people, she argues, the threat of deportation to an unfamiliar country can discourage others from pursuing asylum claims.

"It's using the threat to induce fear in the immigrant population in the United States, and to get people to give up their claims and self-deport. So it's not only being used as a very real deportation tool to remove people, but as a threat," says Schacher.

Alma David, a US immigration lawyer representing people subjected to third-country deportations, highlights how the portrayal of African destinations can also undermine deportees' credibility.

"Part of what's happening is very deliberately making it clear that the reason why people are afraid, and why they're complaining, is because they're being sent to a place that's less developed than where they want to be.

"It uses this whole idea of fear to undermine their credibility. Like, if you were really that afraid, wouldn't you just want to be *anywhere* than in your own country?"

The policy's impact has the potential to extend far beyond the number actually transferred to Africa.

What are African governments agreeing to?

The bilateral arrangements made between the US and African countries differ significantly in their financial terms, restrictions and consequences for deportees.

In Ghana, the arrangement was initially described by Foreign Minister Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa as being in the spirit of "pan-African empathy", though the diplomatic context in which negotiations took place has raised questions about Washington's leverage.

"You have a chronology where on the 1st of August 2025, the US imposed a 15% tariff on Ghanaian imports; the same day, the two governments exchanged

Below: Demonstrators protesting against US President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's plan to end USAID outside the US Capitol on 5 February 2025





diplomatic notes concerning the reception of deportees," says Perrin. On 15 September, the Foreign Minister said that Ghana's decision was based purely on humanitarian principles and not a quid pro quo.

On 25 September, Washington allowed five-year visas for Ghanaians again; in November, they lifted the tariffs on cocoa from Ghana. "It's not a smoking gun, but it gives you quite a good sense of the landscape of the negotiations and ...what kind of framework was built between the countries."

Elsewhere, the terms of the agreements are more explicit.

In January 2026, Sierra Leone agreed to consider receiving up to 300 nationals from other West African countries annually, supported by approximately $1.5m in US funding for "reception services", according to documentation assembled by Third Country Deportation Watch.

The documents asserted that "the ECOWAS citizens removed to Sierra Leone would not be subjected to persecution or torture in Sierra Leone" or in "any country to which the Government of Sierra Leone may further transfer them."

Nonetheless, Sierra Leone has functioned as a transit point, with deportees informed that they are not allowed to remain, while some are rapidly returned to their countries of origin, despite holding US protection against such deportation.

Eswatini agreed to accommodate up to 160 deportees, many of whom have been detained in a maximum-security correctional facility. Legal advocates allege they have been held "without charges, due process, or meaningful access to counsel", although lawyers have now secured a court ruling granting access to detainees. Eswatini received $5.1m in US funding intended to support migration and border management.

Rwanda's agreement provides for up to 250 individuals to be moved to the country in exchange for $7.5m. An earlier transfer of an Iraqi refugee allegedly involved a $100,000 payment. A US Senate Foreign Relations Committee minority report also raised questions about the substantial costs of transferring small numbers of people under the arrangement.

In Burundi, negotiations reportedly stalled until funding of $8m was arranged for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to assist with the reception and onward return of deportees.

These examples illustrate a patchwork of arrangements rather than a single African deportation model. Some countries facilitate rapid onward removal from the third country; others detain deportees; while a few have agreements that envisage opportunities to remain.

"What we have to keep in mind," says Perrin, "is that at the very start of the second Trump administration, they froze or suppressed a huge number of subsidies – to start with, USAID programmes.

"And then you see some instances where the programmes start again once the countries begin receiving deportees. You can map all this information and then you have a kind of indication of what is going on."

"What the Trump administration has been extremely good at is taking advantage of certain parts of the law. Nobody has bothered to try and change them because they have never caused problems for anyone."

But beyond the financial incentives lie questions about African governments' own responsibilities. Their participation is not simply a matter of hosting US deportation flights: it also involves decisions about detention, access to asylum, legal status and whether people can remain or must leave. And what happens when people cannot safely return home, yet have no established legal right to remain in the country receiving them?

From protection to deportation

What is particularly troubling about many of these deportations is that the individuals involved had already obtained legal protection against removal to their countries of origin.

Many in the US hold a status known as withholding of removal. Unlike asylum, it does not provide a direct route to permanent residence. Instead, it prevents the US from deporting to a particular country where an immigration judge has determined they would probably face persecution.

"The judge will say, I'm ordering you deported to your country of origin, but I'm withholding your deportation. Because right now, the circumstances are such that there's a greater than 50% chance that you can't go back. But maybe one day in the future, things will improve," explains US immigration lawyer Alma David.

"What that meant in practice, in the past, for many decades, was that if you got 'withholding', it was like you got residence in the United States."

Although people would not have permanent legal status, many would begin to build lives, have children and buy houses.

"You were essentially told you would live here forever. At the end of your court hearing with an immigration judge, they would say, welcome to America."

The protection, however, applies to a particular country. It does not automatically prevent deportation somewhere else.

"But all along what the Trump administration has been extremely good at is really taking advantage of those parts of the law that have always been there. Nobody has bothered to try and change them because they never caused any problems for anyone before."

The consequences of that distinction are now becoming apparent across Africa, where people previously protected against removal to their home countries may find themselves detained, left without legal status, or returned to those same countries through an intermediate destination.

Life after deportation

Trump's third-country deportation policy has very human consequences – and often the ordeals begin before deportees even reach African soil.

Human Rights Watch says it has interviewed people who described being shackled at the wrists, waist and ankles during flights lasting more than 18 hours, sometimes without adequate food, water or access to medication. Some told the organisation they were not told their destination until the aircraft landed.

Once in Africa, their experiences have varied considerably, from confinement in hotels and military facilities to indefinite imprisonment and forced onward deportation.

In Sierra Leone, Alma David describes clients who have been held in guesthouses while officials seek travel documents to facilitate their return home.

One of his charges is a young, gay Senegalese man who "has been through hell and back," says David. "He was finally granted withholding of removal in 2023, and managed to get out of US immigration detention, but then he was re-detained and deported to Sierra Leone.

"With the crackdown on homosexuality in Senegal right now, which has reached fever pitch, he's terrified of being sent back, but he's also been told

point-blank that asylum is not an option for him in Sierra Leone."

For those caught within the system, deportation may not mean simply leaving the US, but entering a period of prolonged uncertainty in an unfamiliar country.

As covered, in Eswatini, deportees have allegedly spent months in a maximum-security prison despite having committed no offences in the country receiving them. Their detention and access to legal representation have become the subject of legal challenges. In Cameroon, as documented by Forbidden Stories, some of those deported from the US, despite having protection against removal, are LGBTQ+ individuals who now find themselves in a country where same-sex sexual activity is criminalised, creating further concerns about their safety.

Some have reported being held in crowded conditions, without freedom of movement or adequate access to basic necessities. Others describe being under pressure to return to their home countries, despite fearing persecution there. David also highlights the difficulties facing deportees who require medical treatment, including those with chronic illnesses or psychiatric conditions, and people who had been receiving antidepressant medication in ICE detention but were deported without it.

In Equatorial Guinea, deportees have reportedly been confined to a hotel under armed guard, with limited access to basic necessities and medical treatment. Human Rights Watch has also documented allegations of police violence and pressure to return to countries where individuals fear persecution.

I ask Perrin what Forbidden Stories found in terms of allegations of abuse and torture.

"How do you define abuse?" he responds. "Locking people in a cell, denying people water? Take the example in the Central African Republic: one of the witnesses we interviewed from Iran said she got malaria there. She would certainly not have contracted malaria in Los Angeles."

David describes two patterns emerging in Africa: either the authorities' rapid return of deportees to their countries of origin, or individuals being encouraged to accept assisted returns through international organisations.

This raises the issue of *non-refoulement*, a foundational principle of international refugee law prohibiting states from returning people to territories where they face persecution or torture.

"We have this obligation of non-refoulement. Before we send somebody to any country, we first have to determine if they face persecution or torture there. And theoretically, before deporting someone, we [the US] should be giving them an asylum interview."

Under the administration's policy, the US relies on written assurances that receiving countries will not persecute or torture deportees, or send them to another country where they would face such treatment.

"In the case of the US's deportations, they have managed to sidestep this principle by not directly sending people back to their countries of origin." However, when they get to the third country, David asserts, "that's often exactly what happens – they then get sent back to the very country where a US judge has, potentially weeks before, found that they're more likely than not to be persecuted or tortured."

"People often get sent back to the very country where a US judge has, potentially weeks before, found that they're more likely than not to be persecuted or tortured."

In the case of Rabbiatu Kuyateh, I ask, who was repatriated back to Sierra Leone after being deported to Ghana, does that not constitute breaking the non-refoulement provision?

"100%," says David. Kuyateh's experience provides a particularly stark illustration of the issue.

Who is accountable when protection fails?

As deportees move between countries, often without adequate legal safeguards, a central question emerges: who is ultimately responsible for protecting them?

The issue is now before the US Supreme Court in *D.V.D. vs Department of Homeland Security*, a nationwide class action challenging the Trump administration's third-country deportation procedures.

Trina Realmuto, executive director of the National Immigration Litigation Alliance and counsel for the plaintiffs, explains that although US immigration law permits third-country removals, individuals must be given notice of their destination and a meaningful opportunity to contest deportation if they fear persecution or torture there.

Under the administration's challenged guidance, however, these safeguards can be bypassed when Washington considers diplomatic assurances from a receiving government sufficiently credible. Such assurances typically promise that deportees will not be persecuted, tortured or sent onward to countries where they face danger.

"The policy right now is there's no process at all," Realmuto says of this aspect of the guidance. "Literally no process whatsoever."

For Realmuto, transferring someone through an intermediate country does not absolve the US of its legal responsibilities.

"Just because the US government is not deporting somebody directly to the country from which they want protection, doesn't mean they don't have an obligation to assess whether the country that they are sending the person to is going to persecute and torture them," she explains.

"And sending somebody to a country that is known to – or is recognised to be – a place where that person will be persecuted or tortured is a form of persecution or torture in and of itself."

In February 2026, a federal district court ruled against the administration's guidance, a decision upheld in key respects by an appeals court in September. The Supreme Court subsequently stayed the judgment, allowing the challenged policy to continue while it considers the case. Oral arguments are scheduled for 9 December.

Yet even a favourable ruling may offer limited recourse to those already deported. Realmuto is not sure whether those who already been will be able to return to the US.

What is her reading of how the Supreme Court will decide, I ask? "I genuinely and truly believe we have the law on our side," she responds, doubtful at the same time.

Once individuals are transferred into another government's custody, the US argues that they are no longer under its control. Realmuto explains that American courts have also been reluctant in some circumstances to exercise jurisdiction over people already abroad.

Receiving countries nevertheless retain their own obligations under applicable domestic and international law, including the duty to prevent unlawful detention and onward returns to persecution or torture.

And African lawyers and civil society organisations are increasingly challenging the arrangements themselves.

In Ghana, a coalition representing 27 deportees brought proceedings before the ECOWAS Court of Justice in



June 2026, alleging that the government's treatment and onward removal of deportees violated protections against non-refoulement, arbitrary detention and cruel or degrading treatment.

In August, the lawyers also sought urgent measures to suspend further transfers and secure access to legal representation.

In Eswatini, where deportees are held at the Matsapha maximum-security prison, the Supreme Court has upheld a ruling granting lawyers access to them. Separate proceedings concerning their detention have also been brought before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

In Equatorial Guinea, lawyers acting for deportees secured provisional measures from the African Commission in July 2026, aimed at preventing the complainants from being forcibly transferred to countries where they could face serious harm. The underlying complaint remains before the Commission.

The African Commission has itself warned against such arrangements. In October 2025, it adopted Resolution 645, affirming that African states remain responsible for protecting the rights of everyone within their jurisdiction, including migrants transferred under agreements with non-African governments.

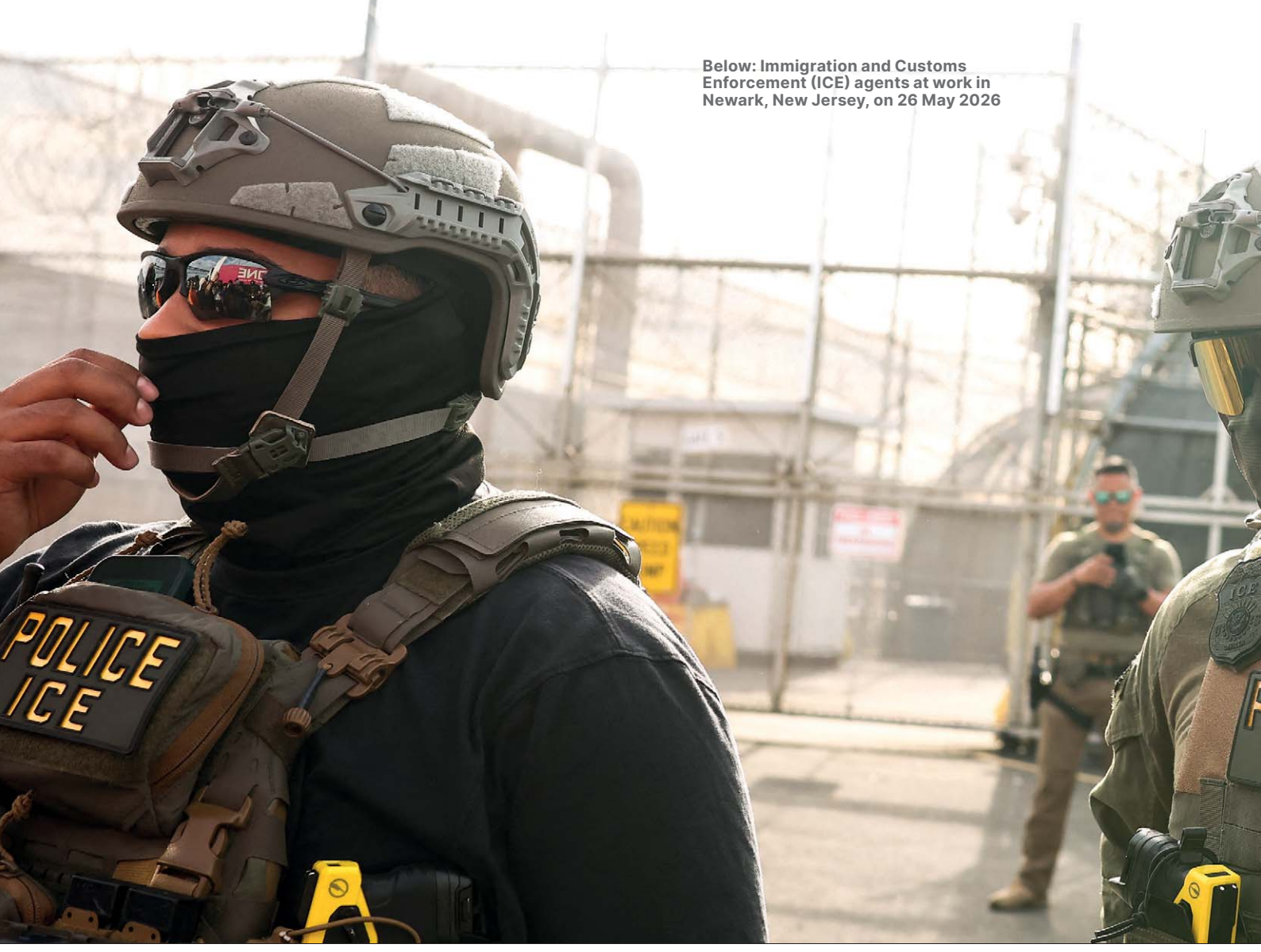
These challenges raise questions not only about Washington's responsibilities, but about the accountability of African governments to their own courts and citizens, and their adherence to international legal commitments.

For those already stranded in African countries, the question is not merely whether their deportation was lawful, but which government can be compelled to protect them – and where they can seek justice when neither does.

For Rabbiatu Kuyateh, these questions are no longer hypothetical. Despite an American court ruling protecting her against deportation to Sierra Leone, she was sent to Ghana and ultimately to the country she had fled. She has since fled again, her whereabouts undisclosed.

Her experience reflects the central contradiction at the heart of this expanding network of agreements: governments can negotiate where people are sent and transfer them from one jurisdiction to another. But those arrangements do not necessarily guarantee that the people being moved will be protected.

As Washington continues to strike deals with African governments, the question is not simply which countries are willing to receive deportees. It is who will take responsibility for their safety once the aircraft lands. ■



Below: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents at work in Newark, New Jersey, on 26 May 2026

With millions displaced across the Sahel and international aid shrinking, UNHCR's Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Abdouraouf Gnon-Konde, tells **Jamila Versi** that the old model of humanitarian relief no longer works and a fresh approach is needed.

How a different approach can empower both the displaced and their hosts in the Sahel

After presenting evidence about the Sahel's displacement crisis in Westminster for over an hour, the UNHCR's Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Abdouraouf Gnon-Konde, was still keen to talk about the situation, especially as the message was aimed at Africa.

I asked what he hoped Britain would actually do. Was this, ultimately, about getting more money?

Funding was certainly part of it. But Gnon-Konde had not come to Parliament with a figure in mind. What he wanted, he told me, was a different sort of commitment: investment lasting five or 10 years, not another cycle of short-term emergency funding.

"Development doesn't happen overnight," he said. This was the central argument he brought to the House of Commons International Development Committee's First Oral Evidence session for its inquiry, *The UK and the Sahel*, on 20 October. "We have reached a limit in terms of the (aid) model," he told MPs. "We need new models."

A deepening crisis

Nearly four million people have been displaced across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Across the wider Sahel, an estimated 24.4m people need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2026. In the broader West and Central Africa region, Gnon-Konde said, displacement can last 15 to 20 years.

He described to me the exhausting cycle behind those figures: families flee insecurity, arrive somewhere they cannot find work, or land to farm, and perhaps return home only to discover that the school has closed or their livelihood has vanished. So they leave again. "Return is not just a cross-border movement," he told MPs.

Gnon-Konde wants the discussion to move beyond how much humanitarian funding is available this year towards how schools, businesses and livelihoods can continue a decade from now.

At the hearing, an MP recalled an earlier Foreign Office argument that years of French spending had not delivered results. It raised a question I was also turning over: with conflict, political turmoil and climate pressures continuing to converge in the region, why would putting in more money now change anything?

Gnon-Konde's response was to challenge the way the problem is framed. Emergency aid can keep people alive. But if it does not connect to functioning schools, land, jobs and local services, it may have to be repeated indefinitely. "The way we can make everything more sustainable is through investment. That's what we are trying to do in the region."

Rather than seeing displaced communities solely as places requiring humanitarian assistance, he argued that they must also be recognised as areas with economic potential, where investment can create lasting opportunities.

Start with local communities

"Sometimes we tend to forget that the first responders are the communities," Gnon-Konde told the parliamentary committee.

This was an important part of his argument. Displaced families often depend first on neighbouring villages, which may themselves lack reliable water, clinics or classrooms. Building one set of services for refugees while leaving their hosts without them risks creating resentment.

In our interview, he described UNHCR's efforts to remain close to local communities, listen to what they need and gather information about the skills and opportunities already available.

"We start local, and then we build a network of partners," he said, describing an approach that could move beyond saving lives towards longer-term solutions.

Patrice Ahouansou, UNHCR's representative in Chad, described to MPs what that might look like. With the country hosting large numbers of refugees fleeing Sudan and neighbouring states, the aim is to strengthen water, healthcare and education services that refugees and Chadians can use together.

"The idea is to have one system for all," Ahouansou explained, warning that parallel systems could create tensions between communities.

He even described villages expressing interest in hosting refugees after recognising the benefits that improved services and economic activity could bring. But



such arrangements require long-term investment in local infrastructure, schools and health systems, rather than separate facilities that disappear when humanitarian funding runs out.

For Ahouansou, the wider goal is to invest not only in individuals, but in entire communities and the systems supporting them. Refugee camps and neighbouring villages should not be treated as isolated spaces, but as parts of the same local economy.

Gnon-Konde also challenged the perception of refugees as passive recipients of aid. Among those who have fled Sudan and arrived in Chad are teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers and entrepreneurs. What if the response helped them to work, establish businesses and contribute to their host communities?

This contests the familiar picture of displacement as an economic burden, and asks instead what displaced people could contribute if they were given the opportunity. And not everyone will eventually return home.

"Some will go, some will stay," Gnon-Konde explained to me. The challenge, he said, is making both possibilities sustainable: ensuring those returning home have access to services and livelihoods, while those remaining can build independent lives without becoming a burden on their hosts.

What investment can deliver

The World Food Programme (WFP) offered a more tangible example.

"It is not all doom and gloom, because there are solutions," Marc Regnault de la Mothe, its senior representation adviser for West and Central Africa, told MPs.

He pointed to the WFP's Integrated Resilience Programme, which has helped restore more than 300,000 hectares of degraded land. Its impact, he explained, goes beyond agricultural production, with children returning to school and social protection systems being developed.

"There is a place for investment," he said, arguing that stronger livelihoods could help people remain in their communities rather than be forced to move simply to survive.

The point is not that humanitarian assistance should disappear. WFP was explicit that emergency relief and development finance must go hand in hand. But investing in agriculture, education and local services today could mean fewer families requiring emergency assistance tomorrow.

But who is going to invest?

It is one thing to call for investment, I pointed out, quite another to attract it to places facing attacks by armed groups, military-led governments and weak institutions. How can investors be sure their money will be used as intended?

"The first condition will be governance," Gnon-Konde replied.

Governments perceived as risky borrowers face higher interest rates, while private investors need guarantees and credible regulations. Development loans also ultimately become governments' obligations, not UNHCR's.

"We need to make sure that the government remains in the lead," he said. UNHCR can provide data on displacement, local skills and needs, but cannot replace functioning institutions.

He pushed back, too, against the assumption that political instability had brought economic life to a standstill. During a recent visit to Burkina Faso, he said, he had seen agricultural production and economic activity continuing despite the insecurity.

"Trust the data, trust the evidence," he urged me. "Go and see for yourself. Despite the odds we might think of, people are becoming more and more resilient. So we need to support them so they can live a dignified life despite the displacement conditions."

Although a strong point, the difficulty does remain: development depends on credible governance at a moment when governance in the region itself is being tested.

Beyond another aid appeal

The debate comes as Britain plans to reduce overseas aid spending to 0.3% of gross national income by 2027, while OECD projections suggest international aid to the Sahel as a whole could fall by 35.6% between 2024 and 2026.

Gnon-Konde hopes Britain can use its relationships with African governments, development banks and private investors to help attract longer-term financing. He wants the discussion to move beyond how much humanitarian funding is available this year towards how schools, businesses and livelihoods can continue operating a decade from now.

Throughout our conversation, he kept returning to young people. The Sahel's youthful population faces enormous pressures, he explained. Many come from farming communities, where displacement means losing not only a home but access to the land on which their livelihoods depend. Around 70% of the total population in each of these countries, he argues, is below 25 years old.

And when he speaks to young people, their priorities are strikingly ordinary: education and jobs.

He remembers a boy of about 15 or 16 arriving at the Sudan–Chad border. The boy thanked aid workers for saving his life, then asked a question Gnon-Konde has never forgotten:

"Thank you for saving my life. But how do you help me with a new future? I want a future."

It is difficult to make the case for investment more simply than that. Saving lives remains essential, but for Gnon-Konde, the challenge is ensuring that those lives can be rebuilt. The Sahel needs more than another emergency response. It needs investment in the people, communities and institutions capable of shaping its future. ■



We present brief highlights of some of our milestones.

The Amahoro Coalition – who we are and what we do

The Amahoro Coalition is regarded as the most influential and impactful private-sector platform focused on Africa's forcibly displaced people. We work on creating employment as well as sourcing funding for the continent's displaced.

We strive to activate underserved markets in displacement settings and thereby drive business growth, jobs and economic inclusion. We advocate for labour mobility and access to decent work for the displaced across the continent. We focus on women and youth and encourage the creation of solutions that make the world a better place.

Billion-dollar economies

Africa's displaced communities represent a $27bn economy hidden in plain sight. Internally displaced people generate an estimated $22.1bn in annual income, while refugees contribute a further $5.6bn, creating a combined economic footprint larger than the GDP of more than 30 African countries.

Hiding in Plain Sight – Africa's $27bn Displacement Market Opportunity is an investment resource for businesses, investors, and development partners seeking to unlock new growth opportunities while strengthening inclusive supply chains.

Although national policies often allow refugees to work, complex procedures, unclear regulations, and limited support make access to jobs extremely difficult. Employers who want to hire refugees also face legal uncertainties and bureaucratic challenges.

To address the gap between policy and practice, Amahoro Coalition, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, presents the *Pathways to Employment* series.

This initiative examines refugee employment across African countries, exploring legal frameworks, administrative processes, employer challenges, and ways to strengthen collaboration.

Partner Job Pledges
270K+

In-Kind & Financial Commitments
$520m+

Direct Jobs Created
49,000+

FDPs Impacted
80,000+

Actors convened
1,800+

Awarded to Refugee-Led Businesses
$2.5m+

Key insights

The reality of African migration: Migration is overwhelmingly intra-regional, with the East, Horn, and Great Lakes (EHAGL) region accommodating approximately 70% of its own protection-seeking population.

The 'mixed migration' challenge: Refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants move through the same corridors, yet rigid policies continue to treat them as entirely separate categories.

A policy-reality disconnect: Current East African Community (EAC) frameworks prioritise high-skilled mobility, creating a gap that fuels irregular migration and restricts the rights of the actual workforce on the ground.

The passport experience

The AU adopted a Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons in 2018. By January 2024, only four nations had ratified it, far short of the 15 needed for it to take legal effect.

In practice, this means visas are still required for 47% of intra-African travel today. *The Passport Experience* is an immersive simulation designed by the Amahoro Coalition that was first implemented at the third edition of the Africa Private Sector Forum on Displacement (AFD 2025).

Instead of receiving a standard conference badge, participants were issued a mock passport containing their personal details and the forum's programme.

Passports were issued in different colours, and each colour determined a different experience within the same physical event.

The experience was a simulation of what it means to try to move, across a border, into a visa appointment, through an airport, toward an opportunity abroad, while holding a travel document that the world treats as suspect by default.

The colour of the passport a participant carried determined how long they waited, how they were questioned, what proof of legitimacy they were asked to produce, and ultimately whether they could move forward at all, regardless of who they were or what they wanted to do.

Our impact

We create win-win solutions for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs) and the African private sector by engaging and enabling the private sector to expand access to education and livelihood opportunities for FDPs.

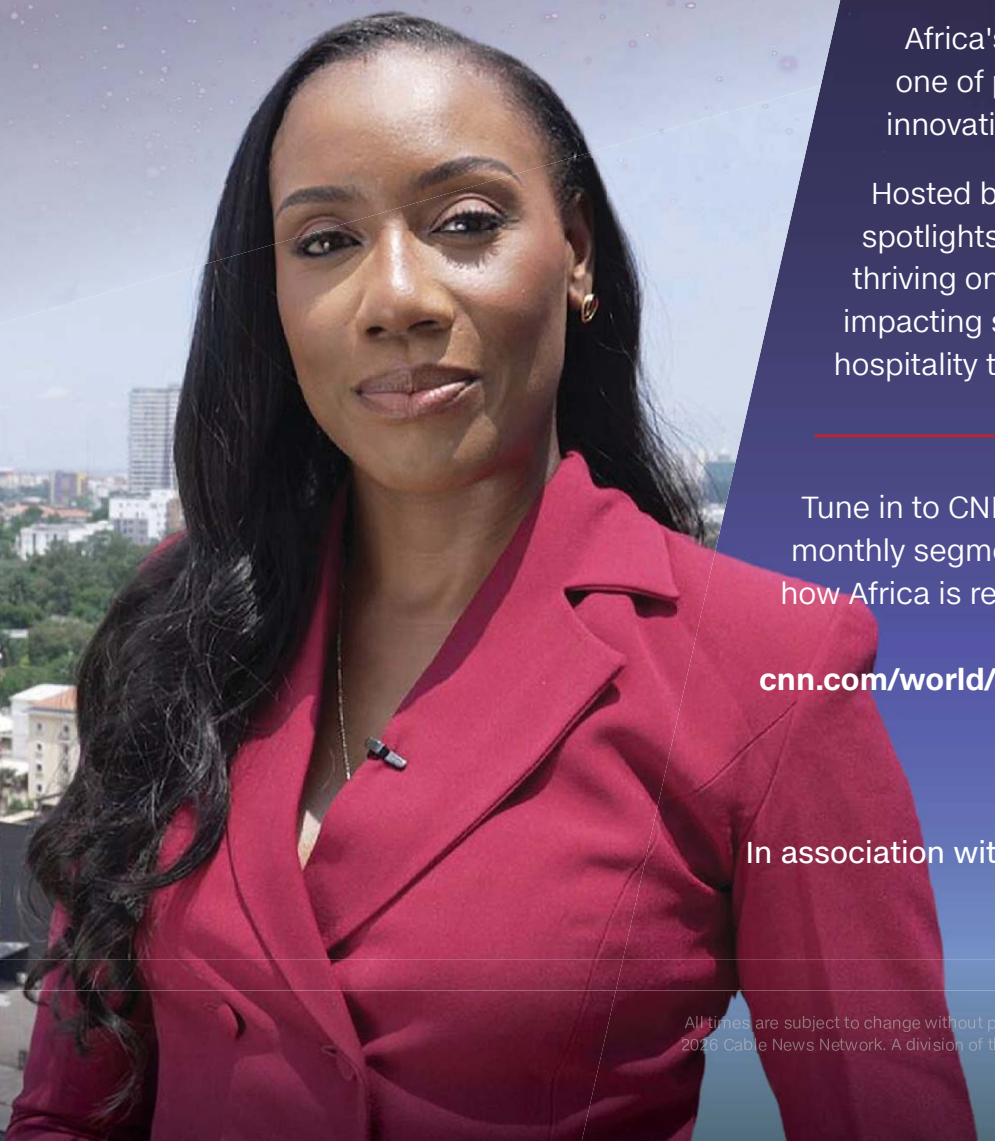
Amahoro enables FDPs to build better futures for themselves and their communities and creates value for African businesses and society.

This approach of partnering with the private sector to create shared value and sustainable impact affirms our belief that every FDP deserves the opportunity to thrive. We are committed to creating a world where they can do so. ■

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