

# THE ZAM KLEPTOCRACY PROJECT

## Editorial

**THIS PUBLICATION MARKS** the completion of an investigative series into the ‘anatomy’ of a system, kleptocracy, that condemns many African countries to the begging bowl. In ten in-depth stories, an equal number of African investigative journalists expose the pervasive practices of looting and mismanagement on that continent. A depressing spectacle unfolds before us: a toxic combination of corrupt rulers, (international) businesses and donors.

Do not think that a seemingly perennial sorry state in many African countries is a result of lack of expertise, money, resources or capacity. The research done by our colleagues shows how political elites simply create the opportunities to enrich themselves at the expense of their nations and populations. The expertise and integrity that exist in reservoirs of ‘good civil servants’, in society and amongst professionals is often eliminated on purpose: those who insist on serving the public find themselves robbed, fired, discredited or even persecuted. The system is made to fail.

At ZAM, we are used to our colleagues in journalism and friends in emerging activist movements – as well as our associates in the arts, the theatre and literature – denouncing power abuse and theft. Still, the findings from the new investigations shook us to the core. They underline, in tandem with recent work by African academics and analysts, that old colonial structures and practices live on, turning the everyday reality of millions into hell and causing people to flee the continent. Why do Western governments and bodies keep pumping money into regimes that have declared war on their own people?

Quite a few African rulers pepper their speeches with anti-colonial rhetoric. We must not fall for that old trick, which serves no other purpose than to disguise their own plunder. Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta, fond of portraying himself as an African patriot and corruption buster, was recently found to have stashed away over US\$ 30 million in tax havens. Our colleagues, investigative journalists at Kenya’s Africa Uncensored, contributed to this revelation in the now-famous Pandora Papers.

An intense social struggle is under way between exploiters and exploited in many African countries. We should not be bystanders, nor should we think in terms of taking the side of ‘Africa’ versus ‘the world’. We should engage with those who fight in Africa for justice, true self-determination and good governance and stand in solidarity with a rising generation of changemakers in African investigative journalism. In the words of South African writer Sisonke Msimang, who delivered the first ZAM Nelson Mandela Lecture in 2019: ‘If a story moves you, act on it’.

THE EDITORS



● IMAGE

Zimbabwe – The ruling party syndicate  
From diamond dictatorship to diamond syndicate and back.  
ILLUSTRATION by Diana Ejaita.



## Change will be possible if we expose abusive leaders

Evelyn Groenink

TEN AFRICAN INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS, who participated in ZAM's Kleptocracy Project, look back on months of risks, hardship and revelations.

Bettie Johnson-Mbayo's worse moment came when she had to print a Freedom of Information request at a print shop in Monrovia, her Liberian hometown. 'I live in a society where people are interrelated. The print shop owner could be related to a subject in my request'. At the time, Johnson-Mbayo was already receiving threats. Journalists have been killed before in Liberia. And she was exposed, sometimes lacking expensive data for communication, and having to physically slog along roads to identify mansions and farms in her quest to report on the wealth of Liberia's political elite. On one occasion, having been wrongly directed, she had to sleep on the road.

Johnson-Mbayo is only one of the ten journalists who went around in their countries, from Liberia to Zambia and from Uganda to Mozambique, lifting the lid on their kleptocratic rulers' ill-gotten possessions, money and contracts. John Masaba, in Uganda, worked sixteen-hour days to unveil the extent of official theft of teachers' salaries in his country next to his day job at an established newspaper, after his editor told him in no uncertain terms that he would not get any time off to do his investigation. Estacio Valoi went partly undercover to trace the wealthy recipients of diverted COVID funds in Mozambique, while Taiwo Adebulu in Nigeria and David Dembélé in Mali, spent weeks trying to convince fearful sources to speak out about the plunder of funds and services meant for citizens that was taking place all around them.

Meanwhile, Nigerian Theophilus Abbah was unearthing 'hundreds of documents' in reports that had been deliberately kept away from the public by his country's authorities, carefully reading through each one; Andrew Mambondiyani was stealthily moving to identify Zimbabwe's ruling party-related diamond dealers and Charles Mafa, in Zambia, obtained details on the kickback-inflated price paid by his government for a corrupt contract by posing as an interested company in emails with the supplier in China.

### Debunking

In the end it was worth it. Adebulu and Masaba discovered how even 'corruption-proof' online systems can be, and are, manipulated as long as kleptocrats control the departments where these are contracted; Abbah meticulously described how powerful politicians can even derail parliament and the courts; Johnson-Mbayo used open-source tracking (OSINT) skills to find supercars and mansions, funded with stolen money, on



### ● IMAGE

Mali – A show for the funders

Did the prime minister pay his election campaign with COVID relief funds?

ILLUSTRATION by Diana Ejaita.

Facebook (and in doing so debunked the claim by formal anti-corruption structures that it was simply too difficult to 'verify (politicians') assets'). Fiacre Salabe traced and photographed a road sign in the Central African Republic that had been billed by local authorities at hundreds of thousands of American dollars; Dembélé and Valoi accessed business and NGO's information to break through government silence; and Nazlee Arbee in South Africa pulled off a detailed anatomy of this country's incompetent and fraud-riddled social grants system.

### *'Honest civil servants helped the journalists.'*

Mindful, in Arbee's words, that they should not play into 'stereotypes' of 'African corruption', their reports made clear how the African public itself, as well as many honest African civil servants, are victimised by the kleptocrat politicians' schemes. It was a former Immigration Service official who guided Theophilus Abbah through what he would call the 'very complex system of corruption' in the agency and surrounding state sector in Nigeria, with its 'many structures, commissions, and regulations'.

And, of course, the journalists themselves are Africans too. From their responses to an 'How We Did It' evaluation questionnaire ZAM asked them to complete it is clear that the kleptocracy in their poverty-ridden countries is more than simply one more 'theme' to them: it is a miserable and unjust state of affairs, foremost in their minds as they live it daily. 'It is not a

'theme that appeals to me', I chose it, as Bettie Johnson-Mbayo would put it. Taiwo Adebulu and Charles Mafa explained in their responses that they 'had had (their stories) in mind for a long time', just waiting for the support to do them. Mafa said he had long been focusing on 'the governing elites and their supporters' in Zambia and Theophilus Abbah said that the project had 'helped (him) to focus on, not just corruption, but to fish out those who played active roles in perpetuating it'.

### Godsend

John Masaba narrated how he wanted to expose the Ugandan salary theft of teachers by their own government department so fervently, that he did it in his free time during weeks of covering a political candidate during an election campaign. The campaign assignment was 'a Godsend,' he wrote. 'It meant I was to travel across the country covering (the candidate). (...) So I took it. On the campaign trail I "stole" some time off the campaign to interview as many sources (teachers) as possible, from all corners of the country.'

Likewise, Andrew Mambondiyani just wanted to do his investigation because of his outrage at the poverty and misery in his country, Zimbabwe, that loses 'billions of dollars each year through illegal activities in the diamond sector', while Nazlee Arbee had met so many people in communities living in extreme poverty that they simply had to highlight their plight, and the South African government's failure to help, at a time when COVID funds were being plundered by top officials in the ruling party.

Most of our colleagues concluded that, even though honest civil servants, many business people and the public at large supported their quests, to get rid of kleptocrat-riddled government systems will undoubtedly take more than a few series of journalistic investigations. A lot of work will still be needed, for at least as long as government departments whose funds were and are siphoned off only waffle in response to questions or simply don't even comment at all. From the Finance Ministry in Mali, to the provincial commissioner for health in Cabo Delgado and the social welfare agency and its ministry in South Africa, the journalists repeatedly emailed and telephoned questions and requests for clarifications went largely unanswered. 'You can declare my wealth for me', Liberian Senator Koug WhatsApped in response to a detailed list of questions. 'Since you know all about my life. And don't ask me such questions ever again.'

### *'The World Bank kept mum.'*

Sadly, even western donors who help fund the kleptocratic regimes that were exposed in the stories would often not engage with the journalists' questions either. The World Bank in Mali, a prominent source of funds that ended up in ruling politicians' pockets in that country, kept mum in spite of weeks of efforts to elicit a response. UNICEF in Uganda, which runs a program to provide sanitation in Uganda's defrauded schools, declined to comment on the theft from teachers by the very education department it supports, saying that 'we are of the view that you (should) liaise with the police and other anti-corruption agencies'. The donor-funded Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission, after giving Bettie Johnson-Mbayo the run around for months, finally responded by claiming that its budget was not 'ideal' and that there was a 'lack of a legal basis to 'robustly implement



#### ● IMAGE

Mozambique – The hundred-thousand-dollar workshops  
What happened to the Covid relief funds for sick people and refugees?

ILLUSTRATION by Diana Ejaita.

dissuasive sanctions' (against failure by political leaders to declare their assets). It also mentioned 'very little urgency by national leaders in all branches of government to make asset declarations a priority'.

### COVID funds

There was some hope for a dialogue with at least one western grantor to the kleptocrats when, after Valoi's story about the embezzlement of COVID funds meant for Mozambican citizens by their political bosses, the head of that country's World Bank branch emailed ZAM. In his email, World Bank Mozambique Senior External Affairs Officer Rafael Saute asked for a meeting with Valoi to 'improve our understanding' of the story. Sadly, after ZAM welcomed the approach by offering to facilitate a meeting, while expressing hope for a discussion about the role played by the World Bank in supporting political elites in African countries, and mentioning how difficult we had found it to elicit comment on this from the institution, we did not hear from Saute again.

Nevertheless, all the participating journalists in the Kleptocracy Series said they would and will dig into the plunder systems in their countries again, in an effort to amass more pressure for change from national and international audiences. 'My hope is that my (future) stories will help to continue exposing the illegal activities and possibly force the government to act', said Andrew Mambondiyani, while Bettie Johnson-Mbayo wrote that she intends to use 'more FOI requests' to expose the ill-gotten wealth of those politicians who 'were living in one room but have (suddenly) moved to a house' as well as



'judges who are involved in businesses when there is a canon that prevents this.'

### *'The public pressure is starting to bear fruit.'*

And there are glimmers of hope, since all this work – informing increasingly upset and angry populations of just where their money goes – is starting to bear some fruit. Anti-kleptocratic public pressure, in which investigative journalists were lauded for the role they played ([hyperlink https://mg.co.za/article/2018-03-19-how-investigative-journalists-helped-turn-the-tide-against-corruption-in-sa/](https://mg.co.za/article/2018-03-19-how-investigative-journalists-helped-turn-the-tide-against-corruption-in-sa/)), had already led to the demise of Jacob Zuma's plunder machine in South Africa in 2018. In response to our current series, accountable authorities in Nigeria and South Africa – even though they had ignored the journalists' emails and calls – felt the need to address their exposed failures in public: a press conference in Nigeria and an op-ed in a South African newspaper pledged improvement. Ugandan colleagues started to team up with our Zambian reporters to address resource plunder in their countries. And in Zambia itself, the ruling party that had indebted the country to over US\$ 30 billion to mainly benefit a wealthy elite lost in elections to an opposition candidate who, at least in his promises, has declared that he will focus on competence and delivery in his government.

Of course, that opposition candidate, now president, will need to be kept on his toes, as do all those other political leaders and important role players, in power and in opposition, on the African continent. The journalists are determined to continue to play their part. 'Naming those involved in corruption sounds tough and risky, but it helps to generate debates and set in motion process for change', said Theophilus Abbah. David Dembélé concurred: 'Change will be possible, if we journalists work on different levels to expose our abusive leaders.' Which is why ZAM will continue to support journalists like the 'Klepto Ten'.

#### **People at the top**

What has been learned from the journalists' feedback, for now, is that even more support will be necessary. In their responses to our questionnaire all colleagues made the point that funds for travel, data and time off (regular) work would be indispensable to continue. Estacio Valoi said, for example, that with more travel expenses, he could be prepared to move from his provincial region to the 'central level where the money comes from', then 'use undercover tools to acquire more information' about 'the people involved at the top and (find out) how deep is their involvement.' Taiwo Adebulu, similarly, said that travel funds could enable him to '(fly) to other cities with federal (marriage)

registries to (...) establish the fact that the corrupt act is a national issue.' John Masaba expressed the hope that more funding would help him take time off for investigations, and travel, without having to also work a full day at the newspaper doing regular news.

Besides travel and time, the journalists also identified other needs. Theophilus Abbah pointed out that 'engaging experts, fixers, (and other) journalists' to collaborate and help provide information also comes with a need to 'compensate such individuals', and Charles Mafa in Zambia proposed that, in case more support would be forthcoming, he could 'set up and train a team of local journalists to follow up investigations in their areas and feed (findings) into the main story.'

#### **Feedback**

Most of the journalists also mentioned that the editorial assistance that they received at ZAM had been indispensable, since several were working as freelancers without any established editorial support, while those who worked at newsrooms found that their bosses weren't too interested in doing investigations. 'The editing process and the feedbacks from the editors were priceless', said Andrew Mambondiyani, and Nazlee Arbee praised the editors for developing their initial proposal into 'a more comprehensive story'. David Dembélé in Mali confessed that he had often felt disheartened by the critical feedback to his drafts 'which often seemed to say that I had done nothing, moved nothing', but added hopefully that the 'important editorial advice and mentoring' would guide him to operate 'faster and more efficiently in the future'.

Another crucial factor in the ZAM support is that its central virtual newsroom helps by accessing information in western and international databases, which is often difficult in the data-poor African media environment. 'My editor did a lot of good work, digging up information on international companies that I could not access in Nigeria', said Theophilus Abbah, who added that ZAM's 'eagle-eye editing made my stories appear better than they would have, if published locally'.

### *'The story made the front page.'*

Which is not to say that locally published stories can't also be good. John Masaba's investigation into the teacher-robbing education officials in Uganda, for which his editor would not give him time off, in the end made it to the front page of that very Ugandan newspaper.



● IMAGE

Nigeria – The border control syndicate  
Plunder continues in spite of parliament and the courts.  
ILLUSTRATION by Diana Ejaita.

## The Ten Journalists



**DAVID DEMBÉLÉ** is editor-in-chief at Dépêches du Mali/L'Investigateur and a member of the Norbert Zongo Center for Investigative Journalism in the Sahel. He contributed to the Panama Papers and other investigations done by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists as well as to several transnational investigations done by the African Investigative Publishing Collective in partnership with ZAM. John Masaba, Uganda, works at New Vision. He is a multiple award winner at the African Center for Media Excellence and also won the 2017 National Environment journalism award in Uganda.



**BETTIE JOHNSON MBAYO**, a senior journalist at the reputable Front Page Africa in Liberia, has won multiple awards Liberia in that country and was nominated for the West African Media Excellence awards in 2019.



**FIACRE SALABE**, CAR, is a media editor, fact checker and trainer as well as a member of the Museba Project, a collective of Central Africa freelance journalists reporting corruption, organized crime, illicit finances and human rights abuses.



**THEOPHILUS ABBAH**, former investigative editor and now programme director at the Nigerian Daily Trust, a winner of the Editors' Courage FAIR award. He has also been shortlisted for the Wole Soyinka Investigative Journalism as well as the Daniel Pearl Investigative Journalism awards.



**ESTACIO VALOI** was a runner up for the FAIR award in 2012 due to his work in uncovering government corruption in illegal logging. He won the Environmental Journalism Award from the Worldwide Fund for Nature in 2017. His work has been featured by the Forum for African Investigative Reporters, Le Monde, Mail & Guardian, Foreign Policy, Al-Jazeera, Daily Maverick, The Star, Deutsche Welle, CNN, and the Reuters Thompson Foundation, among others.



**CHARLES MAFA** is a Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) multiple award winner. He was a nominee for the third African Fact-Checking Awards for 2016, a runner up in the Zambian Investigative Journalism awards in 2011. He works as a BBC Media Action journalist mentor and is managing partner in the Zambia Centre for Investigative Journalism.



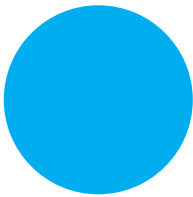
**JOHN MASABA** Uganda, works at New Vision. He is a multiple award winner at the African Center for Media Excellence and also won the 2017 National Environment journalism award in Uganda.



**ANDREW MAMBONDIYANI** has won multiple national and international awards among which the 2018 European Commission Lorenzo Natali Media Award, the PACJA (Pan African Climate Justice Alliance) Africa Climate Change Reporter of the Year in 2016, the 2015 Environment Africa Award for reporting on the effects of global warming and climate change on rural communities in Zimbabwe and the United Nations' best Developmental Reporter in 2014 (Zimbabwe). In 2010 and 2011 Mambondiyani served as a Knight Science Journalism fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



**TAIWO ADEBULU** is an investigative journalist and head of the Fact Check desk at The Cable, Nigeria; he has won multiple awards, among which the Sustainable Development Goals category at the Zimeo Excellence in Media Awards in Ethiopia in 2017. In 2020 he won the PwC Media Excellence Awards and African Fact-checking Awards.



\***NAZLEE ARBEE** is a multimedia journalist and photographer based in Cape Town, whose investigations center on the marginalised: women and the LGBTQI community in particular.

## The Editors

**RUONA MEYER** is an Emmy-nominated, multimedia investigative journalist, media trainer, and consultant with postgraduate degrees in Journalism from Wits University in South Africa and the University of Westminster, London, UK. She has eighteen years experience in journalism across Africa and Europe and her work has been published notably on the BBC, the Financial Times, Reuters, Deutsche Welle and ZAM magazine as well as in various outlets within Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, the Netherlands and Germany. She was named Investigative Journalist of the Year in Nigeria in 2013. In August 2019, Meyer's one-hour documentary 'Sweet Sweet Codeine' brought a first Emmy nomination for the BBC World Service and Nigeria.

In 2021, Meyer was appointed Africa Initiative Manager at the Solutions Journalism Network, which produces evidence-based reporting on solutions to social problems. She is simultaneously studying for a PhD in Investigative Journalism and Media Discourse at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK. Her research interrogates the construct of counterpower within African-transnational investigative journalism networks. She coordinated and edited four investigations for the Kleptocracy Project: two in Nigeria, one in South Africa and one in Liberia.

**BRAM POSTHUMUS** has been covering stories in various parts of West Africa for international radio, press and online publications for close to 30 years. He has covered coups in Mali, Guinea Bissau and Burkina Faso, resource extracting issues in Guinea (bauxite), Burkina Faso (gold), Liberia (timber), Côte d'Ivoire (cocoa) and Senegal (oil and gas) as well as governance issues

in all of these countries and a few others. He is the author of a political biography of Guinea.

He has also been keeping tabs on the growing jihadist security threat that started in 1990s Algeria, then spread into Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso and is now making inroads into coastal states, specifically Benin and Côte d'Ivoire. His focus is on what he calls the 'extraordinarily inept' national, regional and international responses to the phenomenon, which are likely to constitute fresh contributions to another Kleptocracy Project. For the current project he coordinated and edited investigations in Zimbabwe and the Central African Republic.

**STEPHEN KAFEERO** is a Ugandan investigative journalist who has practiced, contributing to different publications, since 2010. He is an Open Society Foundation fellow for Investigative Journalism at University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and a candidate for an MA in Journalism and Media Studies. He considers himself an activist as well as a journalist and has a particular interest in human rights, the media, politics and the law. He coordinated and edited the investigations for the Kleptocracy Project in Zambia and Uganda.

**EVELYN GROENINK** is ZAM's investigations and narrative editor. She co-founded the Forum for African Investigative Reporters in 2003 and has coordinated and edited over a dozen transnational investigations on the African continent. She has published seven books, among which an investigation into the assassinations of three southern African freedom fighters, and a five-part series on South Africa's slide into corruption under the government of Jacob Zuma. She coordinated and edited ZAM's past four kleptocracy investigations; coordinated and edited the Transnational Investigation into COVID 19 relief funds for the current Kleptocracy 'Anatomy' project, while she also served as overall narrative editor.

## The Ten Stories



**Central African Republic** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***The tax collectors from Nola***

How foreign companies' money is gobbled up by a 'mafia system'.  
by Fiacre Salabe [@FIACRESALABE](#)



**Liberia** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***The happy few's happy places***

Politicians and officials escape accounting for their wealth.  
by Bettie Johnson-Mbayo [@BJMBAYO](#)



**Nigeria** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***The border control syndicate***

Plunder continues in spite of parliament and the courts.  
by Theophilus Abbah [@THEOPHILUSA](#)



**Zambia** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***The mills that grind away the money***

Poverty reduction enriches the ruling party.  
by Charles Mafa [@MAFACHARLES](#)



**Mozambique** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***The hundred-thousand-dollar workshops***

What happened to the Covid relief funds for sick people  
and refugees?  
by Estacio Valoi [@ESTACIOSVALOI](#)



**Zimbabwe** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***The ruling party syndicate***

From diamond dictatorship to diamond syndicate and back.  
by Andrew Mambondiyani [@MAMBONDIYANI](#)



**Uganda** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***The government that robs its teachers***

You can now delete, retire, suspend a teacher with one click  
of the mouse.  
by John Masaba and John Mukela [@JOHN\\_MASABA](#)



**Nigeria** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***Extorting those who want to marry***

Corrupt officials simply won't give you your certificate until  
you pay.  
by Taiwo Adebulu [@TAIWEEN](#)



**Mali** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***A show for the funders***

Did the minister pay his election campaign with relief funds?  
by David Dembélé [@ALCOFRIS](#)



**South Africa** – [READ FULL STORY](#)

### ***Looking for crumbs in a crumbling state***

Grants for poor people stopped because of 'limited budgets'.  
Who benefitted from the 1 billion US\$ of Covid aid?  
by Nazlee Arbee





● IMAGE

The ZAM Kleptocracy Project  
The anatomy of a system.  
ILLUSTRATION by Diana Ejaita.

## ‘If a story moves you, act on it.’ – Sisonke Msimang\*

\***SISONKE MSIMANG** is a South African writer and activist. She delivered the first ZAM Nelson Mandela Lecture, 10 February, 2019, International Theatre Amsterdam.



# Beyond corruption, further into kleptocracy

## Going for the heart of the monster

Evelyn Groenink

TO SAY THAT THE ELECTION WIN of pro-change opposition leader Hichilema in Zambia, last August, was a *direct* result of Charles Mafa's and John Mukela's recent exposés on the previous ruling parties' misgovernance in that country would be, to put it mildly, a bit of an exaggeration. The work done by our Zambian colleagues was simply propelled by the general public's outrage at a political elite leadership that kept indebting the country with foreign loans to fund mansions, vehicles and a luxurious lifestyle for itself. Mafa and Mukela informed that outrage; they provided evidence; they and ZAM distributed the message over all of Zambia and beyond. In the end, it was the Zambian voter who had had enough.

It is not often that investigative journalists see real results of their work. It is even more special when we align with the public interest to such an extent that we do assist the public in overcoming the abusive, corrupt, dysfunctional and kleptocratic powers that torment it. Conversely, the public also assist us: it alerts us, follows us, provides information, and pressurises for change when we manage to unearth the –often high-level– wrongs at the root of the abusive treatment it receives.

In our Kleptocracy series, we managed to align with sections of the public in nine African countries. In Uganda, it was teachers; in Nigeria, engaged couples whose marriage wishes were thwarted by bribery demands from officials; in Zimbabwe, communities in the Marange diamond fields helped uncover state-linked theft. Central African Republic villagers pointed Fiacre Salabe to forest companies' tax payments to local leaders, –and also to the trajectory of these tax payments from local notables to their 'masters', as one official called it in the story, at the central government level.

In that country it was perhaps for the first time that a local journalist exposed how millions of dollars paid for timber extraction turned into nothing but a 'cake' shared by notables in state offices and literally nothing else. Salabe also showed how this situation is at least partly to blame for the many armed conflicts in the country. 'Social tensions will continue to mount, and people may well turn against authorities,' in the words of a representative of a local youth association in Salabe's story.

### Inroads

Armed conflict is of course not the kind of impact or public engagement any journalist would go for. Peaceful change for the better is much preferable. The question is how we can increase our contribution to a better world, that is, increasing impact, as journalists. Do we contribute enough to change merely by exposing wrongs? How much impact did we really have, looking back at our recent Kleptocracy series?



### ● IMAGE

Nigeria – Extorting those who want to marry  
Corrupt officials simply won't give you a marriage certificate until you pay.

ILLUSTRATION by Diana Ejaita.

Indisputably, ZAM's 'Klepto Ten' did make inroads towards change. A few examples:

- Bettie Johnson-Mbayo shook the Liberian Anti Corruption Commission out of its inertia and broke through obstacles that stood in the way of her Freedom of Information requests;
- Taiwo Adebulu's story caused the government to warn the Ikoyo marriage registry to put its house in order;
- The Zimbabwean Anti Corruption Commission opened an office in the Marange diamond fields after Andrew Mambondiyan's story; the smuggling ring-leader reportedly left the country.
- In Mozambique, the World Bank showed a fleeting interest in what happened to stolen COVID aid funds.
- Audits were set in motion in Mali after David Dembélé's investigation: 'Where there was fear before, now people are talking', Dembélé reports.
- An individual named in connection with the plunder of the Nigerian Immigration Service gave us extra publicity by threatening to sue author Theophilus Abbah, editor Ruona Meyer, and ZAM.

Yet, in most cases, lasting change still seems beyond our reach. When Taiwo Adebulu checked with the Ikoyo marriage registry two months after the service had improved, he found the officials were back to their extortionary practices. In Nigeria, the funnelling of state money into private pockets simply continues, and so do teacher salary theft in Uganda and wood plunder and 'cake eating' by state officials in the CAR. In South Africa, the same ruling party that abetted nepotism, mismanagement

and fraud in the social services, victimising tens of thousands extremely poor households – as exposed by Nazlee Arbee-, now campaigns in upcoming elections with a promise to ‘root out corruption.’

## *We must gun for more lasting results.*

We must therefore gun for more lasting results. The journalists are certainly eager to continue the fight, and so is ZAM. But how to do that without doing the same, or similar, stories, all over again?

### **Beyond corruption**

Our previous Kleptocracy project looked for the ‘anatomy’ of kleptocratic systems – and the ‘Klepto Ten’ indeed uncovered quite a bit of the monster. But how do we proceed to aim for its heart? Which powers move it? Who ensures that doors remain closed when robbed teachers come knocking? How can a director-general simply admit that ‘there are corrupt people in the department’ without seemingly feeling any responsibility to do anything about that?

In ZAM’s next round of investigations we want to delve yet deeper into such questions. Firstly, we aim to go wider, transnationally, in Africa. How many health, education, police or roads departments and water and electricity enterprises are abused, where, by whom and how? What are the parallels? This approach will take us beyond a focus on corruption to the dysfunction that lies beneath. (It is about time for that, too: a recent report from Nigeria (1) shows that even the term ‘anti-corruption’, in many instances, has started to only cause more fatigue and pessimism among a public that has come to expect nothing else.)

That many states in post-colonial Africa are misgoverned is a matter of record (2), as is the fact that misgovernance usually comes with wastage, nepotism, incompetence and opportunities for theft. A good example is the fraud in South Africa’s social welfare system, which could never have happened on the scale that it did if the system’s administration had not been dysfunctional from the onset. In Nigeria the fish absolutely rots from the head: the top level in the Interior Ministry was so occupied with enriching itself and its shady private associates, that the lower levels clearly felt entitled to do some stealing too.

### **Murky waters**

But do we even know how a good system *should* work? How does a fish interrogate water in places where all is murky? We aim to start working closer together with governance research centres like Democracy in Africa (see note below) and the Public Administration Research Institute PARI in South Africa to finetune our questioning in this regard. For example: in the case of a story about dilapidated, empty and understaffed clinics, expertise on issues like staffing, stocking, maintenance and water and electricity supply will arm us with more precise questions. Applying cost ratios –measuring an expensive budget against the output of the service- will help unearth mismanagement, overpaying on (certain) salaries, ghost workers, incompetence, and neglect. In the case of expensive ‘projects’ –like hospitals, dams, (or agricultural machines like in the Zambian investigation)-, the absence of any business case or plan will help show how the crumbling of the project is practically incorporated from the start.

## *Systems are caused to dysfunction.*

Such interrogation will help show *how* systems are caused to dysfunction, who benefits, and how corruption then enters the picture: first, through the existence of so many loopholes and leaks that stealing becomes normalised; two, through acts by those who deliberately keep the system broken –so that they can steal more.

In uncovering all of the above, we also plan to work more consistently with a category of people who have already been invaluable to us in the past: good civil servants. There are, fortunately, plenty state workers and officials who simply want to do a good job in serving the public, and who are often frustrated and victimised by the dysfunctional systems in which they work –not to mention suspended, fired and physically assaulted, and sometimes killed. We aim to find more and more of brave individuals, work with them, and map and highlight the places where they succeed, often overcoming great odds, to make things work.

### **Calling the World Bank**

And then we still have to bring the public with us, of course: from the start to the end of each investigation. Public disservice can be fleshed out through exit surveys at hospitals and schools; social media provide many opportunities to link with communities and civil society through Twitter hashtags, chat communications, recording of feedback and circulation of clips, interviews and infographics. Members of the public may even be willing to help us knock on doors the next time that a high-level official refuses to take our calls.

Internationally, ZAM is working on increasing its capacity to assist Africa-based colleagues by holding powers-that-be (including international institutions, governments and donors) accountable from its Amsterdam base. And increasingly ask the million dollar question: why anyone would still give development aid to kleptocrats?

Who knows, maybe next time the World Bank may even answer our calls.

### **Notes**

1. See <https://ace.soas.ac.uk/publication/unintended-consequences-of-anti-corruption-messaging-in-nigeria/>
2. See for example [http://democracyinafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Democracy-Capture-Report\\_WITH-DESIGN-AND-FORMATTING\\_THIS-ONE.pdf](http://democracyinafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Democracy-Capture-Report_WITH-DESIGN-AND-FORMATTING_THIS-ONE.pdf) and [http://democracyinafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-Shadow-State-in-Africa-Report\\_FOR-INSTANT-UPLOAD\\_COMPRESSED\\_THIS-ONE.pdf](http://democracyinafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-Shadow-State-in-Africa-Report_FOR-INSTANT-UPLOAD_COMPRESSED_THIS-ONE.pdf)



● **IMAGE**

Uganda – The government that robs its teachers  
You can now delete, retire, suspend a teacher with one click  
of the mouse.

ILLUSTRATION by Diana Ejaita.

## Livecast

**HOW AFRICAN OLIGARCHS** sell out their countries. How international aid helps them. How activists try to stop them.

Talking The Kleptocracy Project in a livecast talkshow in collaboration with Pakhuis de Zwijger, Amsterdam.

**WATCH A RECORDING** of the livecast [HERE](#).

### Host



Documentary maker and founder of Strawberry Earth  
Ikenna Azuike

### Guests



Professor Akinyinka Akinyoade (Africa Studies Centre)



Ivan Pillay (former Commissioner South African  
Revenue Services)



Benon Herbert Oluka (co-ordinator Global Investigative  
Journalism Network Africa)



Joy Kirigia (Africa Uncensored)



Eliza Anyangwe (CNN)



Stephanie Duncan Williams (ZAM)





● IMAGE

Amsterdam – Pakhuis de Zwijger  
 The ZAM Kleptocracy Project Livecast  
 PHOTOGRAPH by Laurens Nijzink.

## About ZAM

***Building a world beyond them and us.***

**THE ZAM-NET FOUNDATION** ("ZAM") was established in 2007. We are a non-profit platform based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. We build and maintain a network of more than 1200 creatives in (investigative) journalism, photography, the arts and opinion in African countries and the diaspora. We offer their stories, productions and creations to international audiences via our media channels, in events and collaborations. This is how we bridge the gap between 'here' and 'there' and contribute to the dissemination of perspectives and insights in often complex realities.

ZAM is rooted in the Dutch solidarity movements with the struggles against apartheid and colonialism. Building on this tradition, ZAM is the the organiser of ImagineMandela-Live!, an annual lecture and cultural programme in collaboration with the International Theatre Amsterdam.

Earlier ZAM investigations include:

***The Plunder Route to Panama. How African oligarchs steal from their countries.***

***The Associates. Handling business for the kleptocrats.***

***Public Disservice. How poor African countries waste billions.***

***The Last Resource. Risking death to feed your kids.***

***The Fairtrade Chocolate Rip-off.***



## The Kleptocracy Project

A ZAM Magazine publication

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Zambia – The mills that grind away the money  
Poverty reduction enriches the ruling party.  
ILLUSTRATION by Diana Ejaita.

# ZAM