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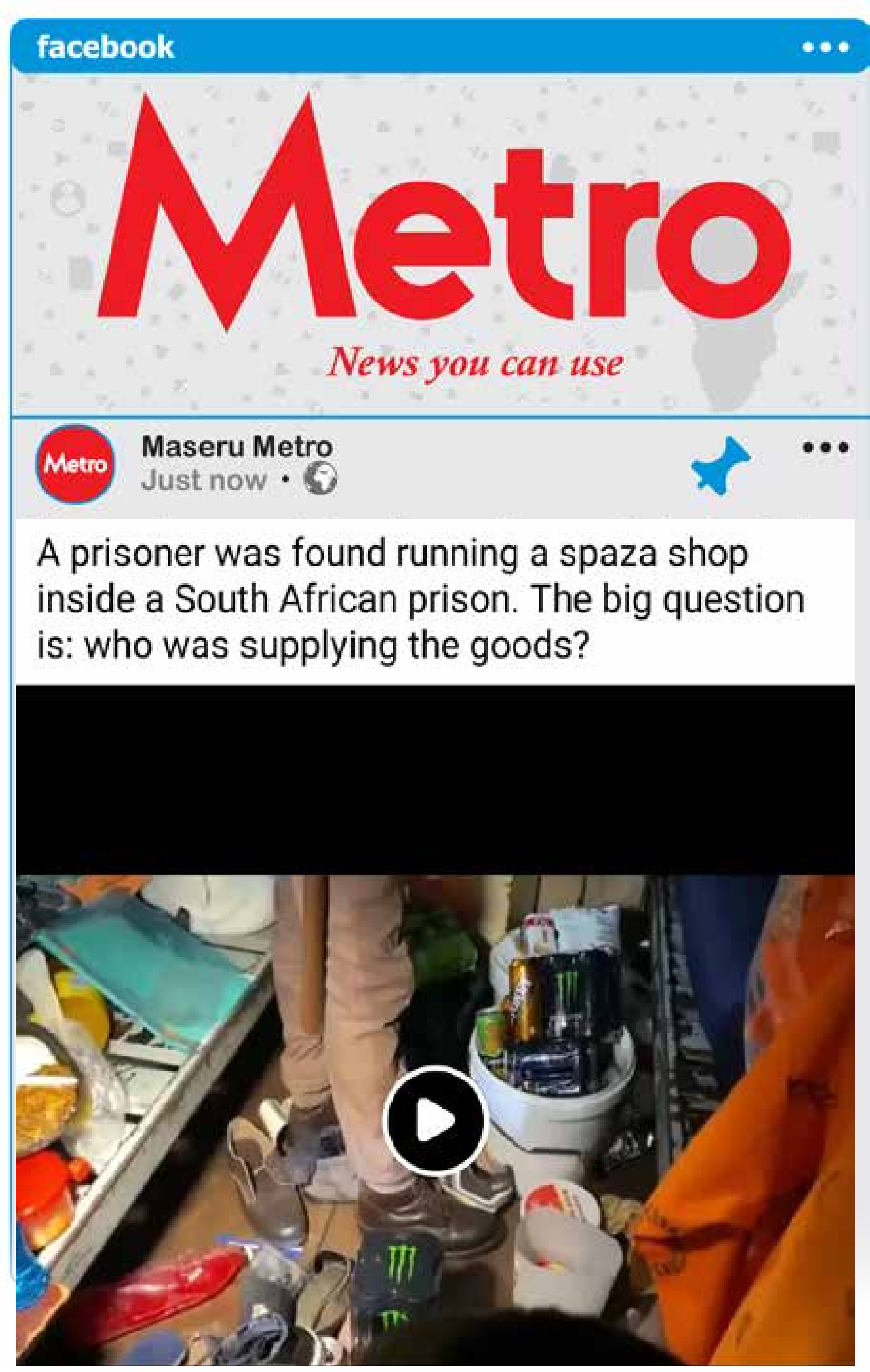
THE SPEAKER WHO WON'T DECLARE



The speaker who won't declare

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

- Sekhamane preaches accountability at SADC podiums – then misses his own asset deadline
- 75 MPs, 9 Senators named by DCEO for defying the law they helped pass
- From apology to Dr Lebese to silence on the Speaker: what the corrigendum didn't fix

MASERU – For a man who has built a public reputation on lecturing others about corruption, maladministration, and impunity, Tlohang Sekhamane has some explaining to do.

The Speaker of the National Assembly, who only months ago stood before delegates from across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and declared that the people have put in place a system to ensure there is no corruption, has himself been named by the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) as one of at least 75 members of the National Assembly who have failed to submit their Asset and Liability Declaration for the 2025/26 financial year.

The DCEO's public reminder, issued on August, 18 this year, is unambiguous in its language.

It states that the listed members and Senators, being public officials required to make a full declaration in terms of section 2 of the PCEO Act 1999 and its regulations, have failed to do so despite previous notice and a set deadline.

Pursuant to Regulation 66(5)(d) of the PCEO Regulations, 2021, the Directorate has now issued a final 14-day window from the date of the reminder for these officials to comply.

Sitting at the top of that list, as the first among equals in this roll of non-compliance, is the name of the Speaker himself: T. Sekhamane. The irony is not subtle.

Sekhamane has occupied the Speaker's chair since October 2022 and has used his platform repeatedly to speak in the register of a reformer.

In October last year, while opening the 17th SADC Organisation of Public Accounts Committees (SADCOPAC) conference, he told delegates that Parliament's role was to safeguard the welfare of the people who elected them.

He reminded the gathering that the legislature represents the people and their wealth, makes laws, allocates money, and oversees how that money is spent.

As recently as May this year, Sekhamane was warning errant members about absenteeism and threatening to enforce standing orders against them.

He has positioned himself, consistently, as the custodian of parliamentary discipline and public accountability. Yet, when it comes to his own statutory obligation to disclose personal assets and liabilities, the man who chairs the House that oversees public money has, on the DCEO's own account, failed to comply.

This is not a mere technicality. Asset declaration is the single most basic accountability mechanism available to any state built on the premise that those who wield public power should not be permitted to quietly enrich themselves in the shadows.

It exists precisely so that a leader cannot preach probity to the public while shielding their own financial affairs from scrutiny.

Sekhamane is not the only high-profile figure on this list.

The DCEO's reminder and accompanying schedules list a staggering 75 members of the National Assembly and nine Senators as having failed to declare.

Among the non-compliant, cross-checked where possible against the National Assembly's own published record of the 11th Parliament, are several figures whose public profiles make their absence from the registry conspicuous.

These include Deputy Speaker Tšepang Tšita-Mosena; the Basotho Patriotic Party's Tefo Mapesela; and Machabana Lemphane-Letsie, who chairs the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

Ironically, Lemphane-Letsie recently told the SADCOPAC conference that the implementation of PAC decisions was the central challenge facing oversight bodies in the region.

Also on the list is Selibe Mochoboroane, the leader of the Movement for Economic Change and Minister of Agriculture.

The extensive list further includes members Jane Lekunya (Mechachane), Letsema Adonts'i (Mokhotlong), Mohlahlobo Busa (Qacha's Nek), Sello Hakane (Qeme), Mohau Hlalele (Thaba-Phechela), Mamamello Holomo (Thaba-Tseka), 'Mope Khati (Pela Ts'oeu), Mootsi Lehata (Makhaleng), Chopho Lekholoane (Khafung), Thabiso Lekitla (Mekaling), Kobeli Letlailana (Lithoteng), Katleho Mabeleng (Hloahloeng), Malefane Mabote (Tsikoane), Bataung Makhakhe (Bobatsi), Teboho Malataliana (Bela-Bela), Maimane Maphathe (Matelile), Paul Masiu (Lesotho People's Congress), Matiisetso Elizabeth Matsie (Taung), Ezekiel Mdlokovana (Mohale's Hoek), Marefuoe Alice Muso (Mekaling), Letsekang Moloi (Lebakeng), Lebohang Monaheng (Thaba-Putsoa), Sekhele Mosebetsane (Mashai), Lehlohonolo Mosoang (Sempe), Khotso Motseki (Leribe), Makatleho Motsoasele (Motimposo), Moeketsi Motsoane (Mafeteng), Rethabile Nalane (Hlotse), Ts'eliso Nkoefoshe (Tsoelike), Lebohang Simon Phohleli (Rothe), Karabo Pholosa (Butha-Buthe), Lejone Puseletso (Thaba-Moea), Monethi Ramakalima (Malingoaneng), Itumeleng Rantsho (Likotsi), Matankiso Tekane (Phoqoane), Mampho Tjabane (Stadium Area), and Tommy Tayob (Moselinyane).

A closer inspection of the DCEO's published list reveals minor spelling or initial discrepancies when checked against Parliament's own roll. For instance, the Malimong member appears in Parliament's records as Lekhotsa Mafatle, while the DCEO schedule lists an "L. Mafethe".

Similarly, a "T. J. Mosotho" appears where Parliament's record shows the Semena member as John Mosotho. While these may be clerical slips, the Directorate should publish full names to avoid ambiguity in such serious matters. However, the presence of the Speaker's name, captured clearly as "T. Sekhamane," is beyond dispute.

The Senate shows a similarly troubling rate of non-compliance. Nine Senators were initially named, including Lerotholi L. Seeiso, Lerotholi M. Seeiso, Mojela T. Makhaola, Seeiso S. Nkuebe, Khoabane L.K. Theko, Moholobela S. Moholobela, Peete R.L. Peete, Sentle D. Mojela, and Thabiso Lebese.

It was regarding the Senate list that the DCEO issued a separate corrigendum later that same day.

The correction notice, also dated 18th August 2026, acknowledged that Thabiso Lebese's name was erroneously included.

According to the DCEO, Lebese had actually submitted his declaration, and his appearance on the delinquent list was an administrative oversight.

The Directorate offered sincere apologies to Thabiso Lebese and confirmed his name had been struck from the list.

The same corrigendum also removed Lerotholi L. Seeiso and Khoabane Theko, explaining that these two Senators had been out of office due to health issues, and arrangements would be made for their later submission. Notably, no such accommodation was extended to Sekhamane.

This is understandable, as Sekhamane has been visibly active in his official capacity throughout the period, presiding over sittings, launching caucuses, and addressing international conferences on the very subject of accountability.

While non-declaration does not automatically prove hidden wrongdoing, the PCEO Act exists to allow the public to test that presumption through transparency.

The scale of non-compliance—three-quarters of the National Assembly—raises a troubling question: what is the value of a declaration regime that the leadership of Parliament treats as optional?

Sekhamane is the constitutional custodian of the National Assembly's integrity. His name appearing on a list of those who have ignored a legal deadline is not a footnote; it is the story.

The DCEO has now given the Speaker and his colleagues 14 days to regularize their position or face the consequences permitted under the PCEO Regulations, 2021.

The public deserves to know if their leaders will be held to the standard they so frequently preach

Women's Caucus takes fight against child marriage to Mokhotlong

LIAPENG RALIENGOANE

MOKHOTLONG - Women's Caucus, a Parliamentary body, through the support of SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) in partnership with European Union (EU), has taken its campaign against child marriage, early and unintended pregnancies and gender-based violence (GBV) to Mokhotlong, where communities are grappling with violence, teenage pregnancy and school dropout among girls.

The concerns facing communities came to the fore during a public gathering held at Lehlohla Agricultural Resource Centre in Makhoakhoeng on Monday.

The Lesotho 2023-2024 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted by the Ministry of Health reports that 24% of women in Mokhotlong experienced physical violence in the previous 12 months while 40% of ever-partnered women in Mokhotlong experienced violence by a husband or intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

District Medical Officer Dr 'Mamohoanyane Chabana said the 2023–2024 Survey showed that young people outnumber older people in Mokhotlong while GBV remains a significant concern in the district.

She warned of the health consequences of pregnancy among young girls, saying their bodies are still developing and may not be adequately prepared for pregnancy and childbirth.

Dr. Chabana said babies born to young mothers could also face malnutrition because young mothers may not have sufficient nutrients to support their infants.

She further expressed concern about men who prevent their wives from accessing HIV treatment, urging men to allow their partners to receive treatment and to accompany them to health facilities. Dr. Chabana also reminded men that having sexual relations with children is a criminal offence.

From the Ministry of Education and Training, Education Inspector Mak'hethuoe Hlongoane said school dropout was another major concern, with girls leaving school because of pregnancy and elopement, while boys were sometimes taken out of school to herd livestock at cattle posts. She said 16.5% of young girls dropped out of school in Mokhotlong last year.

Hlongoane urged communities to work together to ensure that children remain in school. "It takes a village to raise a child," she said.

One of the community members Sehloho Sakoane said some children refuse to attend school because parents are no longer allowed to beat them, while reporting violence can also be difficult.

Sakoane alleged that some police officers laugh at men when they report violence perpetrated by their wives, saying such experiences discourage men from seeking help.

Relebohile Heleho, an Area Technical Officer for Livestock who has worked in Makhoakhoeng for about a year, said she

had observed several challenges affecting children in the area. She said some boys are taken out of school to work at cattle posts, while young herdboys may also be exposed to sexual exploitation.

Heleho raised concern about older women who allegedly engage young boys, particularly herdboys, in sexual relationships, putting them at risk of HIV infection.

Women's Caucus Chairperson 'Mamamello Holomo said the visit was aimed at addressing child marriage, early and unintended pregnancies and GBV, while listening to communities about gaps that need to be addressed through legislation and other interventions.

"Our work as parliamentarians is to ensure that girls and young women are protected through laws. We are here to build the future generation," Holomo said.

She said the caucus wanted to hear from stakeholders about what laws needed to be made or strengthened to better protect girls and young women.

The caucus also paid a courtesy call on Mokhotlong District Administrator Kepa Keqe on Monday who appealed to government ministries visiting Mokhotlong to observe proper coordination by paying courtesy calls to his office instead of entering the district without informing the district administration. He said stronger coordination among government structures was necessary to ensure that interventions in the district are properly coordinated.

Senator 'Mamolapo Majara called for stronger cooperation among all stakeholders to ensure that children remain in school and are protected from circumstances that could derail their education.

She urged parents, communities, schools, government institutions and other stakeholders to work together to help children focus on their education and avoid early and unintended pregnancies, child marriage and GBV.

The public hearings come as Parliament considers the Child Protection and Welfare (Amendment) Bill, which seeks to strengthen legal protections for children, including measures addressing child marriage.

The hearings are also aligned with the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage, which emphasises the role of national parliaments in strengthening legislation, public participation and oversight.

This public hearing was supported by SADC-PF in partnership with European Union (EU), as part of efforts to strengthen parliamentary action and community participation in addressing child marriage and protecting children.

The engagement as stated by SADC-PF forms part of Parliament's efforts to gather evidence from communities and strengthen its legislative and oversight response to child marriage and other threats to children's rights.

The hearings are particularly focused on communities affected by the Polihali Dam construction and other areas where girls face heightened risks.

Women's Caucus is a parliamentary body comprising women legislators from different political parties who unite on issues of national importance affecting women and vulnerable populations.

Its work focuses on promoting gender equality, influencing legislation and advocating for stronger protections against gender-based violence and discrimination.

How a school garden in Namibia is sowing seeds of peace

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

NAMIBIA-As the world prepares to celebrate International Youth Day on August 12, a remarkable transformation is taking root in the heart of Namibia. It is a transformation that begins not with grand political declarations, but with the humble act of turning soil and planting seedlings.

At Moses Van Der Byl Primary School, a new initiative titled "Peace My Namibia: A Bowl of Peace, a Patch of Garden" is proving that the path to global harmony often starts in one's own backyard—or, more accurately, in a school's vegetable patch.

On August 7, the school became a vibrant hub of activity as learners, educators, and volunteers gathered to launch a project that is as much about feeding the soul as it is about feeding the body.

This initiative is a collaborative effort between the school and two prominent international organizations: the International Peace Youth Group (IPYG) and its affiliate, Heavenly Culture, World Peace,

Restoration of Light (HWPL). Together, they are addressing the fundamental needs of the community while instilling the values of peace and cooperation in the next generation.

The primary objective of the garden is to bolster the school's feeding programme, providing a sustainable solution to a pressing local challenge. For many students, the school meal is a critical part of their daily nutrition.

However, access to food can be inconsistent. Mr. Simeon Kamati, a teacher at the school, highlighted the stark reality many of his students face: "Most of our learners come from home with empty stomachs, but with this garden, we can ensure they are fed and ready to concentrate in class".

The garden serves as a vital safety net. Mr. Kamati noted that the project aligns directly with Namibia's national vision for food security, acting as a buffer "whenever government supplies lag" to ensure that the children's "minds and learning" remain the priority. By securing a source of fresh vegetables, the school is not just providing calories; it is providing the foundation for academic success and cognitive development.

While the harvest will eventually fill bowls, the process of gardening is already filling minds with essential life skills. The initiative was designed to provide practical life skills training for the learners.

On the launch day, participants were seen preparing garden beds and planting seedlings, but the real work was in the values being practiced: cooperation, responsibility, and environmental care.

The students themselves are the most enthusiastic ambassadors for the project.

Haihwema Twapewoshali, a participating student, expressed a profound understanding of the garden's deeper meaning.

"Through this garden, we didn't just learn how to care for plants—we learned responsibility and the joy of working together with our friends to help each other," Twapewoshali shared.

This sentiment captures the essence of the initiative—that peace is not a passive state, but an active, collaborative effort. The "Peace My Namibia" project does not exist in a vacuum. It is part of the IPYG's global "Peace My City" campaign, which empowers youth to identify and address local community challenges through volunteer action.

By participating in this garden, the youth of Namibia are joining a global network of young people dedicated to community development and peacebuilding ahead of International Youth Day. The involvement of HWPL further connects this small garden to a massive international movement. HWPL is a global organization dedicated to ceasing war and achieving world peace through a multi-faceted approach that includes peace education, interfaith harmony, and advocacy for international peace law.

With a global membership exceeding 580,000 as of September 2025, HWPL works to establish robust networks among youth, women, and the media to ensure that peace becomes a sustainable reality. The "Peace My Namibia" initiative serves as a model for how local actions can reflect global aspirations.

By focusing on food security and youth empowerment, the project addresses the root causes of instability and conflict at a grassroots level.

The hope, as expressed by young Haihwema Twapewoshali, is for growth: "I hope our vegetables keep growing, and that our garden becomes even bigger in the years to come".

As citizens look toward the future of peace in Namibia and beyond, the lesson from Moses Van Der Byl Primary School is clear: when they work together to nurture the earth, they also nurture the best in themselves. A single patch of garden can indeed become a bowl of peace for an entire community.

Chad opposition figure, Succes Masra, calls for reconciliation after his release

RÉDACTION AFRICANEWS

Chadian President Mahamat Idriss Deby on Friday pardoned jailed ex-prime minister and leader of the main opposition party Succes Masra and eight other opposition leaders.

Deby has led Chad since 2021 after taking charge of a military transition following the death of his father, who was killed by rebels after 30 years leading the central African country.

Masra, one of the president's fiercest critics, was sentenced to 20 years in prison a year ago, convicted of hate speech, xenophobia and having incited a massacre.

The eight other party leaders all belonged to the Political Actors' Consultation Group (GCAP), the main opposition coalition, which was dissolved by the Supreme Court in April.

They were jailed in May for eight years after being found guilty of inciting an insurrection.

The presidential pardon entails a "full remission of custodial sentences for the convicted", according to a decree published on the presidency's Facebook page.

"We thank the president of the republic for having braved the obstacles and chosen to move forward in the spirit of national unity that is now coming into being," Ndolembai Sade Njesada, vice president of Masra's The Transformers party, said.

"We hope at last to sit down around a table to move peace forward," he added.

Like other opposition figures, Masra, 42, an economist, had fled Chad after the army and police opened fire on demonstrators protesting an extension of the political transition under the Deby-led ruling junta in October 2022.

Masra returned from exile and signed a reconciliation deal with Deby before being named prime minister five months ahead of the 2024 presidential election.

Deby was elected head of state with just over 60 percent of the vote, in a contested ballot boycotted by a majority of opposition parties.

Masra faced off against Deby in that vote, coming second with nearly a fifth of the vote, but claimed victory.

He was arrested in May 2025 and sentenced three months later to 20 years in prison, in what Human Rights Watch called a politically motivated trial.

- ARICA NEWS

JSC to create new rules to hold judges accountable for misconduct short of removal

SAMUEL MWANAWANJUGUNA

The Judicial Service Commission (JSC) is considering new rules to hold judges accountable for misconduct that may not meet the constitutional threshold for their removal from office.

The proposal was announced on Friday, August 14, after the JSC and Judiciary Leadership Team held joint deliberations on accountability, integrity, performance, and public confidence in the justice system.

The move comes weeks after the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) led lawyers in a nationwide court boycott over concerns about judicial accountability, alleged corruption, case delays, and the handling of complaints against judges and judicial officers.

The lawyers later targeted 12 judges and one magistrate after accusing them of being linked to court orders that had halted investigations by the JSC and the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission.

In its latest communiqué, the JSC said it would continue discussions on "strengthening the framework for addressing judicial misconduct".

According to JSC, this includes conduct that may warrant accountability but does not meet the constitutional threshold for removal from office.

However, JSC stressed that judicial independence must be protected, saying no judge should face disciplinary action merely because of an unpopular judicial decision.

"At the same time, judicial independence cannot be invoked to shield corruption, misconduct, incompetence, or other conduct inconsistent with the Constitution and the judicial oath," the JSC said.

The JSC and Judiciary said they would also work towards "clearer and complementary statutory and institutional frameworks".

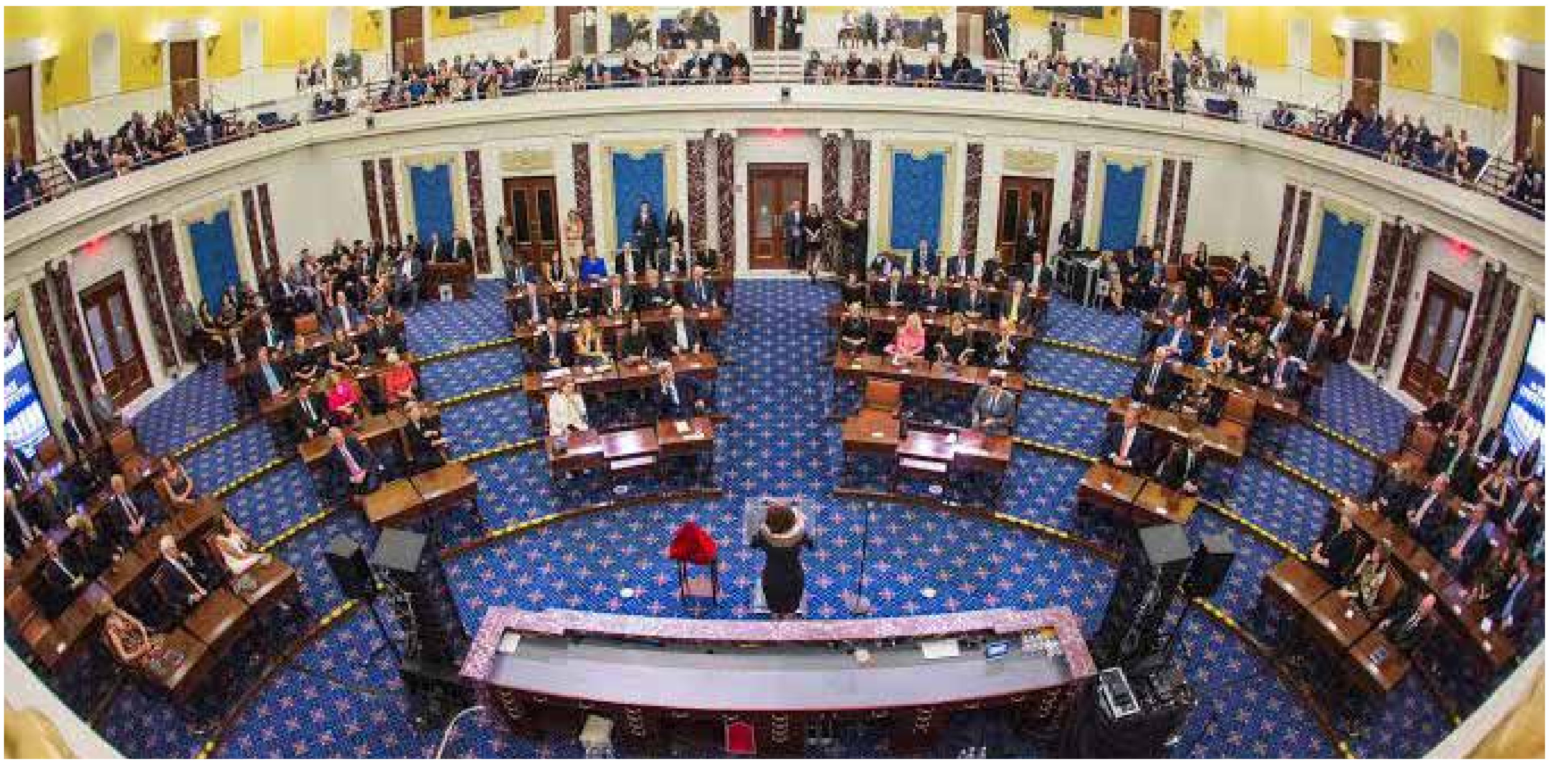
Under their proposal, defining their respective responsibilities, including through legislative reforms where necessary.

The institutions further acknowledged concerns raised by court users, advocates, and the public over delays in justice, integrity, judicial performance, complaints handling, and transparency.

The JSC said it would strengthen its complaints framework, including following up with the National Assembly's Committee on Delegated Legislation on regulations intended to establish a "clear, predictable and procedurally fair framework" for complaints against judges and judicial officers.

- KENYANS

US Senate approves AGOA extension until end of 2028



AMINA DIARRA

Key Facts

—Senate approval: The US Senate voted 90–6 on 8 August 2026 to pass H.R. 6500, which it amended into a government-funding measure that extends the African Growth and Opportunity Act through 31 December 2028; because the Senate changed the bill, it returns to the House for a concurrence vote before it can become law.

—**Eligible countries**: AGOA currently covers 32 eligible sub-Saharan African countries, granting duty-free access for thousands of products.

—**Legislative timeline**: AGOA lapsed on 30 September 2025, received a one-year extension to 31 December 2026 in February 2026, and now faces a three-year extension to 31 December 2028.

—**Duty refunds**: The bill provides for refunds of duties on eligible goods entered after 30 September 2025 and before enactment, covering the period when AGOA had lapsed.

—**Apparel provisions**: The extension preserves the third-country fabric provision, allowing some apparel made in beneficiary countries using non-AGOA yarns and fabrics to qualify for duty-free access.

—**Great-power context**: Africa holds about 30 percent of the world's critical minerals, and lawmakers increasingly frame AGOA as a tool to compete with China for African markets and supply chains.

The US Senate approved a bill extending the African Growth and Opportunity Act through 31 December 2028, restoring three years of trade-preference certainty for 32 eligible sub-Saharan African countries after the programme lapsed in late 2025.

What the AGOA extension bill actually does

The Senate-approved bill extends duty-free treatment under the African Growth and Opportunity Act through 31 December 2028. It also extends duty-free treatment under the Generalised System of Preferences for beneficiary sub-Saharan African countries.

The legislation preserves AGOA's apparel preferences and the third-country fabric provision, which allows some apparel made in beneficiary countries using non-AGOA yarns and fabrics to still qualify for duty-free access. It also provides for refunds of duties on eligible goods entered after 30 September 2025 and before enactment, covering the period when AGOA had lapsed.

The House of Representatives passed the three-year extension (H.R. 6500) on 12 January 2026 by 340–54. Because the Senate amended the bill on 8 August, it now returns to the House for final approval before reaching the president's desk.

A timeline of uncertainty for African exporters

AGOA was first enacted in 2000 and most recently extended in 2015, when Congress prolonged it to September 2025.

When that deadline arrived on 30 September 2025, the programme lapsed, leaving exporters and logistics firms in limbo.

In February 2026, Congress and the president enacted a one-year extension to 31 December 2026, retroactive to the lapse date.

Reuters described that short-term fix as a temporary reprieve rather than a durable settlement.

The current three-year extension to 31 December 2028, now approved by the Senate, aims to give businesses a longer planning horizon.

For apparel manufacturers placing orders months in advance and for investors deciding whether to finance factories in Africa, that certainty matters directly to the bottom line.

Why the AGOA extension is about more than tariffs

AGOA has shifted from a largely technocratic trade preference into a strategic instrument of great-power competition. The core question is no longer only whether Africa gets tariff-free access, but whether Washington is willing to use trade policy as a long-term geopolitical tool.

China is the main comparator in the background. Analysts and congressional supporters increasingly frame AGOA as part of a US effort to compete with Beijing for African markets, manufacturing links, and critical minerals.

Africa holds about 30 percent of the world's critical minerals, a fact often used to explain why Washington sees commercial policy as strategic policy.

Some lawmakers have pushed versions of the bill that would use eligibility criteria to reward countries seen as aligned with US interests and penalise those closer to China or Russia.

South Africa and the geopolitics of eligibility

For South Africa, the issue has been especially sensitive. Pretoria is a major AGOA beneficiary but also a geopolitical outlier in Washington's eyes due to its relations with Russia and China.

Reuters and other sources have described uncertainty over South Africa's standing in the programme amid strained bilateral ties. In January 2026, South Africa welcomed the House approval of the AGOA renewal, signalling how much the programme matters for its export sectors.

The programme has also become entangled in the Trump administration's broader "America First" trade posture. The one-year extension in February 2026 was widely read as a signal that Washington was keeping its options open on which countries would remain eligible.

What the AGOA extension means for business and investment

AGOA matters because it can materially affect export margins in labour-intensive sectors. The programme offers duty-free access for thousands of products from eligible countries, supporting jobs and investment across the continent.

In business terms, the extension reduces near-term policy risk for exporters, logistics firms, and investors deciding whether to place orders, finance factories, or shift sourcing into Africa. The apparel sector has been particularly dependent on AGOA, using US market access to support export-led manufacturing.

The wider contest over trade influence, industrial supply chains, and geopolitical alignment in Africa is reshaping how programmes like AGOA are debated in Washington.

As covered in our pillar Africa: The New Scramble, the continent's resources and markets are at the centre of a new global competition.

What to watch next on the AGOA extension

The Senate vote is a significant step, but the bill must still complete the remaining legislative process before it becomes law.

African governments and businesses will be watching closely for any amendments that might tighten eligibility criteria.

The key date to watch is 31 December 2026, when the current one-year extension expires. If the three-year bill is not enacted by then, AGOA would lapse again, throwing trade flows back into uncertainty.

African governments are also trying to balance access to the US market against ties with China, Russia, and other partners. How they navigate that balancing act will shape which countries remain eligible and which lose their preferential access.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **What is the AGOA extension and how long does it last?**

The AGOA extension is a US Senate-approved bill that extends the African Growth and Opportunity Act through 31 December 2028, restoring three years of duty-free trade preferences for 32 eligible sub-Saharan African countries.

- **Which countries benefit from AGOA?**

AGOA currently covers 32 eligible sub-Saharan African countries, granting duty-free access for thousands of products, with the apparel sector being a particularly important beneficiary.

- **What happens if the AGOA extension is not enacted by the end of 2026?**

If the three-year bill is not enacted by 31 December 2026, AGOA would lapse again, throwing trade flows and investment decisions back into uncertainty for African exporters and their US buyers.

- RIO TIMES

When the gate itself is broken: NMDS must answer for locking out students

RANTAU TLALI MAKHETHA

There is a particular cruelty in building a gate, telling desperate people it is the only way through, and then welding it shut. That, in essence, is what the National Manpower Development Secretariat has done to this year's cohort of qualifying students.

Young Basotho who worked for their grades, who met the academic thresholds set for them, who did everything the system asked of them, now find themselves standing outside an institution that will not open.

Not because they failed to qualify. Not because the money does not exist. But because the machinery meant to connect them to that money does not work.

This is not a minor administrative hiccup that can be waved away with the usual bureaucratic apology. It is a structural failure with a human cost measured in lost academic years, abandoned admission offers, and a generation of young people quietly concluding that the state does not intend to keep its side of the bargain.

When a qualifying student cannot access sponsorship, it is not only that student who loses. It is every taxpayer who has watched successive governments promise that merit will be rewarded, every parent who has told a child that hard work opens doors, and every institution of higher learning that built admission calendars around the assumption that NMDS would do its job.

It is worth remembering what NMDS was actually created to do, because the gap between mandate and performance is where this crisis lives. The Secretariat exists to identify the skills Lesotho needs, to find the young people capable of acquiring those skills, and to remove the single biggest obstacle standing between talent and training: money.

That is the entire premise. Lesotho is a small economy that cannot afford to let ability go to waste simply because a family cannot cover tuition, and NMDS was built, at least on paper, to close that gap on the nation's behalf.

When that same institution becomes the obstacle it was created to remove, the failure is not incidental. It strikes at the very reason the Secretariat exists. A funding body that qualifying students cannot reach is not simply underperforming; it has inverted its own purpose.

Let us be precise about what has gone wrong, because precision is the only honest response to an institution that specialises in vagueness. Prospective students were directed, as a matter of official policy, to apply for sponsorship through an NMDS online portal.

That portal, by every indication available to those who have actually tried to use it, does not function as intended. Applicants report pages that will not load, forms that swallow submitted information without confirmation, and a system that offers no reliable way to track whether an application has even been received, let alone processed.

This is not the profile of a platform experiencing occasional strain under heavy traffic. It is the profile of a system that was never properly tested before it was pushed onto the very students whose futures depend on it.

One does not need forensic access to NMDS's internal project files to reach that conclusion; the sheer volume and consistency of technical failure reported by ordinary users speaks for itself.

A properly piloted system does not break this often, this uniformly, for this many people. What we are witnessing looks less like an unfortunate glitch and more like a launch that skipped the basic discipline of testing before deployment.

That distinction matters, because it changes the nature of the accountability owed to the public. A one-off failure invites a fix. A pattern of failure invites a question: who approved this rollout, on what basis, and why were students used as the testing ground for a system that should have been validated long before a single application depended on it?

Government institutions do not get to treat the public, and especially not students whose academic futures hang in the balance, as an unpaid quality-assurance team for half-built digital infrastructure.

If NMDS wanted to pilot a new application system, it had every opportunity to do so quietly, with a small sample, with contingency channels running in parallel. Instead it appears to have gone straight to a live, high-stakes rollout and left students to absorb the consequences of its own unpreparedness.

The financial dimension deserves equal scrutiny. The Auditor-General's own reporting on the Consolidated Financial Statements of the Government of Lesotho records substantial public money flowing to student grants under the National Manpower Development route each year, running into the billions of maloti when the broader manpower development transfers are accounted for.

That is not a trivial line item buried in the back pages of the budget. It is one of the larger single transfers the state makes in the name of human capital development, and it represents a serious commitment of public resources toward the proposition that Lesotho's future depends on educating its young people.

Money of that scale does not sit idle by accident. It sits idle, or is disbursed to the wrong people, or fails to reach deserving applicants at all, when the institution responsible for administering it is either unwilling or unable to build the basic infrastructure needed to get it out the door.

The question the public deserves answered is simple: if the funds exist, and the qualifying students exist, what exactly is standing between the two? A broken web portal is not an acceptable final answer to that question. It is the beginning of an investigation, not the end of one.

This is precisely why the Minister of Finance, Dr Retšelisitsoe Matlanyane, cannot afford to treat this as someone else's problem. NMDS does not operate in a vacuum outside government oversight; it exists within a structure of ministerial responsibility, and the buck on public expenditure, disbursement failures, and the mismanagement of student welfare ultimately runs through the Ministry of Finance.

Dr Matlanyane has spoken, on more than one public occasion, about fiscal discipline and the importance of ensuring that public money achieves its intended purpose. It is difficult to reconcile that stated commitment with silence in the face of an agency under her ministry's authority that is, by all available evidence, failing to sponsor deserving students while sitting on the very funds meant to do so. Dr Matlanyane must direct NMDS, publicly and without further delay, to sponsor the students who have qualified.

Not to review the matter. Not to commission an internal audit that reports back in six months, by which point an entire academic year will have been lost. Directed action, now, that gets qualifying students into the institutions that have accepted them.

There is also a governance question that outlives this particular crisis. An institution that launches a critical public-facing system without adequate testing, and then allows that system to remain broken through an admissions cycle without a functioning manual fallback, is telling the public something about how seriously it takes its mandate. Where was the contingency plan?

Why, when it became apparent early in the application window that the portal was failing, was there no rapid pivot to an alternative channel, whether physical application centres, a functioning email-based system, or an emergency extension of deadlines to compensate for lost time?

Competent institutions build redundancy into critical processes precisely because they understand that technology fails.

NMDS's apparent absence of any such fallback suggests either a failure of foresight or an indifference to the students it exists to serve. Neither is acceptable in an agency entrusted with this much public money and this much responsibility for young people's futures.

It is also worth asking what message this sends beyond our borders. Neighbouring countries have, in various forms, digitised their own scholarship and bursary application systems, and while none of those systems is flawless, the basic expectation of a functioning intake process is now the regional norm rather than the exception.

When Lesotho's own qualifying students compare notes with peers who applied through South African or Namibian equivalents and completed the process without incident, the comparison does not reflect well on us. It is not enough to point to digitisation as an achievement in itself; a portal that does not work is not progress, it is a liability dressed up as modernisation. If NMDS wanted credit for moving into the digital age, it needed to earn that credit by delivering a system that actually functions, not by announcing one and leaving students to discover its failures for themselves.

It should not need saying, but it evidently does: a scholarship a student cannot access is not a scholarship. It is a promise broken in slow motion, dressed up in the language of process and portals and pending applications.

Every week that passes without resolution pushes deserving students closer to missed registration deadlines, forfeited admission spaces, and the quiet, corrosive lesson that the system was never really built for them.

Lesotho cannot afford to keep producing qualified young people only to strand them at the final administrative hurdle. The Minister of Finance has both the authority and, by her own stated priorities, the obligation to intervene.

NMDS must be directed to sponsor the students who have earned it, the broken portal must be fixed or replaced with a working alternative immediately, and someone must explain, in public, how a system this consequential was ever allowed to go live in this condition. Anything less confirms what too many students are already beginning to believe: that in Lesotho, qualifying is not the hard part. Getting the state to honour that qualification is.

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Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle."
– Napoleon Hill, author

Out of your vulnerabilities will come your strength." –
Sigmund Freud, neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis

AI key towards building a competitive digital economy

NEO SENOKO

MASERU- Minister of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation, Nthati Moorosi has reaffirmed the Government's commitment to developing the policies, institutions and partnerships necessary to position Lesotho as a competitive digital economy while further ensuring that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is deployed responsibly and for the benefit of all Basotho.

Moorosi shared on Monday this week during the official opening of a five-day high-level policy and capacity building workshop on the National AI Strategy and Data Centre Blueprint, marking a significant milestone in the country's journey towards a digitally enabled, inclusive and resilient economy.

The workshop, convened by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation (MICSTI) with support from the UN Office of Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET), the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Lesotho, and international experts, is exploring the development of a national AI strategy alongside a blueprint for sovereign data centre capacity.

The initiative builds on Lesotho's recent validation of three landmark digital governance policy frameworks: the Draft Artificial Intelligence Policy, the Draft Data Management Policy, and the Draft Broadband and Shared Infrastructure Policy.

Together, these policy instruments provide the foundation for a modern digital ecosystem that promotes innovation, safeguards rights, strengthens public service delivery and enhances economic competitiveness. The workshop adopts a whole-of-government approach, recognising that AI and digital infrastructure extend far beyond a single sector.

Opening the workshop, Deputy Prime Minister, who is also acting Prime Minister, Nthomeng Majara, underscored the importance of ensuring that Lesotho approaches artificial intelligence with ambition, but also with careful consideration of its national development priorities.

"Lesotho must not merely ask what AI can do for us, but also what kind of a country we would want AI to help us build. This is the question which should guide our deliberations this week," she remarked.

A key focus of the workshop is the development of Lesotho's national data centre roadmap and it is anchored on the UN's Blueprint for the development of National AI and Data Strategies, a comprehensive framework designed to help countries develop national AI capabilities through a people-centred, ethical and development-oriented approach. The framework incorporates governance, infrastructure, data, skills, research, international cooperation and innovation, while ensuring that AI technologies are deployed in ways that respect human rights, transparency and accountability and advance the SDGs agenda.

In remarks delivered on behalf of the UN, the Resident Coordinator, Taija Kontinen-Sharp, reaffirmed the organization's commitment to supporting Lesotho's digital transformation journey emphasizing that artificial intelligence represents much more than a technological advancement.

"Artificial intelligence is not simply a technology issue; it is a development issue. The decisions we make today will shape how Lesotho strengthens public institutions, creates opportunities for young people, delivers better public services and builds a more resilient economy," she highlighted.

The workshop has brought together senior government officials, development partners, private sector representatives, academia and civil society to advance Lesotho's digital transformation agenda and lay the foundations for responsible artificial intelligence governance and national digital infrastructure development.

Remittance inflows surge in recent years

NEO SENOKO

MASERU- The Basotho diaspora's contribution to the country's economy is rising year on year with remittance inflows amounting to US$475 million (M7.71 billion) in 2024, approximately 21 percent of the country's GDP.

This was revealed on Tuesday this week during the ongoing Remittance Investment National Framework Workshop that among others, seeks to transform diaspora contributions and remittances into stronger drivers of investment, financial inclusion, private sector development and sustainable economic growth.

The remittance inflows for Lesotho are substantially higher than in most SADC countries, with the figures demonstrating that Basotho diaspora already represents a significant economic resource.

"We must therefore more beyond viewing the diaspora primarily as a source of household transfers and recognize them as strategic partners in investment, enterprise development and national development. At a time when traditional sources of development finance are increasingly constrained, diaspora investment provides an important opportunity to diversify our sources of capital.

"Our ambition should be to make investing in Lesotho simple, transparent, credible and increasingly accessible remotely and digitally, supported clear procedures, reliable investment information, efficient facilitation and effective after-investment support," the Director of Private Sector Development and Financial Affairs in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 'Maseiso Lekholoane said in her opening remarks on Tuesday.

At the same time, she added, diaspora resources must be connected to real and bankable investment opportunities in sectors aligned with Lesotho's development priorities, including agriculture and agro-processing, manufacturing, tourism, renewable energy, infrastructure and other productive sectors.

The workshop builds on the substantial work already undertaken by government, including with the support of the International Organization of Migration (IOM), particularly in strengthening diaspora engagement and establishing the National Diaspora Investment Forum.

"Our policy ambition should be clear, from remittances to investment, from investment to enterprise, from enterprise to jobs and value creation and from diaspora resources to sustainable national development. The success of this initiative will ultimately not be measured by the framework itself, but by the results it delivers, investment mobilized, businesses established, jobs created, skills transferred and productive sectors strengthened, "Lekholoane added.

Remittances have become an increasingly important source of external financing across Africa, demonstrating resilience during periods of global economic uncertainty. As a result, Lesotho is looking to take an opportunity to strengthen the link between remittances, savings and productive investment while continuing to recognize their vital role in supporting households and reducing vulnerability.

The initiative forms part of the United Nations Economic Commision for Africa's "Strengthening the Migration-Development Nexus in Africa (2024-2028)" programme, through which Lesotho has been working with ECA and national stakeholders to strengthen the policy and institutional environment for leveraging migration and diaspora contributions.

Since the programme commenced in Lesotho in 2025, the Government and stakeholders have undertaken extensive consultations, aligned existing national initiatives with the programme, validated the National Technical Working Group on Diaspora Remittances, developed a national work plan, and assessed the existing framework to identify key policy, institutional, regulatory and financial gaps.

The current phase seeks to move from assessment to practical reforms and implementation.

Sanitary pads, long distances, among challenges facing Mokhotlong girls

Metro LIAPENG RALIENGOANE

MOKHOTLONG – Lack of sanitary pads, long distances to school and the risk of sexual exploitation are among the challenges confronting girls in Mokhotlong, as the Women's Caucus in Parliament engages learners on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Members of the Women's Caucus through the support of through the support of SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF) in partnership with European Union (EU), visited St. Martins Primary and High School on Monday, where they engaged students on SRHR issues, listened to challenges affecting them and distributed sanitary pads to the girls.

Chairperson of the Women's Caucus, 'Mamamello Holomo, said reports of child marriage, early and unintended pregnancy and gender-based violence (GBV) affecting young girls have prompted legislators to take the issues directly to communities.

"As legislators, we want to understand the challenges young people are facing and find ways of addressing them," Holomo said.

During the engagement, students raised a range of concerns affecting their education, safety and wellbeing.

Some said their parents marry them off in exchange for cattle, while others said parents sometimes hire them out, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

The learners also highlighted the dangers posed by long distances to school, saying the journeys expose them to the risk of rape and other forms of violence.

They further spoke about older men who lure girls into sexual relationships by giving them money and other material benefits.

Menstrual health emerged as another major concern, with students saying the lack of sanitary pads sometimes forces girls to miss school.

St. Martins High School Principal Manthati Khutlisi said the visit by members of Parliament was significant, noting that it was the first time, during her tenure, that MPs had visited the school.

"Some days students miss school because they do not have sanitary pads," Khutlisi said.

She said the sanitary pads distributed by the Women's Caucus would go a long way towards helping girls maintain good hygiene and attend school without interruption.

Khutlisi also expressed gratitude for the education provided by the MPs, saying such engagements were important, particularly because the school serves communities in remote and hard-to-reach areas.

One of the students who received the sanitary pads said the donation would go a long way in helping girls manage their menstruation and remain in school.

She also said meeting the legislators had motivated her to work harder towards achieving her dream of becoming a doctor.

SADC-PF which is supporting the engagements of Members of Parliament in Mokhotlong this week, was established in 1997.

It promotes democratic governance, human rights, gender equality and sustainable development across 16 member states through initiatives such as its SRHR, HIV and AIDS Governance Project.

'Spider-man: brand new day' joins $2 billion box office club

It took just three weekends for the Marvel blockbuster to become the eighth $2 billion hit in history

JEREMY FUSTER

After three weekends in theaters, Sony/Marvel Studios' "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" has made history as the eighth film to gross $2 billion at the global box office.

The milestone was assured after its $360 million domestic/$927 million global launch at the end of July, as the film enjoyed excellent reception from critics and audiences alike.

With a $70 million domestic third weekend, the movie is well on course to keep on rolling past post-COVID shutdown megahits like "Avatar: The Way of Water" and "Ne Zha 2" to become the third film to reach $2.5 billion before inflation adjustment, joining "Avatar" and "Avengers: Endgame" in that elite club.

Domestically, the film is also pushing to become the highest grossing release of all time by passing the $936 million record set in 2016 by "Star Wars: The Force Awakens." Currently, "Brand New Day" is on pace to reach that mark with $785 million after three weekends, 5.6% ahead of the pace set by "Force Awakens," though its mid-week grosses have been lower compared to that film's holiday season run.

Theatrical sources tell TheWrap that "Brand New Day" is falling off the pace to become the first movie to gross $1 billion from domestic receipts alone but could still pass "The Force Awakens" with an estimated final total of around $960 million.

In second on the charts once again is Universal/Syncopy's "The Odyssey" with $23.2 million in its second weekend, pushing Christopher Nolan's film past $500 million in domestic grosses as it continues to show remarkable legs.

For comparison, Nolan's previous film "Oppenheimer," once the highest grossing biopic of all time, had a fifth weekend total of $10.7 million.

In a narrow race for third are two dinosaur-focused new releases: Warner Bros./Bad Robot's "The End of Oak Street" and Paramount/Spin Master's "Paw Patrol: The Dino Movie." Currently, "The End of Oak Street" has the edge with a $21 million domestic/$47 million global opening weekend.

Directed by David Robert Mitchell, the thriller about an emotionally distant family whose neighborhood gets dropped into a prehistoric world faces an uphill battle to theatrical profitability against its $80 million budget.

To get there, it will need to get some solid word-of-mouth, particularly among Gen Xers and older millennials nostalgic for movies like "Jurassic Park" and "Jumanji."

Currently, the film has a Rotten Tomatoes score of 85% critics and 78% audience to go with a B on CinemaScore and 3.5/5 on PostTrak, scores relatively consistent with last year's "Jurassic World: Rebirth." With kids going back to school in the U.S., it may be up to general audiences to carry this end-of-summer title.

"Paw Patrol: The Dino Movie" opened to $20.5 million from 3,545 locations. That's just a couple steps below the $22.7 million opening of "Paw Patrol: The Mighty Movie" in 2023.

"Paw Patrol" has become a major moneymaker for Paramount, earning billions in merchandise since its launch on Nick Jr. in 2013.

With this mid-August release, Paramount and Spin Master are set to earn another windfall on "Dino Movie"-themed back-to-school supplies among the show's under-8 core fanbase.

"Paw Patrol" has also been key to the rise of Jennifer Dodge, who served as an executive producer on the series since its inception and last year was named the President of Paramount Animation following the completion of the studio's acquisition by Skydance.

"The Dino Movie" is part of an animated slate that will be overseen by Dodge and an animated spin on the CBS reality series "Survivor" this holiday season and a Halloween-themed film based on the indie comic "Freddy the 13th" set for release in 2028.

Completing the top five is Trafalgar Releasing's "Katseye: Wild Hearts," a concert film and doc featuring the global pop group Katseye that grossed $4 million from just 724 locations, earning a solid per theater average of $5,533.

Just behind it is Focus Features' "Six: The Musical Live!", a proshot of the Tony-winning musical that imagines the six wives of King Henry VIII in a singing competition where they seek to both outdo each other and rewrite their stories.

The film grossed $3 million from 1,462 locations, continuing the trend of musicals lifting up the special market after Bleecker Street/LD Entertainment's "Hadestown" crossed $20 million in its theatrical run.

In seventh is Angel's "The Brink of War" with a $2.6 million opening from 2,083 locations.

The true story drama stars Jeff Daniels and Jared Harris as Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, retelling the crucial talks in Reykjavik that led to a nuclear arms treaty between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in 1987. The film has a 71% Rotten Tomatoes score.

In limited release, A24's "Tony" added $706,676 from 37 theaters as it crossed $1 million while Mubi's "Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma" added $907,200 from its expansion to 54 theaters for a $1.2 million total. Both critically acclaimed indie films expand nationwide next weekend.

Finally, last weekend's new releases are falling down the charts fast, as Universal's "One Night Only" earned a limp $2.1 million second weekend for a 10-day domestic total of just $9.8 million amidst lukewarm word-of-mouth.

Searchlight's "Super Troopers 3" is sinking faster with just $1.4 million in its second weekend and a 10-day total of $6.6 million.

THE WRAP

FREE

Metro SPORT

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2026

Cameroon crush Malawi to win first-ever WAFCON crown

Metro **ED DOVE**

Cameroon won their first ever Women's Africa Cup of Nations title by dismantling Malawi 3-0 in Rabat on Sunday, with three goals coming during a one-sided first-half display.

Three-time defeated finalists in previous editions of the tournament, Cameroon ousted last year's finalists - Nigeria and Morocco - to reach the final, and ended Malawi's Cinderella story emphatically with Marie Ngah Manga's double and Naomi Eto's fine scissors kick giving them a commanding first-half lead.

Despite failing to show their best at the Moulay El Hassan Stadium, Malawi can still reflect on a remarkable debut campaign, having been ranked 153rd in the world when the WAFCON kicked off last month.

Cameroon had showed more attacking intent during the early stages than in their previous knockout games, while a defensive line that had not conceded at all in the knockouts appeared to cope well with tournament top scorer Temwa Chawinga despite some early jitters.

Goalkeeper Michaely Bihina, Player of the Match against both the Super Falcons and the Atlas Lionesses, saved low at Chawinga's feet during the opening ten minutes, with the Kansas City Current striker's control letting her down.

Bihina had also saved an attempt from Chikondi Gondwe in the 14th minute before the Lionesses began to take control.

Ultimately, it was Cameroon who opened the scoring in the 20th minute following an error from Malawi goalkeeper Mercy Sikelo - who had previously been identified as a weak link in this side after earlier blunders in the competition.

This time, the Civil Service Women stopper could only push Grace Mendoua's cross onto her own crossbar, before Marie Ngah Manga followed up with a close-range header.

Bihina was forced into a save in the moments after the goal, as Malawi sought to strike back, while Sikelo unconvincingly pawed Eto's attempt over her bar just before the half-hour mark after she'd been played in by Ngah Manga.

From the resulting corner, Cameroon had another; Eto beat Sikelo with an imaginative scissors kick after Malawi failed to deal with Achta Toko Njoya's teasing corner on the half-hour mark.

Malawi appeared in disarray, with Cameroon supporters buoyant, although they appeared set to go in at half-time only 2-0 down despite Sikelo completely missing a cross from Cameroon's right, with no one able to follow up on the loose ball in the box.

Three minutes into first-half stoppage time, however, the goalkeeper was again at the heart of a hideous defensive mix-up.

Racing out to close down Eto, she appeared to badly misjudge either the distance to the onrushing winger and/or her own speed, and was easily rounded by the Sassuolo attacker. Eto crossed calmly for Ngah Manga, who took the final beyond Malawi.

Cameroon gave themselves an unorthodox guard of honour at half-time, with the Indomitable Lionesses clearly confident that the job had been done.

Malawi sent an early chance from Tabitha Chawinga just wide of Bihina's right-hand post moments after the restart, although Cameroon should have added a fourth moments later when Ngah Manga held off Benadetta Mkandawire, rounded Sikelo - again stuck in no man's land - but sent a feeble miss into the side netting despite being faced with an open goal.

A VAR check for a penalty afterwards came to nothing, and Cameroon were largely able to control the second half as Malawi tired.

In one moment, the Chawinga sister connected superbly - showing a glimpse of the chemistry that had brought down Nigeria, Ghana and others - only for Temwa to fire wide of Bihina's post.

Mendoua fired over from a tight angle in the 72nd minute as Cameroon reduced their efforts to add further goals, while Sikelo did pull off a late stop to deny the onrushing Eto from close range.

The last kick of the game went to veteran Gabrielle Onguene, who previously represented the Indomitable Lionesses when they were defeated by Nigeria in the 2016 final on home soil.

Having entered as a 91st-minute substitute for Ngah Manga, she capitalised on a gap in the Malawi defence and raced through on goal before dispatching beyond Sikelo.

The 37-year-old thought she'd ensured an emphatic conclusion for a truly dominant final performance, only for VAR to rule the goal out for offside.

- ESPN

Orlando Pirates coach backs Yanela Mbuthuma amid goal drought

Metro **SMISO MSOMI**

Orlando Pirates head coach Abdeslam Ouaddou has urged supporters to back Yanela Mbuthuma, insisting the striker's contribution goes beyond the goals he has yet to provide this season.

Mbuthuma has come under scrutiny for his finishing during the opening matches of the Betway Premiership campaign, but Ouaddou defended the 24-year-old after Pirates' convincing victory over Chippa United at Kings Park Stadium on Sunday.

The Pirates coach believes those properly analysing Mbuthuma's performances will recognise the work he is doing for the team, even though he accepts the striker needs to become more clinical in the final third.

"Mbuthuma in the game, properly if you analyse the game as a technician, this guy is doing well for the team really," Ouaddou said.

- *iol*