

AFRICA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from Africa

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US Aid Freeze and Its Impact on Africa

The Trump administration's recent decision to freeze federal grants and loans, including foreign aid, have raised serious concerns about the implications for local, national and international associations. These measures, which followed executive orders aimed at "reevaluating" U.S. foreign assistance and terminating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, risk undermining the freedoms that are vital to democratic societies. The United States has been a significant contributor to global aid, particularly in Africa, where its assistance has supported various programs in many sectors. However, the recent freezes in U.S. aid have raised major concerns about the future of impact on African nations that heavily rely on this support.

U.S. aid to Africa is imparted through various programs, including the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). A freeze in U.S. aid could heavily impact Africa's health systems, particularly in combating diseases. PEPFAR, for example, has been vital in reducing HIV/AIDS incidence in countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria. A reduction or a stoppage in the aid could disrupt these treatment programs, leading to an increased mortality rates and a possible resurgence of the epidemic. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) has funded projects such as road construction, energy, and irrigation in countries like Ghana and Senegal.

A freeze in the aid could delay or halt such projects resulting in the risk of greater poverty and unemployment.

USAID plays a vital role in managing food security in Africa, mainly in regions affected by conflict and climate change. Programs like the Food for Peace initiative provide major assistance to millions of Africans. A reduction in aid could worsen hunger and exacerbate food insecurity particularly in countries like Somalia and South Sudan, where famine conditions persist. U.S. aid also helps governance and security initiatives focused at promoting democracy and countering extremism. A freeze in funding could undermine efforts to strengthen institutions, combat corruption, and address security threats in regions like the Sahel.

Although in a recent statement, Senator Marco Rubio indicated that there will be exceptions to the freeze on U.S. aid, though it remains uncertain which programs will be exempted. Rubio emphasised that some programs and initiatives are critical to U.S.' national security and humanitarian interests that could be spared from cuts. However, he did not provide details on which programs would qualify for waivers, leaving many African nations and development organisations in a state of uncertainty. Rubio's statement has started a debate among policymakers and organisations, with some stating that programs like PEPFAR and food security initiatives should be given priority due to their criticality. The freeze or reduction of U.S. aid to Africa could have profound consequences for health, development, food security, and governance across the

continent. While Senator Marco Rubio's recent statement suggests that some exceptions may be made, the lack of clarity leaves many critical programs in a state of limbo.

India Bans Two Opioids Behind Crisis in West Africa

After a BBC investigation revealed the illicit sale of a hazardous cocktail of opiates in West Africa, the Indian government banned their production and export. In Ghana, Nigeria, and Cote d'Ivoire, the extremely addictive medications tapentadol and carisoprodol are associated with an escalating public health catastrophe. Aveo Pharmaceuticals, based in Mumbai, was exporting them illegally. Citing the BBC results and the possibility of drug abuse, Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, India's Drugs Controller General, released a circular. The prohibition is now in effect immediately. Carisoprodol is a muscle relaxant that is prohibited in Europe because of its significant potential for addiction, whereas tapentadol is a potent opioid. Since the combination of the two can result in respiratory problems, convulsions, and even death, it is not licensed anywhere in the world. To stop the supply of these medications, the Food and Drug Administration of India has promised to conduct additional checks. Additionally, Aveo Pharmaceuticals is being sued. "We are fully prepared to act against illegal activities that tarnish the reputation of the country," it stated. Authorities also seized Aveo Pharmaceuticals' inventory during a search on the company's Mumbai plant. Aveo and its sibling business, Westfin International, sold millions of these tablets

to countries in West Africa, according to publicly available export data.

According to a BBC undercover operation, Aveo's management allegedly knew about the drug's abuse. Vinod Sharma, a director of the company, admitted in covert video that the tablets were popular with Nigerian teenagers and had addictive qualities. Sharma said, "OK," when informed that clients use several pills to get high, adding, "Nowadays, this is business." With an estimated four million users, Nigeria, a country of 225 million people, has one of the highest rates of opioid misuse. On the streets of Ivoirian towns and Nigeria, investigators discovered openly sold pills bearing the Aveo brand. The Indian pharmaceutical business has received a strong message from the crackdown on Aveo Pharmaceuticals, which highlights the importance of moral behavior and adherence to international standards. The business could now be subject to severe fines and the cancellation of its manufacturing permits, among other legal repercussions. Authorities are also looking into the participation of other supply chain participants, such as wholesalers and logistics companies, as the inquiry progresses. This event emphasises how difficult it is to maintain India's position as a major exporter of pharmaceuticals while also making sure that its goods are not abused. Although the government's proactive approach is a positive start, long-term initiatives and international collaboration will be essential in addressing the underlying causes of the opioid problem and averting future occurrences of such nature.

Djibouti's Mahmoud Ali Youssouf Elected as AU Commission Chairman

The African Union (AU) Assembly of the Heads of State and Government elected Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, the Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Minister of Djibouti, as the new chairperson of the AU Commission in its 38th Ordinary Session. The outgoing chair Moussa Faki Mahamat, will be replaced by Youssouf, who is elected for the 2025–2028 term. Mahamat led the 55-member continental bloc for eight years i.e. two terms. Former Foreign Affairs Minister Richard Randriamandrato of Madagascar and former Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga were defeated by him. Youssouf stated his goals for the African Union in a December 2024 televised debate. He promised to operationalise the African Standby Force (ASF), strengthen the AU's Peace and Security Council, guarantee steady funding for the union, increase intra-African trade, and support the free flow of people and goods throughout the continent. "One of my top concerns will be Africa's position on the global scene. Africa of peace, unity, and prosperity is the Africa we desire. "I will try my hardest to ensure that our continent shines on the international scene if I am given the opportunity to serve as the commission's chair," Youssouf stated. Several officials have mirrored Youssouf's idea in recent weeks. The outgoing chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, commended Youssouf's all-encompassing program, saying, "His priorities align with the aspirations of Agenda 2063." Achieving the Africa we desire requires both the African Standby Force's operationalisation

and the pursuit of secure funding. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a game-changer for our economy, according to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who also emphasised the significance of intra-African trade. Geoffrey Onyeama, Nigeriane foreign minister emphasised the need of security and peace. "No progress can be made without peace. In order to resolve the crises that still afflict our continent, the AU Peace and Security Council must be strengthened," he said. With the words, "The free movement of people and goods is not just an economic imperative but a symbol of our shared identity as Africans," Kenyan President William Ruto emphasized the significance of free mobility. Many people embrace Youssouf's ideas and hope that his leadership could possibly be a game-changer for the African Union.

DR Congo Halts Cobalt Exports

To control the excess supply of the battery metal on the global market, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has announced a four-month suspension of cobalt exports. About three-quarters of the material used in electric car batteries is produced in Congo, where cobalt production has increased dramatically in recent years due to an increase in output at two huge mines by China's CMOC Group Ltd., which has caused supply to outpace demand and prices to plummet. In written answers to inquiries, Patrick Luabeya, president of the Authority for the Regulation and Control of Strategic Mineral Substances' Markets, or ARECOMS, told Bloomberg News that exports need to be in line with global

demand. Luabeya said the policy went into effect on February 22, 2025. An order signed by the prime minister and the minister of mines the day before gave the regulator the authority to temporarily halt shipments "in case of circumstances affecting the stability of the market." According to Fastmarkets statistics, benchmark metal prices have fallen below \$10 per pound, a level that hasn't been achieved in 21 years, except for a temporary decline in late 2015. The primary form of the metal produced in Congo, cobalt hydroxide, has fallen below \$6 per pound. In an email, George Heppel, an analyst at BMO Capital Markets, stated, "The DRC has played its trump card." The action "will probably cause cobalt prices to soar in the days and weeks ahead." Before being surpassed by CMOC in 2023, Glencore Plc, which runs two mines in Congo, was the largest producer of the metal for many years. Over 40% of the world's supply is supplied by the Chinese business, whose output last year tripled that of the Swiss commodities behemoth. Similar volumes are its goal for 2025. Even if the demand for cobalt is still growing overall, new supply is outpacing it, and EV batteries that don't require the metal are gaining market share. Prior to the announcement of the suspension, Benchmark Mineral Intelligence conducted a study that predicted the surplus would last until the end of the decade.

According to Luabeya, the Congolese government, which is also the second-largest producer of copper worldwide, "has been carefully reviewing market dynamics" for a year. According to Luabeya, Congo will examine the export restrictions in three

months. According to him, ARECOMS is amid drafting more policies to stabilize the cobalt market, promote domestic processing of strategic minerals, and provide "a transparent and fair pricing mechanism." A year after President Felix Tshisekedi charged his administration with creating plans to raise cobalt prices, the suspension was implemented. One of Tshisekedi's recommendations, export quotas, is being contemplated "but no decision has been made yet," according to Luabeya.

The DRC's four-month halt on cobalt exports is likely to have global ramifications, including for India, as the DRC supplies roughly 75% of the world's cobalt, a crucial component in EV batteries. This could disrupt supply chains and raise prices, which could affect India's expanding EV industry by raising production costs and slowing adoption. On a global scale, cobalt-dependent industries like electronics and renewable energy may also face similar difficulties, but the move may also hasten research into alternative battery technologies, reducing long-term reliance on cobalt.

Sudan's RSF, Allies Sign Charter to Form Parallel Government

Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a powerful paramilitary group, and its allies have taken a significant step toward consolidating their influence by signing a charter to establish a parallel government. This move comes amid an ongoing and brutal conflict between the RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), which has devastated Sudan since April 2023. The RSF, led by General Mohamed Hamdan

Dagalo (Hemedti), has been gaining ground militarily, particularly in the capital, Khartoum, and the western region of Darfur. By forming a rival administration, the RSF aims to challenge the legitimacy of the internationally recognised government, which is backed by the SAF under General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. This development exacerbates Sudan's fragmentation and raises fear of prolonged civil war, with competing power centers further complicating efforts to achieve lasting peace.

The charter, signed in West Darfur city of Geneina, includes armed groups and political parties and tribal leaders allied to the RSF. This indicates an effort to create a large coalition. The RSF argues that this is to reinstate civilian rule, but critics believe it is really an effort to take over. The group has been accused of various grave crimes, including Darfur's ethnic cleansing, and its own distinct government will never be accepted by the international community. At the same time, the SAF-controlled government in Port Sudan says it is Sudan's legitimate authority and has support from regional organisations like the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Having two rival governments can make Sudan even more isolated since foreign countries and organisations will not know how to effectively deal with either side.

The establishment of an alternative government by the RSF and its allies is a dangerous escalation of Sudan's war, reducing the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. Earlier efforts at mediation, including talks in Jeddah backed by Saudi

Arabia and the United States, have failed to produce lasting ceasefires or a plan for political transition. With both sides entrenched, the likelihood of Sudan as a permanently divided state grows. The SAF has vowed to continue fighting, and the RSF's recent move suggests that it is preparing to rule for the long term, rather than negotiate. Without a unified international policy or serious peace process, Sudan's future looks increasingly bleak, with potential for prolonged war, state failure, and regional instability. The world is presented with whether to tighten pressure for a ceasefire and broad-based negotiations or risk letting Sudan drift further into chaos.

Senegalese Government Signs a Deal with Separatist Rebels

Senegal has recorded a significant milestone in ending one of the longest insurgencies on the African continent by officially signing a peace accord with separatist rebels in the southern Casamance region. The agreement, negotiated alongside the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), aims to bring an end to a conflict that has run for more than four decades and claimed thousands of lives and displaced many people. Casamance, which is separated from northern Senegal geographically by The Gambia, has long demanded greater autonomy, fueled by cultural and economic marginalisation. The new agreement, signed in Ziguinchor, the regional capital, is the most promising bid in years to bring in enduring peace; however, there are issues in the total disarmament and the reintegration of rebel fighters.

The MFDC, a fractured movement that has several splinter groups, has been involved in a low-intensity struggle since 1982, featuring intermittent violence, landmine bombings, and abductions. Earlier peace arrangements like the 2014 ceasefire agreement collapsed due to mistrust among the rebels and the government as well as militia fighting among MFDC factions. This new peace agreement, nonetheless, seems to be more tangible, with demobilisation and disarmament procedures and development activities in Casamance. President Macky Sall of Senegal, whose personal crusade is reconciliation prior to his term ending in 2024, has offered to invest in Casamance, promising economic activities to cater to the grievances in the region, such as shoddy roads and joblessness. Residents continue to remain mistrustful based on previous false promises and inaction as well as the perceived underdevelopment in the region by comparison with Senegal as a whole.

For Casamance's citizens, the deal brings positive promise of a future free of violence. The conflict has strangled the region's economy, particularly agriculture and tourism, even though the land is fertile, and the shoreline is scenic. Lasting peace could unlock Casamance's potential, attracting investment and reconciliation. But if the deal fails, it could embolden holdout rebels and prolong suffering. Senegal's success in navigating this delicate transition will determine if Casamance finally turns the page on decades of turmoil or remains mired in a cycle of broken promises and instability.